

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 6 December 2018 at 2.00pm

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

APOLOGIES: Chris McHugh

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)

MINUTES

1. CHRISTMAS LUNCH

The Chairman thanked Targetfollow for hosting Christmas lunch for the Conservators.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. MATTERS ARISING

a) McMillan Williams

The Warden reported that all work has been satisfactorily completed.

b) Bye-law signs

They will be put up as agreed once they have been produced.

c) Pedestrian Crossing

The traffic survey in Langton Road has begun without informing the Parish Council of their contribution.

d) Archaeology

AGREED. The group can continue with their limited explorations.

e) Replacement tree

The Warden recommended that the replacement for the diseased tree on Inner London Road be postponed until an occasion when a commemorative tree is required, as the position is very prominent.

AGREED. To plant a commemorative tree as a replacement when an occasion arises.

f) Inner London Road

The Warden has replaced all missing posts down the length of Inner London Road to protect the grass from frequent encroachment.

g) Ring Bolts

The Warden confirmed that all fixtures at Happy Valley are now covered by British Mountaineering Council insurance.

4. 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 Thelma Huggett)	one year term ending
Councillor James Scholes)	31 December 2019
Councillor Chris Woodward)	

Freehold Tenants

Stephen Lacey)	
Ian Marshall)	1st year of three year term until
Chris McHugh)	31 December 2021
Clare Sinha)	

Manor of Rusthall

Paul Burnett)	
Ewen Cameron)	3rd year of three year term until
Antony Moore)	31 December 2019
Corin Thoday)	

Cllr Huggett informed the meeting that she would not be standing for re-election next May and, as she was unable to attend the March meeting, this would be her last. She was thanked for her contribution.

5. **WELCOME TO NEW CONSERVATOR**

Antony Moore was welcomed as a new Conservator representing the Manor of Rusthall.

6. **APPOINTMENT OF NEW CLERK**

The Conservators agreed to appoint Giles Membrey as the new Clerk, subject to the completion of all the necessary procedures. The appointment will commence on 1 February and it was suggested that he shadow the current Clerk until the official handover of duties at the next Conservators' meeting on 21 March.

Rodney Stone was thanked for agreeing to remain until the March meeting.

AGREED. To appoint Giles Membrey as Director of the Commons and Clerk to the Conservators with effect from 1 February 2019.

7. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Warden reported that much of the autumn programme was delayed as his contractors were all busy elsewhere. Fortunately, a new contractor, Honnington Farms, based in Southborough, was recommended. He has now used this contractor several times and they have proved to be good, reliable and sometimes cheaper than the alternatives.

Two new steel bollards have been installed at key points where vehicles need excluding and the Warden plans to introduce more in the future.

The autumn has seen an increase in rough sleepers on the Commons, and several camps have been removed. Most notably, the man who camped for some time over the summer and was finally moved on with great difficulty returned briefly. However, the council found him accommodation before he had a chance to re-establish himself.

The volunteers have been very helpful this autumn, and a new group has formed in Apsley Street to keep the bank clear. In return, the Warden proposes a major clearance and cutting back of holly at the top of the bank which currently blocks out the sunlight. The residents will make a financial contribution to this work.

The Friends will also consider contributing to the cost.

The clearances recently funded by the Freehold Tenants have revealed a number of trees in need of remedial action. Those that have to be felled will provide tree trunks that can be used to protect verges.

8. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT NO 3 2018/19**

AGREED – that the statement be approved.

9. BUDGET REPORT AND PRECEPT 2019/20

The Treasurer reported that, due to an overspend last year, the reserves had reduced to £33,291 which is lower than the minimum target of £35,000.

The two main contracts are subject to CPI increases, which was 2.2% in September, and he has put aside 2.2% for salaries. Any increase above that level will have to be met by the contingency.

He also recommended that the work budget should be aligned with the management plan in order to improve planning and control.

RESOLVED. To agree the budget report and precept of £161,900 for 2019/20.

10. BANK AUTHORISATION

The new Clerk will replace the outgoing Clerk as signatory on the appointment date.

11. RISK REGISTER

The Conservators agreed that the risk register should be recalibrated to take account of the importance of some of the growing risks. It was suggested that the committee should look at the register and draw up an action plan, but that the decision on how to proceed should be taken by the new Clerk.

12. FREEHOLD TENANT PROJECTS

- a) Second Marlpit Pond - open the area around the dry pond as a first step towards creating extra habitat for great crested newts to expand into if their current pond is made unusable by the Australian stonecrop and parrots feather growing there.
- b) Happy Valley clearance – clear the dense holly scrub at the top of the steep escarpment to open the views.
- c) North of racecourse between Major Yorks Road and Pantiles path – clear holly scrub.
- d) Racecourse between Hungershall Park and Bracken Cottage drive – clear holly scrub to bring more light to waterlogged section.
- e) South of Hungershall Park between Major Yorks Road and racecourse – clear holly, create network of paths to bring more people in and reduce fire risk.
- f) Brighton Lake – remove four metres of encroaching reedmace.
- g) Volunteers – support and encourage links with KHWP and Hadlow College.
- h) Commemorative seats – for Peter Freeman and Mungo Chapman.

The projects were not thought to have major funding implications as all the clearance needs to be done and maintenance of larger cleared areas is easier.

The Conservators thanked the Freehold Tenants for their generosity.

13. CAR PARKING – MAJOR YORKS ROAD

Targetfollow circulated two alternative sets of plans for maximising the parking space in Major Yorks car park. The proposals were designed to protect the Common and the immediate surroundings.

One plan is to resurface and rationalise the layout to create more spaces. Targetfollow agreed that the surfaced area extends beyond the existing footprint but pointed out that it will not go beyond the area they judge to be the current car park. They have utilised the grass verges around the edge.

The second plan is to install a deck to provide a second storey, well screened from the surrounding Common and roads by living walls and hedging. This would not extend beyond the existing surfaced area.

It was pointed out that the parking problems in the area are not issues for the Conservators and the Clerk stated that the main duty of the Conservators is to protect the Common from encroachments unless it would result in benefit to the Common.

Targetfollow asked the remaining Conservators for alternatives that would be acceptable and the Conservators replied that it is not their job to resolve the parking issues but to protect the Common.

AGREED. To reject both the current proposals on the grounds that they are encroachments and not of benefit to the Commons.

14. CRICKET CLUB

The Chairman of Linden Park Cricket Club has approached Targetfollow with some ideas about how to raise money from the underused cricket pavilion now the nursery school has closed.

Their favoured options are a café which would open to the public in the morning and on match days, and a yoga studio.

The Conservators were concerned about both ideas. The café would mean the car park will be filled by users of the café rather than the Common, and the yoga studio is a purely commercial venture of no benefit to the Common which would also bring car parking problems.

A third possibility, not raised by the club in discussions with Targetfollow, is that the space could be used as a small office, which would not bring the same parking issue.

The Conservators defined their position by stating that they will consider anything that will not cause more pressure on the car park or introduce a purely commercial venture to the Common.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Mount Edgcumbe Hotel

The owners have recently resurfaced their drive and have created hard standing areas to the sides which are a clear encroachment onto the Common. In addition, they

have installed low level lighting along the drive without permission, which is served by a cable lying only about six centimetres below the surface.

AGREED. The Clerk to write to them to instruct the removal of the encroachment and a resolution to the dangerous electrical installation.

b) Churchside sign

RESOLVED. Not to allow the placing of a house sign on the Common where identifying the house is not a problem.

c) West Kent Partnership

This is a group that have been working with Kent Highways to reduce flooding in the Pantiles and Nevill Street. They want to divert some of the water running off the Common to ponds which will gradually drain away.

The Conservators agreed that they may be willing to look at some sort of drainage management solution but the group should offer something of benefit to the Common such as reopening or improving some of the ditches.

d) Parking at Beacon Hotel

As their parking is inadequate, particularly for large wedding parties, cars are parking all the way down Tea Garden Lane and causing serious erosion to the verges. The Warden has already installed tree trunks, but by law these have to be some way from the edge of the road and parkers are pushing right up to them. He has no solutions to this, although he may be able to protect the triangle of grass at the junction with the A264 by installing posts or tree trunks.

e) KCC Footpaths

It was noted that more and more of these are in a poor state with the surfaces breaking up. They need remedial work now before they deteriorate too far to repair. The office to contact the PROW Officer.

f) Aldi

Targetfollow confirmed that the six week moratorium had expired and they were progressing with discussions with Aldi.

16. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

White Hart, Lower Green Road – conversion to flats with two new dwellings behind. Wrote to point out verges are Common and there is not enough parking.

63 London Road – alterations to restore building. Wrote to householder to point out that the Common must not be used for storage or parking.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on Thursday 21 March 2019**