



MEDIA RELEASE
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Finances

Maintaining stable finances continues to be a key objective for the WPCC Board which, given the need for investment in the built infrastructure of the Commons in particular, presents an ongoing challenge. On the basis of the management accounts as at 31st December 2019 and the forecast for the remainder of the financial year, it is expected that there will be an operating deficit for the 2019/20 financial year (ending 31st March 2020) although the costs that have led to the deficit are non-recurring.

The Board also approved the budget for 2020/21, incorporating an increase in the aggregate WPCC Special Levy to £1,247,857. This represents an increase of 51 pence from £29.90 in 2019/20 to £30.41 in 2020/21 for a Council Tax Band D property, representing an increase of 1.7%.

Update on Wimbledon and Putney Commons National Lottery Heritage Grant Award

Since the official launch on the 1st November 2019, considerable progress has been made on the 'Commons for the Next Generation, Green Space for All' project to develop a new masterplan for the Commons. Funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project enables work to be undertaken to better understand the challenges and requirements of delivering long-term resilience for the Commons as the 150th anniversary of the passing of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 ('the 1871 Act') that brought the Commons into public ownership approaches.

Barker Langham, the firm leading the project, has completed the first phase of the project - a situational analysis based on surveys of the physical environment of the Commons as well as qualitative and quantitative visitor research. The studies have included a review of the current funding structure for the charity as well as access audits of the main public buildings, an assessment of the built heritage and an analysis of the Commons' ecology and landscape.

Barker Langham will utilise the findings from this phase of the project to start to define a vision for the Commons and to create options to support the development of a masterplan. A number of focus groups have been held with both user and non-user groups, and a wider area representative survey is also being conducted by specialist market research consultants to gain further insights into views and perceptions of the Commons.

As part of this next phase, Barker Langham is planning to hold drop-in sessions both outside the Windmill complex and at Putney Lower Common from 9:00am until 3:00pm on the 28th and 29th February 2020, providing an opportunity for the public to provide views on the emerging themes for the development of the masterplan. All members of the public are welcome to attend.

Results of the Commercial Dog Walking Consultation

Some 1,214 people responded to the commercial dog walking consultation that took place during the late summer and autumn period of 2019. The results of the consultation were considered by the Board at its February 2020 meeting, alongside feedback from WPCC's officers based on their experience and daily interaction with members of the public.

On the question of whether all commercial dog walkers should be licenced, 80% of respondents were in favour and 20 % opposed. In terms of the current policy of allowing 24 licenced dog walkers to walk up to six dogs, two of which must be on leads at all times, 39% of respondents were opposed to the policy, but 40% approved of the approach. A further 21% considered the current policy should be retained, but limited to the current number of licensees. Although under the current Byelaw, mandatory charges cannot be imposed on commercial dog walkers, 51% of respondents were in favour of charging and 49% opposed.

The Board approved a number of recommendations including retaining the existing policy of permitting 24 licenced dog walkers to walk up to six dogs at any one time, but strengthening the licencing arrangements so that all such individuals who are licenced are identifiable when operating on the Commons. The Board further agreed that no new licences would be granted for a person to walk up to six dogs as the existing licences lapse, so phasing out this scheme.

The Board also agreed that all commercial dog walkers using the Commons be invited on a voluntary basis to sign up to become officially licenced. The Board agreed to review the success of this approach after twelve months. The Board also supported the view that all licenced dog walkers be encouraged to voluntarily donate £120 per annum thereby contributing to WPCC's charitable objectives and the upkeep of this special place.

The Board also recognised the need for parity with other commercial users of the Commons (such as fitness instructors) and further work will be undertaken to ascertain how these commercial operators can help contribute towards WPCC's charitable objectives.

Log sales

As part of the charity's wider commitment to the environment, the Conservators considered at length the current policy of selling wood, much of which is presently unseasoned, for burning.

The sale of logs has generated income to support the charity for over two decades and although the Conservators recognise that the collection of wood has become a popular activity, especially for families, it is increasingly recognised that the burning of unseasoned logs contributes towards air pollution, particularly fine particulate matter, if not burned in an approved appliance. Recognising their inability to validate the way in which the wood is ultimately burned or otherwise utilised, the Conservators therefore reached a decision to stop selling unseasoned chopped wood.

DEFRA Appointed Conservator

The Board was pleased to receive confirmation from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that Dr Ros Taylor's position as their appointed Conservator had been extended until the autumn of 2020. The Conservators will be commencing an appointment process over the summer period, with a view to having a new Conservator in position by November 2020.

Governance

The [Resolutions](#) of the meeting of the Board of Conservators held on the 3rd February 2020 have been posted on the Wimbledon and Putney Commons website. There are further Resolutions from the [2nd December 2019](#) and [10th December 2019](#) Board meetings that have also now been released.

ENDS

NOTES for Editors - Wimbledon and Putney Commons is a charity managed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC). It was established under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871. The Commons comprise some 1,140 acres across Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common.

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