

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 7 December 2017 at 2.00pm

PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Chairman)
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
George Craig
Cllr Thelma Huggett
Stephen Lacey
Corin Thoday
Cllr Chris Woodward

APOLOGIES: Cllr James Scholes
Clare Sinha

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, which was greatly appreciated.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2017 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. MATTERS ARISING

a) McMillan Williams

The Warden has written again to request the reinstatement of the bank and received a positive reply.

b) Stranges Avenue

The Warden has met the developer of Royal Springs on-site. The developer has agreed to reduce the two trees that require attention, using a contractor approved by the Conservators. The developer will obtain planning permission. They are also considering proposals for landscaping behind the new building, although the residents' committee will need to agree to take responsibility for maintenance.

c) Drainage

KCC Highways have confirmed in writing that their cleansing crew advise that all the accessible gullies and chambers on the Common are free flowing and no problems with the system have been noted.

The office to ascertain whether there is a regular maintenance programme.

d) Information panels

The panels are nearly all installed now, and Targetfollow are preparing a press release.

e) Pedestrian Crossings

Clive Evans reported that KCC have discovered underground cables at the crossing site in Langton Road and it is no longer clear that the crossing will be installed in February as planned. Cllr Woodward to raise the matter at the JTB.

f) Bye-laws

The Clerk wrote to Defra for advice but the letter was not received by them. He has sent them a copy.

g) Telecomms box on Rusthall Road

Targetfollow confirmed that nothing more has been heard.

h) Flamingos

The office has again contacted the organisers of Leefest and has informed them that any flamingos or other promotion they place on the Common without permission in future will be removed and Leefest will be charged for the cost of removal and storage.

i) Hadlow College

The Chairman informed the meeting that no further progress had been made as they had approached the wrong person. The Chairman and Clerk are discussing the most appropriate senior executive at the college to address the letter to.

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 2018 |
| Councillor Chris Woodward |) | |

Freehold Tenants

| | | |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Mungo Chapman |) | |
| Stephen Lacey |) | 3rd year of three year term until |
| Ian Marshall |) | 31 December 2018 |
| Clare Sinha |) | |

Manor of Rusthall

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Paul Burnett |) | |
| Ewen Cameron |) | 2nd year of three year term until |
| George Craig |) | 31 December 2019 |
| Corin Thoday |) | |

5. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that the regular work to cut the meadows and path edges has been completed, and only Happy Valley remains. He also reported that he has started following the new management plan by leaving some areas uncut to create a variety of age ranges and habitats.

He has carried out some repairs to Fir Tree car park surface and will shortly be installing posts at the top of Apsley Street.

KCC have carried out the work to create a hard edge in Mount Edgcumbe Road by installing tree trunks and backfilling. This will prevent further erosion. It is a technique the Warden may look at for other eroded edges on the Commons. This would have the added advantage of blocking access for travellers.

He reported that Tunbridge Wells Common won Silver Gilt in Britain in Bloom.

He also mentioned a recent assault on the Common but felt there was no further action he could take to guard against this. Lighting would not help.

6. FINANCIAL STATEMENT NO 3

RESOLVED – that the statement be approved.

7. **GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT**

There was discussion of the possible reasons for the lack of alternative tenders and ways to avoid this in future.

RESOLVED. To accept the tender from G Bridgland unless discussions with TWBC warrant further talks.

8. **LITTER CONTRACT**

RESOLVED. To accept the tender from Oakbourne.

9. **BUDGET REPORT AND PRECEPT 2018/19**

There are currently no national guidelines, but inflation is rising, and the budget reflects this. Salaries are the biggest expense and the Treasurer has made a 2% provision for them. Salary increases will be determined in the March meeting, and any rise above 2% will need to be met from the contingency. The contingency has been doubled to account for rises in the grasscutting and litter contracts.

He has included provision for purchasing a body camera, to be worn by the Warden at all times.

He is currently unable to allocate the budget to reflect the new management plan as there is no base data, but he will start to collect the data which will be reflected in future budgets.

In order to maintain a sensible reserve of £35,000 he recommended that the precept next year should be set at £156,000. This is less than the maximum allowed for under the formula.

RESOLVED. To agree the budget report and precept of £156,000 for 2018/19.

10. **FREEHOLD TENANT PROJECTS**

The Freehold Tenants have offered to fund the following projects in 2018:

- i) Racecourse improvement near the crossing with Major Yorks Road;
- ii) Clearance of holly scrub at Fir Tree pond to improve penetration of light;
- iii) Clearance adjacent to Cabbage Stalk Lane around a young holm oak;
- iv) Finish last year's successful partial clearance at Happy Valley.

RESOLVED. To accept the offer of funding for all four projects, with thanks.

11. **RISK REGISTER UPDATE**

The Clerk reported that the Chief Executive has agreed the Council will use their best endeavours to assist the Conservators in the event of loss of accommodation and personnel, and this will be put in writing.

RESOLVED. To review updates to the risk register at each quarterly meeting.

12. **PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER**

RESOLVED. The office to submit the draft response on behalf of the Conservators, with certain agreed changes.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Peter Freeman

The Clerk reported the sad death of Peter Freeman, a Conservator for nearly twenty years. He will represent the Conservators at the memorial service in the spring together with the Warden and Administrator.

b) Archaeology

RESOLVED. To allow investigations to proceed subject to the Warden being satisfied it will not harm the Common and insurance cover being in place.

c) Bye-law signs

Targetfollow expressed concern that there were insufficient bye-law signs in some areas, and badly degraded in others. They have been advised that the signs should be more visible to remove the possibility of successful claims for prescriptive rights. It was agreed that new ones were needed but should wait until the advice on bye-laws is received from Defra.

d) Fir Tree car park

Targetfollow proposed erecting warning signs and asking RCP to monitor the car park and issue penalty charge notices to people who park for more than four hours. The Warden pointed out that the office already monitors the car park when it is becoming full, and most people respect the warning stickers placed on their cars. The Clerk expressed concern that the Conservators may not have the power to levy fines, but Targetfollow pointed out it is already being done in Nevill Park with no problems.

RESOLVED. The Clerk to investigate the legal position.

e) Centenary of end of First World War

RESOLVED. Rusthall Parish Council to fund the planting of an oak tree to commemorate the end of the First World War, subject to the Warden agreeing the position.

f) Centenary of women's suffrage

RESOLVED. To allow Tunbridge Wells Common to be used as the starting point for the planned women's march to the Town Hall.

g) Photographic record for museum

Cllr Woodward proposed utilising the photographs that have been taken by the Warden over the years to form an archive for the museum. This could be part of the developing archive of scanned old postcards of the Commons and photographs being taken as part of the Management Plan.

h) Rusthall Bonfire

The Warden felt that in recent years the bonfire had spread over a larger area, and met the organisers to agree a maximum radius of 10m in future years. They also agreed to restrict access to a single vehicle, and use a different access point so that the Warden can close off the current access point to protect against traveller incursions.

i) Town Centre Management

To brighten the entrance to the town, TCM have proposed planting daffodils down Inner London Road. The Warden thinks daffodils unsuitable as they are not native and take too long to die back before the area can be mown. He has suggested snowdrops and crocuses instead.

RESOLVED. To allow planting of native bulbs on the grass at Inner London Road, subject to the Warden agreeing the details.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on Thursday 22 March 2018**