

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 21 June 2018 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Cllr Barbara Cobbold (Chairman)
Paul Burnett
Mungo Chapman
Ian Marshall
Clare Sinha
Corin Thoday
Cllr Chris Woodward
- APOLOGIES: Ewen Cameron
George Craig
Cllr Thelma Huggett
Stephen Lacey
Cllr James Scholes
Clive Evans
- ATTENDING: Rodney Stone (Clerk)
Geoff Levitt (Treasurer)
Steve Budden (Warden)
Julia Woodgate (Support Officer)
Jennifer Blackburn (Rusthall Parish Council)
Julian Leefe-Griffiths
Matthew Sankey
- OBSERVING: Cllr Joy Podbury

MINUTES

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2018 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING

a) McMillan Williams

The Warden reported that he has been given assurances that the work will start imminently.

b) Stranges Avenue

The tree work has been completed and the cost paid by the developer. The clearance work has also been carried out and the developer has agreed to reimburse the cost.

c) Telecoms box

The work has not gone as planned as the Openreach contractors mistakenly dug their trench along the verge, before digging another along the road as agreed. However, they then found that the expected power connection was not available, so will need to come back to finish the work at a later date. Openreach have agreed that the Conservators' contractors should restore the verge and they will pay for the work.

d) Pedestrian crossing

The meeting of the JTB has not yet taken place, but Cllr Woodward still intends to raise the issue of the Langton Green crossing. .KCC are currently planning to carry out a traffic census.

e) Bye-law signs

New signs will be prepared and installed.

f) Hadlow College

Representatives of the Freehold Tenants met Jenny Price of Hadlow College and she confirmed that they would be interested in using the Common for student projects, to the benefit of both sides.

g) Archaeology

Weekly activity is continuing but will end in August. A full report and recommendations will be prepared for the Conservators.

h) Replacement Tree

The Conservators confirmed that they wish to plant a replacement tree for the badly diseased oak at Inner London Road this autumn so that it has a chance to grow before the old tree has to be removed.

i) S106 payment

The Warden was asked to prepare a plan according to the Management Plan for spending the potential s106 payment if the cinema site development goes ahead.

j) Fir Tree car park

The regular monitoring has resulted in most all-day parkers going elsewhere. The Warden reported that it was now rare to put a sticker on any car.

3. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Warden reported that, although some of the spring work has been delayed due to the bad weather, the wet conditions have suited the rare plants on the Common and the displays this year have been very good.

The postponed work at Happy Valley is now scheduled for the second week of September.

There will be several experiments this summer to find better ways of managing work that currently can only be done by hand. This is expensive. One is to use a specific herbicide on an area of heather to see if it will control the scrub that grows through and smothers it; in a second he will be trying out a remote-control flail to see if it can cut the steep slopes of Happy Valley; and a third experiment at the Cheesewring will use water jets to try to remove the build-up of soil between rocks. In all cases, if successful they should reduce costs.

4. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT no 5 2017/18**

RESOLVED. That the statement be approved.

5. **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

The Treasurer reported that the internal audit had found the design and performance of controls for the nine relevant objectives sound. All the boxes have been ticked in the Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED. To confirm all statements in Section 1.

6. **UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS AND BALANCE SHEET 2017/18**

The Treasurer explained the figures to the meeting and reported that the regulator is satisfied that the Pensions Act has been complied with.

RESOLVED. To approve the accounts.

7. **STATUTORY ANNUAL RETURN**

The accounts appear in the format required by the external auditors so that they can track changes in future years and spot any discrepancies.

RESOLVED. To approve the Annual Return.

8. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT no 1 2018/19**

RESOLVED. That the statement be approved.

9. PANTILES CAR PARK

The Clerk advised the meeting that the role of the Conservators is to consider any proposal for the development of the car park that might be brought forward, not to initiate any proposals.

Two Pantiles Traders attended the meeting and they were invited to speak. Matthew Sankey, Chairman of the Pantiles Traders, and Julian Leefe-Griffiths said that they have approached the Council many times to discuss the inadequate parking at that end of town, which has been reduced even further by recent developments and is threatened by future proposed developments. The Pantiles cannot thrive if visitors are unable to park. However, no assistance has been forthcoming. The parking department is more concerned to provide parking for residents than visitors. They are therefore hoping that a partial solution can be found by rationalising and improving the Pantiles car park to provide more space.

Targetfollow confirmed that they have been working to provide variable tariffs at the car park to encourage short term parking and will ask RCP how many spaces could be fitted in if the whole footprint was used. They also indicated that they would look again at the plans for improvement drawn up in 2010.

The Traders were encouraged to speak to their Councillors, but the representatives stated that they had never met any of them. Cllr Woodward indicated that he would speak to the Councillors from the Pantiles Ward. He also pointed out that he and the Chairman represent the adjacent Showfields Ward and therefore have an interest in the success of the Pantiles, as does the whole town.

The meeting agreed that they would consider any plans brought before them but could not initiate any improvements.

Julian Leefe-Griffiths and Matthew Sankey left at this point

A brief discussion took place about the problems of parking on Major Yorks Road and an email from a member of the public suggesting that the road could be widened by using some of the Common. This was rejected.

10. APPOINTMENT OF CLERK

The Chairman expressed the Conservators' sadness that the Clerk was standing down at the end of the year after 28 years of service

She distributed a possible process and timetable for finding a replacement Clerk.

As time is short, the Conservators agreed that a committee should be drawn up with a representative from each of the three Conservator bodies. This will consist of Clare

Sinha for the Freehold Tenants, Paul Burnett for Targetfollow and Chris Woodward for the Borough Council.

The committee was asked to consider remuneration, as the job may have become rather too onerous to be done on a voluntary basis. If the job is to become a paid role, the new pensions legislation must also be taken into consideration. The Committee also needs to consider succession planning for the Treasurer as he indicated he may step down in the near future.

RESOLVED. The committee to agree a proposal which they will email to all Conservators. If agreed they will immediately move to advertise and draw up a shortlist, which should be completed by the end of September.

11. **RISK REVIEW**

In the light of the new GDPR regulations, the possibility of having a Privacy Policy was raised.

RESOLVED. To send the Conservators the full Risk Register for consideration at the next meeting

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) **New Conservator**

A new Targetfollow Conservator, Anthony Moore, will take the place of George Craig with immediate effect.

b) **Change of Committee Member**

Paul Burnett will be the committee member representing Targetfollow with immediate effect

c) **Retreat Hotel**

The Clerk noted that parking posts outside the hotel at the bottom of Inner London Road were being removed and guests were parking on the Common while they took their luggage in.

RESOLVED. Warden to speak to the hotel about preventing this. He will also obtain a quote for installing posts that cannot be removed or knocked over for the length of Inner London Road.

13. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

27 Upper Street – rear extension. Wrote to point out sensitivity of Common there and the irreparable nature of any damage.

1 Common View – change of use to house of multiple occupancy. Wrote to point out the parking problems and the danger to the Common of further pressure on parking.

Flat 3, 63 Mount Ephraim – change of use from office to residential. Wrote to point out that delivery vehicles should not damage Common verge outside, nor materials be stored there.

When responding to applications it was agreed that the Conservators should specify where skips and materials can be placed.

Targetfollow confirmed that they have been approached by Aldi with regard to the strip of Common outside 15 and 16 Eridge Road but not about the rumoured widening of the road to accommodate a turning into the new store.

14. SALARY REVIEW

The Clerk presented a report which had been previously circulated concerning the Job Evaluation he had asked the Council to carry out and the issues arising from attempting to use that in the Conservators' very different organisation. He reminded the Conservators of the report that the Treasurer had made to the last meeting recommending a 2% increase to reflect cost of living rises and that such an increase was budgeted for.

After discussion and hearing further advice from the Clerk and Treasurer it was

RESOLVED.

- 1) WARDEN – that the salary be increased o £34,921 with effect from 1 April 2018**
- 2) ADMINISTRATOR – that the salary be increased to 12/37 of £26,000 with effect from 1 April 2018**
- 3) That both salaries be paid until any subsequent cost of living increase that may be determined by the Conservators.**

The next meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. on Thursday 20 September 2018