

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in The Council Chamber on Thursday 19 April 2012 at 2.30pm

- PRESENT: Barbara Cobbold (Chairman)
Sarah Bird
Mungo Chapman
Peter Freeman
Andrew Gower
Ian Marshall
Cllr Catherine Mayhew
Kate Sander
Cllr James Scholes
Cllr Victor Webb
- APOLOGIES: Nathan Dickinson
Chris Jones
- 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

MINUTES

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2012 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

a) Mount Edgcumbe Hotel

It was noted that the hotel had not opened for Easter as hoped, but is due to be opened shortly.

b) Interactive panel

The panel may be reused as part of the educational project but could also be used by the Friends for a map if wished.

c) Beacon Hotel

The owner has agreed to remove his extra signs but has not done so yet as the main sign has been stolen. He will remove the secondary signs once the replacement sign is in place.

d) Helicopter landings

It was confirmed that the Kent Air Ambulance would like to continue using the cricket ground as a landing place in emergencies even though a new helipad was available at the new hospital.

3. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that he has completed all the planned works for the winter period.

Due to the unexpected availability of machinery, the new path at Happy Valley, scheduled for the autumn, has also been created. It was pointed out that it is very steep and slippery in places and the Warden agreed that it will need steps in a few places.

The extension of the big clearance behind the Forum adjacent to Castle Road to created wood pasture has now been completed and seeded, and the new grass should be appearing soon due to the recent rain. On one section there were almost no trees worth saving other than damaged birch and sycamore, so the clearance is more complete than envisaged, although this provides an opportunity to do some planting of native trees. He has received many compliments.

Cllr Webb made the point that, although he approves of much of the clearance work that has been carried out in the last few years, this last clearance was much more drastic than he thought desirable, and could not understand why quite sizeable trees had been removed. He expressed concern at the destruction of habitats, and felt that scrub and bramble was valuable to many creatures that live on the Common. He was concerned at the reduction in numbers of lizards and snakes. He also pointed out that the air quality on London Road is very poor, and the trees are needed to counteract that.

The Warden explained that it is necessary to go through a clearance phase to return the Common to its original heathland and wood pasture, as laid down by the management plan. This is designed to increase habitats for numbers of rare species that are present on the Common in dwindling numbers. The trees that were removed were either damaged or undesirable, and he intends to plant species more appropriate to heathland such as Scots Pine. He pointed out that lizards and snakes have been driven out by the encroaching scrub and woodland, and that recreating heathland will encourage the numbers to build up, a practice also being carried out by the RSPB in Broadwater Warren and on the Ashdown Forest. The plan is to create a mosaic of heathland, woodland and grassland to provide a wide range of habitats.

Dan Docker, the Borough Council Trees Officer, has offered to attend a site meeting with Cllr Webb and the Warden to explain the objectives of the management plan and why certain types of operation are being carried out.

The Clerk pointed out that the Warden was instructed to carry out this work by the Conservators at the previous meeting, and that all the work carried out by the Warden is based on the management plan or direct instructions by the Conservators.

4. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 4 2011/12 showing total payments of £42,938.20 and receipts of £1,780.62.

The End of Year Accounts will be presented to the next meeting.

RESOLVED. To approve the report.

5. **LITTER CONTRACT**

The Warden informed the Conservators that, with the help of the Treasurer, a formula has been devised for a fair payment to the litter contractor. With the agreement of the Clerk and Chairman he had spoken to the new contractor and proposed a total annual payment, including tipping costs, of £20,928. The contractor has agreed to this proposal, which is linked to CPI and the actual increases in tipping costs.

Any contract offered will include clear specifications as well as penalties.

RESOLVED. To offer a three year contract to Oakbourne on the basis of the remuneration outlined above.

6. **WILDFLOWER VERGES**

The Landscape and Biodiversity Office for TWBC has asked the Conservators to run a trial to allow wildflowers to grow on some areas of Tunbridge Wells Common close to the road. The possibilities are Inner London Road, the triangles of grass at Vale Road, and the newly cleared area opposite the triangles.

The trial will allow selected areas to grow unchecked through the summer to see what varieties grow naturally with possible plug planting of further varieties if the results are encouraging. A neat appearance will be maintained by mowing around the trial areas.

The Warden expressed some concern that the longer grass may be trampled and it may serve as a trap for blown litter, but the trial will test these. He will endeavour to keep desire lines open. The trial will also test public opinion.

It was suggested that the bank opposite Vale Road may be inappropriate for the trial as sight lines must be kept clear for the traffic.

RESOLVED. To run a trial this year.

7. **RUSTHALL BONFIRE**

RESOLVED. To grant permission for a bonfire on 27 October 2012 on a similar basis to 2011 and subject to the same terms and conditions.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) **Precept**

The Conservators were asked if they could set the precept in December rather than January as this would assist Rusthall Parish Council to set their budget in time. The Treasurer pointed out that the Conservators meeting would then need to be held in December, but holding it in early January would be possible and may be desirable. The Conservators indicated their willingness to hold the meeting at the beginning of January. The Clerk will discuss this with the Chief Executive of TWBC.

b) **Travellers**

RESOLVED. To place bollards where the Commons may be vulnerable to entrance by travellers, especially at the Lower Cricket Ground on Church Road.

c) **Advertising posters**

The Warden agreed to instruct the litter picker to remove all advertising signs, boards and posters on the verges wherever possible. Where the boards are too large to remove, the organisation that placed them there should be approached.

d) **Litter bins**

The Warden will replace bins in a poor condition including the one in Hungershall Park.

e) **Harmony Street**

It was pointed out that cars are still not parking on the lower section of the new double kerb as they are afraid of damaging their cars, and so the cars opposite are still parking on the grass. The Warden was asked to put letters on cars parking on the grass asking them to move further out.

f) **Friends**

The Chairman of the Friends told the meeting that they had taken a stall in the Pantiles on Easter Day and received a very positive response.

g) Picnic company

An organisation has asked permission to set up a temporary, moveable booth on the Commons selling picnics and renting out blankets, baskets, etc. It was pointed out that purely commercial ventures are against the Open Spaces Policy. Although the policy was not intended to fetter the discretion of the Conservators, concern was expressed that it could set an unwelcome precedent

RESOLVED. To refuse permission to sell picnics on the Commons.

h) Jubilee Celebrations

It has been confirmed that the beacon will be lit in a specially made basket on the Lower Cricket Ground. There will be a hog roast and Morris dancers. The meeting discussed the advisability of allowing a commercial company to sell food and concluded that it was important to the success of the event, but asked the company to donate some of its profits to charity.

RESOLVED. To delegate authority to the committee to take any decisions necessary for the event to take place. Conservators should all be kept informed by email.

i) Refreshments

The Borough Council have introduced a charge of £15 for the use of meeting rooms, with an extra £10 for refreshments. The meeting concluded that refreshments are not necessary.

9. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

15-16 Eridge Road (Plant and Tools site) – new application for flats and houses. Repeated expectation of receiving Section 106 money and pointed out that verges are Common. In correspondence with developer over boundary.

21-23 Eridge Road – demolition of garages and construction of houses. Pointed out that verge is Common and no materials to be stored there.

73 London Road – demolition of porch, construction of extension. Pointed out that no materials to be stored on grass at Inner London Road.

Applications received but not commented on:

Langton Villa, Langton Road – demolition of existing extension and construction of new one.

Conservative Association, 84 London Road – repaving to front and creation of roof terrace.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m.** on 12 July 2012 in Committee Room A.