

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

**Minutes of a meeting held in the Council Chamber on Thursday 21 September 2017 at
2.00pm**

PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Chairman)
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Cllr Thelma Huggett
Stephen Lacey
Cllr James Scholes
Clare Sinha
Cllr Chris Woodward

APOLOGIES: George Craig
Corin Thoday

ATTENDING: Rodney Stone (Clerk)
Geoff Levitt (Treasurer)
Steve Budden (Warden)
Julia Woodgate (Support Officer)
Clive Evans (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common)
Jennifer Blackburn (Rusthall Parish Council)

OBSERVING: Cllr Joy Podbury
Alastair Tod

MINUTES

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2017 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING

a) McMillan Williams

It was noted that the work was not completed and the Warden was asked to speak to them again.

b) Strange's Avenue

The developer has not completed the agreed work. The Warden was asked to write to him again.

c) Drainage

The office has been in touch with KCC about the soakaways and they are sending an engineer to meet the Warden on site.

d) Information Panels

Targetfollow reported that planning permission has been granted but it appears that it will last for only five years. Clive Evans confirmed that the panels will be installed as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked Paul Burnett for all his hard work in obtaining planning permission.

e) Pedestrian Crossings

KCC expects to do the work in Major Yorks Road in February 2018 but this is not confirmed. No date has been given for Langton Road. However, KCC have confirmed in an email to the Chairman of the Friends that the work will be done before the end of this financial year.

f) Risk register

The officers are working to reduce the liability of the items currently marked as high risk. The Clerk confirmed that he has spoken to the Chief Executive who has indicated that the Borough Council are aware of, and considering solutions to, the potential risks.

g) External Audit

The Treasurer informed the meeting that the external auditors have passed the accounts with no problems arising.

h) Licences for Fitness Classes

Targetfollow confirmed that licences have been sent to four classes. BMF have indicated their willingness to pay and Uberfit have moved their classes elsewhere.

i) Bye-laws

The Clerk confirmed that he has written to the Secretary of State to request advice on reframing the bye-laws with a particular view to including the use of drones.

j) Land Swap

The Warden confirmed that more of the hedge would be removed and the area has received its first cut of grass but some tidying remains to be done.

3. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

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

22 March 2018
21 June 2018
20 September 2018
6 December 2018

4. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Commons suffered another incursion from travellers, this time on Rusthall cricket pitch, shortly after the last meeting, but they were swiftly moved on by the police. They arrived on a Friday evening, left on the Saturday morning, and the cricket club did the clean-up in time to hold their match on the Saturday afternoon. Relatively little damage was caused.

The new flight of steps on Rusthall Common and the hard surface to the remainder of the path from the Marlpit Pond to Common View have both been completed thanks to the funding from the Freehold Tenants.

The Warden is now starting to follow the new management plan: the grasscutting regime in glades and clearances has been amended to create different stages of growth; KHWP are sending their volunteers to assist with keeping the heather areas clear; some pond clearance will be carried out at Fir Tree Pond; and the volunteers will start to clear scrub growing on Wellington Rocks.

The budget may need some reorganising to take the new priorities into account, and the Warden warned that protection of roadside edges is increasingly important and expensive.

5. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

RESOLVED – that the statement be approved.

6. **GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT**

The draft contract is similar to the existing contract and will run for three years with an option to renew for a further two years. The specifications have changed slightly to increase path widths to two metres on either side to prevent nettles and other long growth from falling over the paths. In addition, the Toad Rock and Apsley Street

areas and two further paths have been added. The contract covers only the regular cuts to the short grass areas.

The Freehold Tenants wish to see a flail contract for the long grass introduced.

RESOLVED. To approve the tender document for distribution to applicants.

7. LITTER CONTRACT

The draft litter contract is also similar to the existing contract, and will also run for three years with an option to renew for two years. The draft shows the number of days reduced, but talks with the current contractor have confirmed that seven day working in the summer is essential to keep the litter under control.

The Chairman confirmed that the current contractor is not registered for VAT and has an agreement with Bridgland which leads to lower disposal costs.

RESOLVED. To approve the tender document for distribution to applicants.

8. WILDFLOWER AREAS

The Warden briefly outlined the history. An experiment was begun in 2012 to leave the areas of grass between Inner London Road and London Road as wildflower areas. It quickly became apparent that past disturbances had left the soil on most of it too fertile for wildflowers, but the lower portion, south of Church Road, was promising. After some initial opposition from the residents, the experiment has continued, albeit confined to circles beneath the trees with paths cut through.

Several sowings of yellow rattle have weakened the grass, and this year has been extremely good for diversity, if not for colour. The Council Landscape Officer is keen that it should continue.

AGREED. To allow the experiment to continue.

The Warden confirmed that he has looked at extending the experiment to other areas. The triangles by Vale Road may be suitable when poppies are no longer planted there. He will sow more poppy seed to try to make a better showing there in the final commemorative year, 2018. He is also encouraging the spread of the wildflowers on the new area of Common by removing mowings to reduce fertility.

9. TELECOMS BOX IN RUSTHALL ROAD

Targetfollow have received a request to install a new telecoms box on Rusthall Road. Although Openreach are usually flexible over the exact location they have a statutory right to install them. The Warden requested that the box be placed well back on the verge to be clear of large machines. The Warden to liaise with Targetfollow to establish how far back it needs to be.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Flamingos

Around 400 plastic flamingos on stakes were placed overnight on the Common beside the Forum and left there for three days to promote a festival at Edenbridge. The officers were not aware of it and no application for permission was made.

AGREED. Not to allow promotion of this event on the Common in future. If a promotion is installed it will be removed, and the Conservators will charge for its removal and storage.

b) Rusthall Arts

The Warden gave them permission to place posters on the verge for the weekend of their festival.

c) Dandara

The officers have obtained a s106 contribution in excess of £9,000 from the developers of Union Square. It should be payable in 2019.

d) Management Plan

The Chairman read a draft letter to Hadlow College to see if they would be interested in using the Commons as part of their coursework, assisting the volunteers and helping to develop the management plan. The meeting approved the letter.

e) Apsley Street

A householder in Apsley Street has requested permission to place a skip on the grass verge for no more than two weeks to assist with his extension. The Warden expressed doubt that this could be done without harming the grass.

AGREED. To allow this on condition that the skip is placed on timbers for no more than one week.

f) Town Centre Management

As part of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Together promotion, Targetfollow has been asked if they can incorporate the Common in some way. They suggested a sculpture trail or something similar. Targetfollow to request a proper proposal for the next meeting, and for them to discuss it with the Warden first.

g) Christmas lunch

Targetfollow offered to host a lunch for the Conservators before the December meeting.

AGREED. To gratefully accept Targetfollow's offer.

11. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

44 Common View – side porch. No comment but issued warning about protecting grass verge.

Information panels on Common – wrote to support application. Approved.

17 Eridge Road – rebuild partly demolished wall. Wrote to point out that land outside the verge is Common.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on 7 December 2017.**