

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 27 March 2014 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Chris Jones (Outgoing Chairman)
Ian Marshall (Incoming Chairman)
Sarah Bird
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Peter Freeman
Cllr Victor Webb
Cllr Chris Woodward
Will Wright
- APOLOGIES: Cllr James Scholes
Neill Buchanan
Nathan Dickinson
- 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)
David Young (Sustrans)
Bartholomew Wren (TWBC)
Colin Finch (KCC)
Saul Fajerman (KHWP)

MINUTES

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

In accordance with the third Schedule of the County of Kent Act 1981 it was noted that the Conservators are required at the first meeting held on or after 1 January each year to appoint a Chairman for the ensuing year.

RESOLVED – That Ian Marshall, representative of the Freehold Tenants, be appointed as Chairman until the quarterly meeting of the Conservators in March 2015.

The Chairman thanked Chris Jones for his excellent work as Chairman.

2. **MEMBERSHIP**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Chris Woodward to his first meeting.

RESOLVED. To formally appoint Corin Thoday, Ewen Cameron and Will Wright in place of Chris Jones, Sarah Bird and Andy Gower as Conservators representing Targetfollow .

The Chairman welcomed Will Wright to the meeting.

He also thanked Chris Jones and Sarah Bird for their contributions as Conservators.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2013 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

a) Correspondence

RESOLVED. The office to email Conservators copies of all letters sent on their behalf.

b) Parking in Castle Road

The Chairman told the meeting that he had spoken in favour of the new parking restrictions at the JTB meeting and all proposals had been passed. It is hoped they will be introduced in early May.

c) Notifiable invasive species

The Warden confirmed that the Himalayan Balsam on Tunbridge Wells Common and the Japanese Knotweed on Rusthall Common will be treated. However, they might need repeat treatment.

d) Maintenance costs

The Chairman reported that the Freehold Tenants wished to get an idea of the impact of the clearances and other projects on the maintenance budget. Accordingly, they have asked the office to record expenditure by compartment as well as by type of work in the forthcoming year. This knowledge should assist in producing an informed update of the Management Plan which will soon be necessary.

5. **CYCLEWAY**

The Chairman welcomed David Young from Sustrans, Colin Finch from KCC and Bartholomew Wren from TWBC to the meeting. He reported that, following a

revised proposal from David Young he had held discussions with Colin Finch over some of the issues, especially the importance of pinch points to prevent motor bike racing. KCC had agreed to incorporate two sets of Kent Carriage Gaps along the new track, in addition to both ends.

KCC agreed to send formal written confirmation that the path will be compliant with the specific legislation regarding the bye-laws regulating the Common, including the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Conservators will also require confirmation that the proposals do not contravene any general planning and Commons/Village Green specific legislation.

It was also agreed that the path would be 2.5 metres wide, the surface would be dusted with a coloured finish, and safety barriers would be installed at the ends where busy footpaths cross the track.

The Clerk confirmed that, although the surfaced cycle track would be wider than the existing restricted byway, the Conservators were able to authorise encroachments on the basis that they benefit the Common.

Concern was expressed that there was nothing to prevent children from riding straight into Major Yorks Road, but Sustrans believe that ending the surfaced path 25 metres before the junction will deter this.

Chris Jones, representing Targetfollow, expressed concern that cyclists were effectively being directed across the car park. He agreed to investigate the possibility of cycle parking being provided, but stated that there could be no extension of the cycle path across the car park, nor any signage to encourage cyclists to go that way.

Colin Finch confirmed that KCC will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance.

RESOLVED. To allow the cycle path to be surfaced as outlined in the last proposal with the addition of Kent Carriage Gaps. Further discussions to be held to finalise the details.

David Young, Colin Finch and Bartholomew Wren left at this point

6. COMMON VISION UPDATE

John Barber outlined the work that has been done on the Common Vision project and asked for agreement to the proposals.

He reported that they plan to hold two events for schools at the end of the summer to introduce teachers to the educational programme. Both teachers and PTAs in the 22 schools within one kilometre will be contacted. Funding is being sought for this.

Work has begun to design Interpretation Panels but further funding will be needed to before any panels can be made and installed.

The leaflets have been designed and, pending resolution of a few details, will be printed and distributed shortly. This aspect was partially funded by Cllr Scholes.

The online site is under development and will be available on both the Friends and the Conservators website. More funding will be required to complete the development.

RESOLVED. To thank the Friends and KHWP for their hard work on progressing this project.

The Chairman took the opportunity to discuss a linked initiative on the part of the Friends to put pressure on KCC to install pedestrian crossings over Major Yorks Road and Langton Road. This initiative has the support of a wide range of local business leaders and organisations including the leader of the Council, the Civic Society and Town Forum, Rusthall Parish Council and Village Association, and the church and primary school in Rusthall.

Targetfollow expressed their full support and agreed to be signatories. They are also keen to get another crossing over Eridge Road and will liaise with the Friends over their approach. The Conservators expressed their support for this additional crossing.

RESOLVED. To add the Conservators as signatories to the Friends' initiative. The Conservators also to write separately to KCC in support of the proposals.

Saul Fajerman left at this point

7. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that it had been a difficult winter because of the extreme weather. Despite this, he had managed to deal with all serious damage as well as complete all planned work. Some minor damage and clearance remains. Very little of the damage was significant, the notable exceptions being the mature beech that came down in Royal Victoria Grove and the lime from the adjacent line that was knocked down as it fell.

The two new paths in Rusthall have both been created, although the weather has meant that there is still some minor work to be finished. The clearances on Tunbridge Wells Common have also been completed and are ready for grading and seeding.

The extreme rainfall has meant a lot of work has been done on the drainage ditches, especially on Rusthall Common. He has therefore exceeded the drainage budget, which was already fully spent on the remedial work at Brighton Lake earlier in the year. He told the Conservators that, despite the overspend this year, he would also like to spend more than the budget allows next year to carry out work on Tunbridge Wells Common. Cllr Scholes has asked him to see if anything can be done to alleviate the flooding in the Pantiles and he believes a sump, installed next to Major Yorks Road many decades ago, could ease the situation if the accumulated silt is removed. He plans to do this work during the summer months.

With the new parking restrictions on the Commons roads due to be implemented shortly, he proposes to install posts where displaced commuters might try to park, primarily around the entrance to Nevill Park. This may take an extra £3,000.

RESOLVED. To authorise the Warden to spend the necessary amount in improving drainage and protecting the Common against parking encroachments, even if this causes an overspend. The Conservators to consider raising the precept next year to cope with the extra costs.

The Warden confirmed that sink holes were particularly likely to appear on the Common in extreme wet weather because the sandy soil was easily washed away by new springs.

The Warden was asked not to commence the grass cutting so early this year, as the ground was scalped during the first cut last year.

8. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 4 2013/14 showing total payments of £51,899.42 and receipts of £109.65. Much of the tree work has been done in the last few weeks, so many invoices remain to be submitted. The Maintenance of Cleared Areas budget has been overspent, and the Treasurer agreed to email the reasons for this to the Conservators.

RESOLVED – that the report be approved.

9. **HOSPICE IN THE WEALD 10K RUN**

The Hospice have requested permission to start and finish their 10K run on the Lower Cricket Ground as usual. They have confirmed that there will be no drumming and amplification will be moderated. In other respects they intend to do the same as they have each year. It will be held on 14 September 2014.

RESOLVED – to allow the run to take place on condition there is no drumming.

10. **RUSTHALL FETE**

RESOLVED. To allow notices to be placed along the verge of the A264 for the week preceding the fete.

11. **LANGTON FETE**

RESOLVED. To allow notices to be placed along the verge of the A264 for the week preceding the fete.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Tunbridge Wells Vision

The Clerk referred to the draft document produced by TWBC outlining their vision for the next five years in which they say that finding a solution to the traffic problems in London Road “could mean encroaching on green space in the future.” The Clerk has written to the Leader of the Council to point out the Conservators’ obligation to preserve the Common free from encroachment. He expressed the hope that the two bodies can work together to resolve their differences.

b) Vale Royal Methodist Church

The Clerk indicated that he had been approached by the Church to confirm that the parking area in the front was not regarded as Common, and it would remain this way once the Church was sold. He submitted a draft reply to the Conservators before sending it to the Church as he is a member of the congregation, which is a potential conflict of interest.

RESOLVED. To send a written reply confirming that this area is not Common.

c) Fir Tree car park

Chris Jones of Targetfollow informed the Conservators that they intend to install solar powered Pay and Display machines in the Fir Tree car park in order to begin charging as soon as possible. They will take responsibility for the maintenance of the car park. The attendant from the car park in Major Yorks Road will patrol and issue penalties where appropriate. The charging details have not yet been finalised, so he could not say whether the parents taking their children to nursery school will have a short period of grace.

The Conservators noted the intention but urged Targetfollow to adopt a policy which favoured users of the Commons and cricket club and which deterred commuters and other long term users.

d) Major Yorks Road Car Park

Chris Jones of Targetfollow informed the meeting that they are to install a sign pointing to the entrance of the car park on the opposite side of the road.

e) Rusthall Cricket Club Storage Container

The Warden reported that he had spoken to the cricket club, who are reluctant to site the container adjacent to the clubhouse as it will block an entrance wherever it is placed. The Warden believes it will be possible to find a position in the undergrowth where it will not be unduly noticeable. They are still fundraising, so it is unlikely that a decision will be required before the next Conservators’ meeting.

Targetfollow made the point that they will not allow a permanent structure, but are willing to discuss an annual licence with them.

RESOLVED. To hold a site meeting if it becomes necessary to make a decision before the July Conservators' meeting.

Mungo Chapman left at this point

f) Trough near Brighton Lake

John Barber informed the meeting that Tunbridge Wells Garden Centre might be prepared to take on the filling and maintenance of the trough, as previous plantings have failed due to lack of maintenance. They would wish to display a small sign advertising their involvement.

RESOLVED. To allow John Barber to make arrangements subject to the sponsorship sign being small and appropriate.

g) Rusthall Bonfire

RESOLVED. To grant permission for a bonfire on 25 October 2014 on a similar basis to 2013 and subject to the same terms and conditions.

h) No 1

RESOLVED. To allow a poster to be displayed on the Common to advertise the No 1 Summer Fair on 20 July 2013. The poster to be there no longer than one week.

13. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Dingley Dell – erection of three detached houses in garden. Wrote to advise that the verge is all Common and must not be damaged during building works.

Applications received but not commented on:

The Forum – extension of permission for installation on roof to 3years.
Rusthall Fire Station – change of use

14. SALARIES

RESOLVED – to increase the salaries of the Warden and Support Officer by 2%, with effect from 1 April 2014.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on 10 July 2014.**