

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 19 September 2013 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Sarah Bird (Acting Chairman)
Neill Buchanan
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Peter Freeman
Andrew Gower
Ian Marshall
Cllr Victor Webb
- APOLOGIES: Nathan Dickinson
Chris Jones
Cllr Catherine Mayhew
Cllr James Scholes
- ATTENDING: Rodney Stone (Clerk)
Geoff Levitt (Treasurer)
Steve Budden (Warden)
Julia Woodgate (Support Officer)
John Barber (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common)
Jennifer Blackburn (Rusthall Parish Council)
John Cunningham (Water in the Wells Group)
Nick Baldwin (TWBC)
- OBSERVING: Maria Simmons

MINUTES

1. CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, Sarah Bird was asked to chair the meeting.

2. BRIGHTON LAKE

John Cunningham from the Water in the Wells Group outlined the project with particular reference to Brighton Lake.

The project aims to provide very visible water features at strategic locations around the town, and considers the four main road entrances to the town to be of particular

importance. On Eridge Road it was believed that the best site would be Brighton Lake.

The main problem would be the provision of an electricity supply which cannot be taken from a lighting pole. However, it is possible it could be brought from the Tunbridge Wells Garden Centre, and the Group have had some very positive discussions with them. They estimate the cost of the entire Brighton Lake project to be under £20,000 and the running costs to be around £600 - £800 p.a. which they hope to persuade the water company to cover. The capital cost will, they intend, be covered by a mixture of sponsorship, government, local government, and charitable grants as well as public subscription. They emphasised that they were not expecting the Conservators to contribute to the cost. The design is yet to be considered, although it would need to rise to some height to be visible from the road.

The Clerk asked the Conservators to consider whether, in principle, they were prepared to support the idea, depending on the actual design, as there is little point in the Group continuing to invest time and money in the planning if no water feature of any kind would be permitted.

The Conservators suggested that the roundabout near Sainsbury's would be a more suitable location, but the Group had concluded that on windy days the blown spray could be a danger to traffic negotiating the roundabout. Also, the road layout is very uneven and has a tendency to flood.

Four of the Conservators expressed reservations: that a feature at the junction of Broadwater Lane and Eridge Road may be a distraction to passing motorists, that the feature may be too park like, and that Brighton Lake is not visible enough to make a statement. The Warden was concerned over practical issues such as security of power supply and safety of members of the public.

Two of the Conservators were very supportive of the project. Targetfollow were unable to give a view as they will need to look carefully at the issue of the landowner's legal responsibility.

The meeting decided that they were unable to give a response in principle, but would be prepared to consider an actual design so long as it looked natural; for example, a pile of sandstone rocks with water trickling down. A fountain would be unacceptable.

The Conservators thanked Mr Cunningham for his comprehensive briefing.

3. PARKING

Nick Baldwin, from the Borough Council, outlined the division of responsibilities between TWBC and KCC. KCC is the highway authority and deals with nearly every aspect of highways. However, TWBC carries out parking restrictions on behalf of KCC where they are put in place for parking management reasons; KCC continues to deal with restrictions for safety and movement, although TWBC can look at the issues on their behalf and report their findings to KCC. This arrangement was introduced in 2005.

All restrictions are covered by Traffic Regulation Orders. The orders are always issued in the name of KCC although they may be written by TWBC.

The process is that, when TWBC receives a request, it considers the restrictions that may be necessary and usually holds an informal consultation, such as a letter drop, to gauge reaction. If appropriate, it then formulates a proposal for a Traffic Regulation Order. Subsequently it advertises the proposal which gives 21 days for objections, of which there are almost always some. If there are fewer than 5, the matter will be dealt with by an officer, but if there are six or more the proposal will go to the TWBC Joint Transportation Board, which meets quarterly. If it is agreed, the Order will be written and signed by KCC, who will advertise and implement it. As advertising is expensive, they often wait until they have several orders to bundle together, which can lead to long delays.

TWBC has not carried out a review of parking for five years, so it has spent this year prioritising and investigating the 50 or more requests it has received.

As the Conservators have requested a number of restrictions which will have an effect on the rest of the town by displacing a large number of all day parkers, it has prepared a report for the Joint Transportation Board now, instead of following the usual route, in order to seek its opinion. It is possible the JTB will require the restrictions to be pared down or introduced in stages. The report is not yet finalised, and is subject to further management changes, but it will contain crash data for the last three years and car crime data for the last year. It was pointed out that crash data would not contain some very serious crashes that have happened in Hungershall Park in the last twelve years, and that car crime is frequently not reported to the police.

Mr Baldwin confirmed that KCC have already agreed to introduce double yellow lines at the top of Castle Road.

RESOLVED. Office to send copies of the Clerk's letter and the action points from the unfinished JTB report to the Conservators for comments. All comments to be sent to the office by Tuesday 24 September.

RESOLVED. To ask TWBC to add the parking problems in Bishops Down Road to the report.

The Conservators thanked Nick Baldwin for attending the meeting and for explaining the process.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2013 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

5. MATTERS ARISING

a) Scots Pines

The Warden confirmed that he will be replacing the dead tree.

b) Rusthall Park subsidence

The Warden agreed that it was hard to see any subsidence, but he would meet the residents before any work was carried out.

6. COMMON VISION UPDATE

John Barber informed the meeting that further grants have been received and the project is now almost fully funded.

The education element is in place and ready to take forward.

The interpretation element is well underway. An expert adviser had led a meeting with volunteers to work on the development of an interpretation plan, which is being finalised by KHWP. Two working groups have been formed, one to develop information panels at the main entrances, and one to develop a series of walks, avoiding busy main roads. A third working group is being considered to look at information data and an overall data architecture.

Recommendations will be put to the Conservators next year.

7. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden advised the meeting that contractors would shortly be putting in a new path on Rusthall Common on the approach to the Marl pits, funded by the Freehold Tenants. As the entrance at Common View gets very slippery in wet weather, he recommended putting in a short section of path here at the same time. The cost of the second path would be in the region of £600 inc VAT.

RESOLVED. That the path be surfaced at the entrance at Common View.

He confirmed that the path on the Bumps will be extended later in the year, paid for by the Freehold Tenants.

He reported that the wildflower areas on Inner London Road had produced few flowers this year, but the plants appeared healthy, and so he was hoping for a better result next year. On the other side of the road, above the coach park, the ground had proved suitable for wildflowers although he recommended concentrating it on a much smaller area. The cost of the altered mowing regime should prove neutral, and the plugs and seeds required for this and for the original areas would cost a few hundred pounds. It may be possible to get some more funding from the Bloom Committee.

RESOLVED. To extend the three year experiment to the other side of London Road, on a smaller area, leaving wider margins either side of the paths.

8. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT No 2 2013/14**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 2 2013/14 showing total payments of £23,412.37 and receipts of £3,649.09. He pointed out that most of the maintenance work was done over the winter, so the budgets are still largely unspent.

RESOLVED. To approve the statement.

9. **BENCHES**

RESOLVED. To adopt the benches policy with a minor wording change to avoid ambiguity.

10. **FREE SCHOOL**

The Conservators made the point that no organisation should have formalised access to the Common to perform a regular function, so it cannot be used as a dedicated school sports ground. On the other hand, the schoolchildren have the right to free access.

RESOLVED. To allow the school to take its pupils to the Common but not to enter into a formal agreement with them. The Warden to liaise with them over usage.

11. **LINDEN PARK CRICKET CLUB**

The Warden reported that, now the club has gone up another league, they are required to cover their wicket for two days before each match and need a place to store the large covers. They had considered building a new enclosure, but are now making plans to store them in the existing nets.

12. **RUSTHALL CRICKET CLUB**

RESOLVED. To continue to allow sponsorships signs to be displayed for the duration of the matches.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) **Kent Youth Services**

The Warden reported that Kent Youth Services ran two sessions on the Lower Cricket Ground during the summer offering informal sports and general support to disadvantaged youngsters. As these were very successful, they wish to continue running outreach sessions on Thursday evenings (and occasional Tuesdays) at Wellington Rocks, and near the Forum, as well as on the Lower Cricket Ground. They would do so in partnership with the Town Centre Police,

Health Education team, Sexual Health nurse, Kenward Trust, CXX/KCFN and local faith groups.

RESOLVED. To allow these sessions subject to the usual restrictions. Warden to liaise with them about their plans, and ensure they do not take a vehicle onto the Lower Cricket Ground or any other part of the Common in wet weather.

b) Civic Society

The Warden announced that the Civic Society are to make an award to the Conservators for the clearance on Tunbridge Wells Common last year.

14. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

There were no planning applications to consider.

The next meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. on 12 December 2013 in Committee Room A.