

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 11 December 2014 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Chairman)
Neill Buchanan
Ewen Cameron
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
George Craig
Peter Freeman
Cllr James Scholes
Corin Thoday
Cllr Chris Woodward
- APOLOGIES: Nathan Dickinson
Cllr Victor Webb
- ATTENDING: Rodney Stone (Clerk)
Geoff Levitt (Treasurer)
Steve Budden (Warden)
Julia Woodgate (Support Officer)
John Barber (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common)

MINUTES

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2014 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING

a) Road edges

The Warden confirmed that the new parking restrictions have improved the situation on all the roads involved enabling the road edges to be repaired. They have already been overrun, though, so bollards or other deterrents will be required at certain points.

b) Pedestrian crossings

John Barber expressed his concern that the issue, as demonstrated at the October JTB meeting, is capable of being overlooked both by the JTB and by KCC unless it can be kept at the top of the agenda. The funding allocation decision will be made by KCC in February 2015 according to perceived relative

priorities. Cllr James Scholes offered to look at the costs of funding a feasibility study.

RESOLVED. The Conservators to write again in support of the proposals.

c) The Mount Edgcumbe

No assurance has been received that the cable has been properly and safely buried despite repeated letters from the Warden and office. John Barber offered to speak to them to try to resolve the situation.

RESOLVED. If it becomes necessary, the Clerk to write on behalf of the Conservators stating the legal position.

d) Rusthall Cricket Club

The Warden confirmed that the container has not yet been put into position.

e) Procedure for dealing with travellers

This has been sent to all concerned parties.

f) Drainage at Rusthall

The Warden confirmed that KCC has completed the drainage work and, as far as he can tell, it has been effective. He will continue to monitor the situation. He also confirmed that the sump near Major Yorks Road has been cleared together with the interceptor drains, but that the storm drains are blocked in the road. This has been reported by phone but no incident number has been issued.

RESOLVED. To report the issue again as soon as possible and track the response.

3. **MEMBERSHIP**

The under mentioned Conservators were appointed by the bodies specified to serve for the period indicated.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Councillor Barbara Cobbold)	
Councillor James Scholes)	one year term ending
Councillor Victor Webb)	31 December 2015
Councillor Chris Woodward)	

Freehold Tenants

Neill Buchanan)	
Mungo Chapman)	3rd year of three year term until
Peter Freeman)	31 December 2015
Ian Marshall)	

Manor of Rusthall

Ewen Cameron)	
George Craig)	2nd year of three year term until
Nathan Dickinson)	31 December 2016
Corin Thoday)	

4. **DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED – That the meetings of the Commons Conservators be held at 2.00pm on the following dates:

12 March 2015 (not 26 March as in agenda)
25 June 2015
24 September 2015
3 December 2015

5. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Warden reported that the year's work was complete thanks to the dry summer. He was also able to complete the final stages of some of last year's Freehold Tenants' projects that had been held over from the winter due to the rain.

The volunteers have recently coppiced heather from the Common to spread on the new clearance at Royal Victoria Grove. This was something of a landmark as, in previous years, coppiced heather has been brought in from the Ashdown Forest and Cinder Hill. Now, however, there is sufficient heather regeneration on the Common to provide the heather for this purpose.

He reported that he is now starting on the winter schedule of remedial tree work.

The Conservators expressed concern at the scale of problems caused by cars parked on verges in roads all over the Common, particularly at the entrance to Nevill Park. The Warden agreed that the budget for posts was likely to prove inadequate over the next few years. Cllr James Scholes offered to see if he had sufficient funding to assist with the protection of the entrance to Nevill Park, especially if the residents can make a contribution.

6. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT to November 2014**

RESOLVED – that the statement be approved.

7. **BUDGET AND PRECEPT**

The Treasurer outlined the financial pressures on public bodies and the need to keep costs down, but pointed out that the Conservators have kept their precept at the very minimum over the last few years.

His draft budget for 2015/16 acknowledged the number of unknown elements, including salaries, and the cost of the new contracts for grass cutting and litter picking. He has therefore increased the contingency to allow for these increased costs. Although recent work to make the Common more easily manageable has reduced pressure on the tree work and maintenance of cleared areas budgets, the pressures now come from the need to protect the road edges and upgrade the drainage, which has been neglected for many years.

The budget includes the expected £18,000 s106 payment in respect of the development at the old hospital site but this has been set aside to be spent in future years. It was noted that future mitigation payments will need to be spent close to the development

He pointed out that the reserves were at the lower end of the range that he considers prudent, £25,000 – £30,000, and an unexpected tree emergency could quickly use this up.

Accordingly he proposed that the precept should be increased to £143,000, an increase of 7.4%. This would equate to an average annual increase over a six year period of 2.35%.

RESOLVED – that the proposed budget for 2015/16 be approved.

RESOLVED – that a precept for 2015/16 of £143,000 be approved.

8. GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT

The three year contract expires at the end of this financial year, but it contained a provision to negotiate a two year extension. The Warden stated that Bridgland do a good job as they know the Common well, offer a very good price, and they are easy to deal with.

RESOLVED. To delegate responsibility to the Warden and Treasurer to negotiate an extension to the contract, with a cap on any increase to be the rate of CPI as at September 2014.

9. LITTER CONTRACT

The three year contract expires at the end of this financial year with no option to extend. However, there was agreement that Brian Godley, working as Oakbourne, does a very good job and is conscientious, which previous litter pickers were not. He is not VAT registered, which keeps the cost down, and he also does other work on the Commons, including emergency tree work, at a good rate with no call out charges. It was noted that the planned increase in the number of litter bins and dog bag dispensers will increase the size of the job.

RESOLVED. To delegate responsibility to the Warden and Treasurer to negotiate a new three year contract based on the current terms, with a cap on any increase to be the rate of CPI as at September 2014. There was also agreement to increase the payment when the new bins and dispensers are in place.

10. **PROPOSAL FOR S106 MONEY**

It is expected that the contribution of £18,000 will be paid in the latter half of 2015, and the Conservators need to submit a proposal for spending it. It has been confirmed that the money is intended for "the improvement or maintenance of the Commons in the vicinity of the development" which would exclude any expenditure on Rusthall Common. The Warden plans to submit a proposal to install a number of new litter bins and dog bag dispensers, as well as posts to protect the verges. It was suggested that new benches at the top end of the Common should also be considered.

11. **FREEHOLD TENANT PROJECTS**

The Freehold Tenants submitted a proposal to fund two projects this year. One is for a wetland site at the side of Lower Green Road where there was once a pond. Past drainage changes have meant that a pond can no longer be supported, although the area can still get very wet and could become a successful wetland which would provide a variety of new habitats. It would also help to alleviate the flooding experienced by nearby houses. It was suggested that the nearby nursery school should be informed for safety reasons.

The second project is to continue the clearance behind Fir Tree car park at the hibernaculum, which would make the area safer as well as enhancing it.

RESOLVED. To accept the Freehold Tenant projects with thanks.

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Beacon Hotel

This has recently changed hands and the new owner is intending to create an upmarket bar and restaurant with accommodation. He has already opened up the view, and is likely to be interested in opening the access from the Common to the Victorian baths.

b) Harmony Street

The Warden reported that no grass has grown through the mesh placed along the edge of the pavement because of the constant parking, and the soil was becoming depleted, exposing the mesh which was becoming a trip hazard. He proposed laying tarmac over the whole area.

RESOLVED. The Warden to obtain quotes for the work.

c) Pantiles car park

Targetfollow have submitted a planning application for low level lighting bollards in the car park. It was pointed out that no lighting can be installed without the permission of the Conservators regardless of whether planning permission has been granted.

RESOLVED. To delegate the decision to the Committee who may hold a site meeting.

13. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Pantiles Car Park – bollard lighting beside path from Swan Garage to car park and at kiosk. No response sent yet.

6a Apsley Street, Rusthall – first floor side extension and alterations. Advised that no materials to be stored on Common or vehicles to drive on it.

Bredbury House, 77 Mount Ephraim – Detached two storey dwelling in grounds. No comment.

Approved:

11 London Road – erection of 9 residential units.

Appealed:

Dingley Dell – proposal to erect three dwellings to rear of property. Permission refused by Council.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on 12 March 2015.**