



Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Media Statement March 2023

Wimbledon and Putney Commons – Levy for 2023/2024

As previously reported, at their meeting in December 2022 the Conservators took the difficult decision to increase the aggregate levy by the maximum allowable under the 1990 levy regulations of 12.6%, reflecting RPI for the year to September 2022. The decision reflected the growing cost of meeting the Conservators' constitutional duties to preserve and protect the Commons given inflationary pressures on the operating budget and essential capital works.

In deliberating the matter, consideration was given to the current rise in the cost of living and the potential impact of the increase on levy-payers. The Board also noted the reassurance that they had received from the three local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC that any benefits and reductions to which residents were entitled for council tax purposes would also apply to the levy.

Subsequent to the meeting, the Conservators received confirmation from the three local authorities of the total number of households in the levy-area of 41,449 Band D equivalent properties. As a result, WPCC determined that the 2023/24 levy for a Band D property would be £35.96, which represented an increase of £3.82 per household per annum from the previous year (or 32 pence per month) and notified the three local authorities accordingly.

In response to the notifications, the Conservators received representations from the leaders of both Wandsworth Council and Merton Council, urging the Conservators to reconsider the decision to increase the levy by RPI. Although the Conservators understood the concerns of the councils to keep taxes low, the Conservators equally had to consider their duties to protect the assets of the charity that owns and manages the Commons. Under charity law, the Conservators have a duty to act in the best interests of the charity.

In light of this, and given the considerations noted above, the Board's view was that it would be neither prudent nor in the best interests of the charity to propose an increase in the levy for 2023/24 that was below the maximum permitted under the 1990 regulations.

In responding to the Leader of Wandsworth Council, the Chairman commented "Councillor Hogg's letter reaffirms Wandsworth Council's commitment to delivering high quality services at low prices, a principle that both the Conservators and staff fully endorse. There is no doubt in our belief that the average levy for a Band D property of £3 per month represents outstanding value for levy-payers."

Cont'd....

Masterplan and Levy Consultation - Update

The final report summarising the results of the Masterplan and Levy Consultation exercise that was conducted in the autumn of 2022 was approved by the Conservators at their meeting on 13 February 2023. The report confirmed strong support for the projects in the Masterplan and also for the principle of increasing the levy.

The main findings from the report included the following:

- More than nine out of ten people were in favour of the Masterplan projects.
- There was broad support for all the projects, but more so for the ponds and wetlands, and the heathlands and grasslands projects.
- The main concern, where expressed, was that the Commons should not be like parks – they should retain a feeling of being natural spaces.
- Nearly nine out of ten people agreed in principle that the levy should be increased, almost all of whom supported the suggested increase of £8 per year, with many people happy to pay more.
- Of those who disagreed with the increasing the levy, the most common response was that they thought this is not how the Commons should be funded, rather than the amount proposed, for example increasing the levy area to cover the population of all three local authorities rather than those living close to the Commons.

The consultation generated over 600 responses, roughly two-thirds of which were through on-site face to face engagements and one-third through on-line surveys. Most of the users who responded to the consultation lived within a 2.0 to 2.5 mile radius of the Windmill; two-thirds of the respondents were levy payers.

A copy of the final report has been published on the website here: [Masterplan Consultation Report](#)

Sir Robert Andrew KCB MA FRSA

The Conservators and staff of Wimbledon and Putney Commons were saddened to learn of the death of past-Conservator, Sir Robert Andrew KCB MA FRSA, on 31 January 2023.

Sir Robert was one of the longest serving Conservators, being first appointed by the Secretary of State for Defence in 1973. His commitment and dedication to the Commons was undiminished over his remarkable 36 years of outstanding service and he remained involved and supportive of the Commons even after his retirement as a Conservator in 2009.

WPCC Chairman Diane Neil Mills said “Although I didn’t have the privilege of serving alongside Sir Robert, his great contribution to the Commons is very much evident in minutes of meetings; his name is still mentioned in discussions, always with great reverence and respect. It was an enormous honour to have him in attendance at the reception at the House of Commons as part of our 150th anniversary celebrations and there are few people more than Sir Robert who understand the importance of the bond between the Commons and Parliament”. He will be deeply missed.

Commemorative Orchard on Putney Lower Common

An orchard has been created on Putney Lower Common as part of the ‘Queen’s Green Canopy’ – a tree planting initiative launched as part of Her Majesty’s Platinum Jubilee Celebration. The trees have been sponsored and the funds raised through the sponsorship

will be put towards the cost of the purchase of 12 trees, their planting and protection as well as their longer-term care. This will include the purchase of a water bowser (watering equipment that attaches to a WPCC buggy). Any funds remaining will help care for the wider landscape on Putney Lower Common. Ten of the 12 trees have now been sponsored, with donations totalling some £4,500 from sponsorship and general donations towards the project.

Fruit trees are very beneficial for the local ecology. As well as producing spring pollen and nectar for pollinators such as bees and butterflies, fruit trees also provide an important habitat and nectar source for a wide range of other invertebrates.

The trees have been selected based on advice about the soil conditions at Putney Lower Common which are 'impoverished'. They have also been mulched to conserve water and temperature.

A community celebration and a supporters "thank you" event was held on Sunday 5 March at which sponsors and donors were presented with certificates to mark their support. In addition, a panel detailing the different varieties of fruit trees and the names of the sponsors was unveiled.

Governance

The Resolutions agreed at the Board of Conservators' meeting held on 13 February 2023 can be found here: [Resolutions](#)

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.

Contact: Stephen Bound, Chief Executive
Tel: 020 8788 7655, E-mail: rangersoffice@wpcc.org.uk website: www.wpcc.org.uk

Issued March 2023