

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 12 March 2015 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Outgoing Chairman)
Cllr Barbara Cobbold (Incoming Chairman)
Mungo Chapman
George Craig
Peter Freeman
Nick Hill
Cllr James Scholes
Corin Thoday
Cllr Victor Webb
Cllr Chris Woodward
- APOLOGIES: Ewen Cameron
Paul Burnett
- 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: Alastair Tod (Town Forum)

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 Councillor Barbara Cobbold, representative of the Borough Council, be appointed as Chairman until the quarterly meeting of the Conservators in March 2016.

The Chairman thanked Ian Marshall for doing such a good job as last year's Chairman.

2. **MEMBERSHIP.**

RESOLVED. To formally appoint Nick Hill in place of Neill Buchanan as a Conservator representing the Freehold Tenants and Paul Burnett in place of Nathan Dickinson as a Conservator representing Targetfollow.

The Chairman welcomed Nick Hill back as a Conservator after a break of several years. Paul Burnett sent his apologies.

The Chairman also thanked Neill Buchanan for his contribution as Conservator.

Cllr Webb told the meeting that he would be standing down as Conservator after the election on 7 May as he would no longer be a Councillor. He commended the Warden for his work and the Freehold Tenants for their contribution.

Corin Thoday and George Craig arrived at this point.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2014 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

a) Mount Edgcumbe

It was reported that the owners have sent a written assurance that the cable laying conforms to current Health and Safety advice. The Clerk thanked John Barber for his assistance in getting the required assurance.

b) Pedestrian Crossings

It was confirmed that the Clerk sent the JTB a further letter of support for the crossings. John Barber advised the meeting that the budget for a feasibility study had still not been approved and that KCC appear to have changed their process. However, he is still actively pursuing the matter.

c) Lighting in Pantiles Car Park

Targetfollow confirmed that the lighting will be in place before next winter.

d) Rusthall Cricket Club

The container is still not in position due to the ground being too soft for the delivery lorry.

e) Harmony Street

The Warden has received a quote of £4,670 + VAT for laying tarmac over the protective mesh, which is now lifting, at Toad Rocks. The pavement edge that meets the mesh is now crumbling, increasing the quantity of tarmac required. It was pointed out that Highways are responsible for the pavement.

RESOLVED. To pin the mesh down where it is lifting, and continue to pin whenever necessary. No more money to be spent on trying to resolve the problem.

5. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that it had been a quiet winter so he has been able to complete all the planned roadside work. The Freehold Tenant project to clear the area behind Fir Tree car park has been completed and seeded. The Sunnyside Road project has not yet been started as the ground is too wet.

As there were fewer emergency tree works, he has been able to clear some damaged, self-sown oaks near the path from the Pantiles to Wellington Rocks, as well as create another new glade below Royal Victoria Grove.

He is now planning to spend the last of this year's tree budget on pushing back the trees along Tea Garden Lane. The resulting trunks will be used to protect the road edges where they are being eroded by parked cars. There should also be some spare tree trunks that can be used on the edges of Castle Road.

He confirmed that he is planning to repair the very bad ruts near Brighton Lake where heavy lorries overrun the road edge, but conceded that the problem will simply continue. Wooden bollards will not be strong enough to protect the edge, but one solution might be to use as a barrier the old scaffolding that was abandoned many years ago on the Common between Sainsburys roundabout and the petrol station.

6. FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 4 2014/15 showing total payments of £33,479.79 and receipts of £1,501.58. Much of the tree work has been done in the last few weeks, so many invoices remain to be submitted.

RESOLVED. To approve the report.

7. MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Warden pointed out that the ten year Management Plan, drawn up in 2005, was now expiring. Although he is still following the recommendations laid out in the plan, the future direction of the Commons should be considered.

The Freehold Tenants advised the meeting that they are working on a plan to serve as a starting point in future Conservators' discussions and hope to have this ready to

present later in the year. They do not believe that any outside input will be required this time.

The Warden agreed that a full management plan, drawn up by an outside body such as Kent Wildlife Trust – who prepared both the previous plans – is not required, but thought that some external input on ecological issues might be useful. It was suggested that Kent High Weald Project might be able to give an overview as they have been closely involved in the Common in recent years.

8. CIVIC SOCIETY MEETING

The Clerk advised that he had not attended the recent Civic Society meeting to consider the future ownership of the Commons as he felt, as an officer, that he should remain neutral.

The Chairman asked a Conservator from each of the three Conservator bodies, each of whom had been on the panel, to outline the meeting.

Ian Marshall informed the meeting that the Freehold Tenants have spent £132,000 over the last six years on projects to improve the Commons, but their ability to continue funding improvements was being impaired by the dramatic fall in their share of the income from Targetfollow. They feel that the Commons should be owned by a charitable body, not a commercial one, which would ensure all the income arising from the Commons was re-invested in them.

Cllr Scholes advised that the Commons are seen as vitally important to the town, and people are therefore very concerned about its future. He thought it had been an exceptionally difficult meeting for Targetfollow as the mood of the attendees was overwhelmingly in favour of taking the Commons out of commercial hands.

Corin Thoday, for Targetfollow, expressed gratitude that he had been given the opportunity to explain how the Commons' ownership and management works, and had made the point that their intention is certainly not to pillage or to go against the ethos of the Commons. He offered to allow the Conservators to audit the car park accounts to assure themselves that the Freehold Tenants are receiving all the income to which they are entitled.

John Barber referred to an earlier meeting with the head of Targetfollow, and reported that the company has given an undertaking not to sell off small portions of the Commons. He asked if the attitude of Targetfollow has changed now they have seen the level of community engagement, and whether they will now do more to invest in the Commons.

Corin Thoday conceded that Targetfollow could do more, and undertook to engage more on the issues.

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

The Hospice is to hold the afternoon activities as a separate event elsewhere this year. The Common will therefore be used only for the start and finish of the run.

RESOLVED. To allow the run to take place on the same terms and conditions as in previous years.

10. **SIGNS ON VERGES**

RESOLVED. To allow notices to be placed along the verge of the A264 for the week preceding Langton Fete, and the week preceding Rusthall Fete. Also to allow a notice to be placed on the Common by Brighton Lake advertising No1 Fun Day.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Accommodation

The Clerk reported that the Borough Council is looking into the possibility of selling Calverley Terrace, but is committed to providing alternative accommodation for the Conservators' office in this event.

b) Duckingham Palace, Brighton Lake

Following a report in the Courier, the Warden confirmed that the house needs repairing or replacing, but there is no current plan or funding.

12. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

Swan Garage – change of use from garage to workshop, complete renovation and new signage. No comment

12-16 London Road – change of use from car showroom to furniture showroom and new signage. No comment.

Beacon Hotel – new vestibule. No comment on plans but pointed out that the parking area at north side is Common.

13. **SALARIES**

RESOLVED – to increase the salaries of the Warden and Support Officer by 1.5%, with effect from 1 April 2015.

The next meeting will be held at 2.00 on **25 June 2015.**