

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

### Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 6 December 2012 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Cllr Barbara Cobbold (Chairman)  
Mungo Chapman  
Chris Jones  
Ian Marshall  
Kate Sander  
Cllr James Scholes  
Cllr Victor Webb
- APOLOGIES: Cllr Catherine Mayhew  
Peter Freeman
- 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)
- OBSERVING: Maria Simmons  
Louis Duffield

### MINUTES

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2012 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

a) Harmony Street

Targetfollow confirmed that they would contribute half the cost of the works to protect the Common at Harmony Street whilst allowing parking to continue. The other half to be provided by KCC Councillor John Davies. The work will begin once the KCC grant is confirmed.

On behalf of the Conservators, the Chairman thanked Targetfollow and Cllr Davies for their generous funding.

b) Gas main renewal at Rusthall

The Warden confirmed that Morrisons, the company who replaced the gas main at Rusthall, will pay for the reinstatement. The work will begin as soon as possible.

c) BT emergency work

The Warden reported that he had heard no more from BT about taking new cables across the Common in front of the Forum, even though it was presented to him as an emergency.

d) Mitigation Strategy

Copies of this document were sent to all Conservators to be discussed at the October 2012 meeting.

**RESOLVED. To adopt the Mitigation Strategy as Conservators' policy.  
Proposed by Victor Webb and seconded by Ian Marshall**

e) Kent and Sussex Hospital Redevelopment

It was reported that the plans for redevelopment had been passed. The section 106 payment was said to include £18,000 for the Commons to be spent on mitigation. The office to clarify the position.

3. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

As it has been a relatively short time since the last meeting and the bad weather has hampered the work, there was little to report.

Brighton Lake is now full and looking very good. The fencing has been removed, but most remedial work will have to wait for an improvement in the weather.

The winds have caused some minor damage to trees, but nothing significant. The ditch clearance has been completed.

The major tree work is still to come, and the Warden hopes to have enough left in his budget to continue pushing back trees at the roadsides, creating scalloped edges.

The works to reopen the upper Terrace Walk and clear away the holly at the top of the 101 steps, which currently conceals the last hidden rock outcrop, are to begin next. Both projects are kindly being funded by the Freehold Tenants

Answering a question about Chalara Fraxinea, or Ash Dieback, the Warden said that the impact on Tunbridge Wells Common would not be great, but it could be on Rusthall Common where there are many more large and mature ash trees.

4. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 3 2012/13 showing total payments of £29,344.22 and receipts of £64,745.82.

**RESOLVED – that the report be approved.**

*Sarah Bird arrived at this point.*

5. **PROPOSED BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2013/14**

The Treasurer told the meeting that the Government has asked for a council tax freeze this year although the TWBC plans are not known. Inflation was down to 2.7% in October (CPI) but is expected to rise.

Next year's budget is based on requirements, and expenditure is expected to rise by 2.5%. This includes a provision for a 2% increase in salaries; due to the small number of staff, there is no possibility of making staff efficiencies. Allowances for the Clerk and Treasurer will remain unchanged for a fourth year.

The litter budget will increase in line with CPI, and there is no provision for increases in the tipping cost element. The grass cutting budget was set for year two when the contract was awarded.

The tree maintenance budget has increased in line with inflation, but the maintenance of cleared areas budget has been held at last year's level. The Treasurer made the point that the budget has no room for any capital projects, and the Conservators are reliant on assistance from elsewhere, especially the Freehold Tenants, for capital projects.

Apart from the precept, there is very little income. A small HLS payment is received from Natural England but interest is negligible due to the very low interest rates.

The statutory limit for the precept would allow the Conservators to set it at £139,177, but this is more than is required for the forthcoming year.

Following discussion about dog fouling and the cost of providing dog bags and dog bins, it was suggested that the Conservators should look at initiatives for tackling dog fouling in the Borough, including the Southborough awareness campaign and the bag and flag events.

**RESOLVED – that the proposed budget for 2013/14 be approved.**

**RESOLVED – that a precept for 2013/14 of £130,560 be approved.**

6. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS 2013**

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

21 March 2013  
4 July 2013  
19 September 2013  
12 December 2013

7. **ART INSTALLATION**

A briefing paper was sent to all Conservators for information. The Conservators noted the plans but did not comment as the installation is not on the Common and their permission is not required.

8. **GREAT WAR CENTENARY**

The Borough Council are looking at ways to mark the centenary of the Great War and have suggested that poppies could be grown on part of the Commons. The Warden pointed out that they will only grow on ploughed land so, if they are sown in the first year, the seed will lie dormant and they will not flower again until the area is ploughed again. He suggested that they could be planted on the triangles of grass at Vale Road after rotovation, together with a mix of other cornfield plants such as corn marigolds, cornflowers and corn cockles. The ground would then be rotovated each year from 2014 to 2018.

It was suggested that they could also be grown in the troughs, but they would need watering; possibly a school could be involved in this.

The Warden to produce costings.

9. **EDUCATIONAL PROJECT**

John Barber from the Friends told the meeting that he has been working with KHWP to further the plans. KHWP are confident that they can obtain funding for the work aimed at the general public, but it is less clear where the funding will come from for the schools project. The Friends have agreed to fund the planning for a one school pilot project, although the pilot will not involve pond dipping. KHWP will need to obtain a firm commitment from a school before work begins. The intention would be to work with the school for one year while training a teacher to take over the following year. As St Pauls, Rusthall, appears keen to take part, it is hoped that Rusthall Parish Council may assist in the funding. The Friends will work with Mrs Blackburn and Cllr Scholes, who may be able to assist with funding for a Tunbridge Wells school.

On behalf of the Conservators, the Clerk thanked the Friends for carrying the project forward.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) **Water features**

The Clerk reported that he had met with Michael Holman, from Water in the Wells, about the possibility of establishing a water feature on the Common. He had expressed the Conservators' desire that the Common should remain natural and not park like, but indicated their willingness to take part in further discussions.

It was pointed out that Brighton Lake was an early water feature, created to provide employment, and this should be commemorated.

b) **Castle Road**

The Warden reported that serious erosion to the verge had occurred at the top of Castle Road. Because parked cars had eroded one side, he had placed tree trunks at the edge of the Common to keep car wheels on the tarmac. However, where the road narrowed at the top, it had resulted in large vehicles driving over the edge of the Common to get by, causing erosion to this side as well. The only solution he could see was to prevent parking at the top end of the road entirely. The Freehold Tenants had suggested placing further tree trunks on the side being eroded, but he felt that this would make the road impassable.

**RESOLVED. The Warden to speak to Kent Highways and TWBC Highways Department about yellow lines. Unless the matter is resolved urgently, the Clerk to raise the matter at a more senior level.**

11. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

St Pauls School House, Rusthall – new dormer window. Pointed out that no damage may be caused to Common.

Applications received but not commented on:

Langton Villa – erection of extensions.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on 21 March 2013.**