

**TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS**

**Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 12 July 2012 at 2.00pm**

- PRESENT: Cllr Barbara Cobbold (Chairman)  
Sarah Bird  
Mungo Chapman  
Peter Freeman  
Chris Jones  
Ian Marshall  
Cllr Catherine Mayhew  
Kate Sander  
Cllr James Scholes  
Cllr Victor Webb
- 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 19 April 2012 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

**2. MATTERS ARISING**

a) Mount Edgcumbe Hotel

The Warden was asked to ensure that the new owners understand where their boundary lies, and make it clear that the hotel must stay within its own boundary.

b) Advertising boards

The litter picker has been instructed to remove all unauthorised advertising boards, or make them not visible if this is not possible.

c) Precept

The Clerk has met the Borough Council Chief Executive and discussed the timing of the precept. He will have further discussions with the Treasurer and make his recommendation to the next meeting.

d) Beacon donation

The Warden was asked to ascertain where the proprietor of the hog roast at the lighting of the Jubilee Beacon had made his charitable donation.

e) Litter bins

The Warden has a budget of £800 for new litter bins and is hoping that the new, lower prices will enable him to buy three.

**RESOLVED. To authorise the Warden to spend money from the reserves on further bins if a better deal on a larger quantity can be achieved.**

f) Damaged signs

It was confirmed that some new signs will be installed to replace some of the old, damaged ones. The Borough Council are reframing one at Fir Tree Road.

3. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that it has been difficult to complete all the planned work due to the constant rain. The grass cutting is not as neat as usual as it is too wet, but is growing strongly so the budgeted twelve cuts are unlikely to be sufficient this year. He has fifteen bench renovations planned, some funded by the Friends, but these cannot be carried out until the weather improves. The Cricket Club renovated the benches by the cricket pitch earlier in the year during the fine weather, which has been a great help.

The wildflower experiment is continuing. The Warden is pleased by the area below Church Road which shows the promise of some floristic diversity, but above Church Road it is less successful, and he would prefer to see the experiment moved opposite, above the coach park, next year. Most feedback has been positive, including from the London Road Residents Association. He would be happy to run an experiment at the junction of Coach Road and Rusthall Road in the future if it is wanted by the residents.

He agreed that the cold baths would be weeded and tidied soon, just before the Bloom judging. The Friends indicated that they might be willing to take on responsibility for this, and the Conservators expressed their gratitude.

The Warden was asked to ensure grass cuttings are cleared after mowing at Lower Green Road and ask the workmen to be more careful when using strimmers.

Cllr Webb expressed the view that the policy of restoring the heathland should be reviewed before any further large scale clearances are undertaken, even though the most recent clearance is now starting to look very good.

Fitness trainers are a problem on Tunbridge Wells Common as they damage benches. The Warden speaks to them where possible.

Tightrope walking, as well as tree climbing, has been seen on the Common, but the Warden is not concerned by such activities so long as other Commons users are not put at risk.

The question of people using the Commons for private parties was raised, and it was suggested that consent should never be given to people for gazebos, as the parties often turn out to be more extensive than indicated. There is also a question of liability, even if the Conservators issue a disclaimer.

**RESOLVED. The officers to bring a recommendation and wording to the next meeting for consideration.**

The Warden confirmed that desilting Brighton Lake was to begin in October, and this should reduce the rapid growth of pond weed significantly.

4. **FINAL ACCOUNTS AND BALANCE SHEET 2011/12**

These have been submitted to the auditor and approved. They show a small saving on salaries due to lower pension contributions and on maintenance due to the saving on VAT with the new contractor. However, costs on maintenance of cleared areas and posts were up. It was a poor year for interest, but there had been several donations, and work and purchases had been funded by the Freehold Tenants and the Friends. The reserves are within the prudent range.

**RESOLVED. To approve the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 and balance sheet as at 31 March 2012.**

5. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 1 2012/13 showing total payments of £38,554.95 and receipts of £76,416.44. Most of the items relate to the previous financial year. The large dog bag cost was due to finding a new supplier and ordering a two year supply.

**RESOLVED. To approve the report.**

6. **KENT AND SUSSEX HOSPITAL UPDATE**

The Warden informed the Conservators that, with the number of planned developments close to Tunbridge Wells Common, there was likely to be a great deal of extra pressure, especially with dog walking and associated litter. The officers have been working with Kent Wildlife to draw up some costings, a proportion of which

should be met by the Kent and Sussex Hospital site developers in mitigation. The officers and Kent Wildlife are due to meet the developers shortly.

As this would be part of the Section 106 payment, Cllr Scholes stated that he would take no part in any discussion.

7. **RUSTHALL PARISH COUNCIL**

The Clerk and Warden attended a recent Parish Council meeting and reported that they were well received. The main issue that arose was parking at Harmony Street. They were grateful for the invitation and will be happy to attend further meetings as it is a useful way to consult Rusthall residents. Mrs Blackburn to send a list of meeting dates.

8. **INTERACTIVE SIGN**

The Conservators had been asked by Kent Highways for their permission for two interactive signs, one in Coach Road and one in Lower Green Road. Mrs Blackburn stated that this was incorrect, and the two signs were planned for Lower Green Road, one on each side.

**RESOLVED. To grant permission for the interactive signs on condition that the Warden has no concerns about the exact siting.**

9. **ART INSTALLATION**

The Borough Council, in conjunction with the Hoodwink Project, are planning a series of temporary public art installations over the next few years. The first one is to be based at the Forum, will be installed in February and will remain for about six months. The brief is out at the moment with submissions expected shortly. The decision will be taken quickly, so permission is being sought from the Conservators now even though there are no plans available. At least some of the installation will be outside the building and will be lit in some way. Any problems with security and road safety will be dealt with by the Council. It is not expected that any part of the installation will be on the Common. The Conservators agreed that they could not give permission until they have more information, but the next meeting will be too late.

**RESOLVED. Sarah Bird to hold a meeting with the Borough Council, together with officers, and will disseminate information. A special meeting will be called if it is considered necessary. Clerk to write to the Council.**

10. **BRACKEN AND GORSE COTTAGE PIPES**

Work has started to replace the water pipes leading to the two properties; the urgency meant there was not time to consult the Conservators. Although moling has been used so far, a trench will be required.

**RESOLVED. To allow the work to continue on condition that full reinstatement is made.**

11. **HARMONY STREET PARKING**

Residents have complained that the new double kerb is too difficult to park on, so they are parking on the road; this means that, to leave enough space for passing traffic, cars are continuing to park on the grass opposite. Some residents have suggested laying plastic mesh on the first 18 inches of grass to protect it and placing bollards beyond the mesh to ensure that cars cannot park on unprotected grass.

Most Conservators expressed the view that the residents had agreed to the double kerb, therefore no further accommodation was required. Bollards should be installed on the Toad Rock side as previously agreed as the Conservators have a statutory duty to protect the Common. However, the residents do not feel that the kerb is what was proposed because the bottom kerb is much higher than expected and has a much sharper edge, making it difficult for the cars to mount.

Maria Simmons, a resident of the area and a Parish Councillor, was invited to speak. She proposed that, rather than allowing parking to encroach on the Common, the double kerb should be made more accessible. It was suggested that this could be done by raising the road surface.

**RESOLVED. The committee and Chris Jones of Targetfollow to hold a site meeting, together with residents and any other Conservators who wish to go. Cllr Davies should also be invited.**

The question of run-off from the bank above the kerb due to the rain was also raised and the Warden agreed to arrange suitable planting to prevent this when the rain stops.

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) **No 1 Community Centre**

**RESOLVED. To allow an advertising board for their mini Olympics to be placed on the grass at the bottom of Broadwater Lane for three or four days and removed after the event.**

b) **Rusthall Bonfire Village Fete**

**RESOLVED. To allow signs to be placed along Langton Road on the Friday and Saturday.**

c) Rusthall Cricket Club

The club have been trying to raise money to upgrade the pavilion and have a new sponsor who wishes to put an advertising sign up during matches only.

**RESOLVED. To allow the sign to be put up during matches and removed afterwards. Permission to be reviewed after one year.**

d) Disabled Parking

It was pointed out that there are likely to be two applications for disabled parking spaces in Upper Street.

e) Rusthall Bonfire

The Bonfire Committee is arranging its own marshals this year and the Conservators were asked if they could loan any bollards. However, the Conservators do not have any moveable bollards.

f) Meeting with Borough Council Chief Executive

The Clerk reported that, at the recent meeting, the Chief Executive had expressed appreciation for the planting of the Jubilee trees. He also said that the Conservators' letter about yellow lines was still going through the appropriate procedures, and he hoped to be in a position to report back shortly. The route of the Olympic torch was also discussed, although it is unlikely to affect the Common significantly.

g) Traffic

The Conservators believe that the lower part of Major Yorks Road, and its junction with Hungershall Park, is dangerous for pedestrians due to the excessive traffic speed. Cllr Scholes reported that he has been talking to Kent Highways about a crossing over Major Yorks Road from the car park and was awaiting a decision. It was thought unlikely that a crossing will be possible in Eridge Road. He would also pursue the idea of a speed limit at the junction if he has evidence of usage. Cllr Scholes also reported that he has succeeded in getting the double yellow lines extended at the top of Major Yorks Road near the roundabout.

*Councillors Scholes, Mayhew and Webb left at this point.*

13. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

12 Apsley Street - Single storey extension. Pointed out that the verges were not to be damaged and no materials were to be left on them.

Applications received but not commented on:

Kent and Sussex Hospital - scoping opinion

Blue Cedars, Langton Road - demolition of bungalow, replacement with single house.

The next meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. on 25 October 2012 in Committee Room A.