

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 23 March 2017 at 1.30pm

- PRESENT: Ewen Cameron (Outgoing Chairman)
Ian Marshall (Incoming Chairman)
Paul Burnett
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Cllr Thelma Huggett
Stephen Lacey
Cllr James Scholes
Clare Sinha
Corin Thoday
Cllr Chris Woodward
- APOLOGIES: George Craig
Rodney Stone (Clerk)
- ATTENDING: 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. 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 2018.

Ian Marshall in the Chair

The Chairman thanked Ewen Cameron for all his work as Chairman, which had been most appreciated.

He also welcomed Clive Evans to his first meeting in the role of Chairman of the Friends.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2016 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. MATTERS ARISING

a) Linden Park Cricket Club

The Warden confirmed that the signs requesting dog walkers to refrain from congregating in the same part of the outfield each day have been erected on the surrounding railings.

b) McMillan Williams

The Warden confirmed that the work to rebuild the bank has not yet been started and he does not have a start date.

c) Stranges Avenue

The Warden reported that he has been unable to pin the developer down to a start date for the work although they are still keen to have it done, so he hopes to organise the work himself and invoice the developer. It is now too late to begin tree work, so it will need to wait until the autumn.

d) Roadside drainage

The Warden reported that KCC seem to have cleaned all the gullies to some extent, but no work has been done to connect them to the soakaways on the Common. He will speak to them again to see if this can be done. The drainage system on that part of the Common is now clean and clear.

4. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that he had completed more work than usual in this quarter because of the extra project work generously funded by the Freehold Tenants and Friends. He has completed all the tree and hedge work in time for nesting, including most of the work resulting from the first of the annual tree surveys which this year covered Major Yorks Road, Bishops Down and Fir Tree Road.

He is now able to turn his attention to the other work, of which the most urgent is the height restriction barrier at the entrance to Fir Tree car park. The creation of the bund, which will run from the new clearance at Castle Road through to Edgcumbe Rocks to prevent vehicular access, will also be a priority.

In addition he plans to put in the two set of steps, one at Fir Tree Pond and one below the Tarry Path on Rusthall Common, shortly.

A great deal of clearance work has been carried out at Happy Valley this winter, some by a new contractor called The Living Forest, which did an impressive amount of clearance in a short time with their specialised machinery.

5. FINANCIAL STATEMENT

RESOLVED – that the statement be approved.

6. **RUSTHALL PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE**

Jennifer Blackburn has been appointed by Rusthall Parish Council to be their official representative to the Conservators.

7. **PAYROLL ADMINISTRATION**

The Treasurer informed the meeting that, due to a change to their payroll system, TWBC are to introduce a charge of £15 per employee per month to include all aspects of payroll administration.

RESOLVED. To continue to use the council payroll facilities and pay the charge.

8. **RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY**

RESOLVED. To adopt the draft Risk Management Policy.

9. **RISK REVIEW**

Amendments to the risk register suggested by the Head of Internal Audit were sent by email prior to the meeting. As it is very detailed, the Treasurer suggested that the suggested amendments should be examined by the committee immediately after the Conservators' meeting.

It was agreed that assurances should be sought from the Council that they will continue to provide office space in the future. It was also pointed out that the reputation of the Conservators depends, to some extent, on the Manor not making decisions that run counter to the those of the Conservators.

RESOLVED. The committee to complete the amendments to the risk register with a view to it being adopted at the next meeting.

10. **MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The focus has been on consultation with Kent High Weald Project, the Council, the Friends and the public via the website. The Chairman pointed out that it will evolve once it is put into practice and the requirements become clear.

The Freehold Tenants were congratulated on the quality of the Plan.

RESOLVED. To adopt the Management Plan.

11. **LICENCES FOR ACTIVITIES ON THE COMMON**

The Chairman suggested this item be held over to the next meeting in the absence of the Clerk.

Targetfollow expressed their concern that the issue was not being dealt with, as they believe that users of the Commons could claim rights to occupy if the Conservators'

acceptance of donations could be construed as granting rights; they therefore want to introduce licences immediately to formalise the rights of those running the classes.

The Treasurer advised that any payments made by fitness classes to the Conservators are voluntary donations. No charges have been made.

The Warden expressed concern that these donations are used to repair the damage and wear and tear caused by the classes. If licences are granted by Targetfollow, donations will no longer be made to the Conservators and the Warden will no longer be able to offset this damage.

The Freehold Tenants made it clear that Targetfollow are not entitled to claim that the one third share paid to the Freehold Tenants constitutes payment to the Conservators. Any funds received by the Freehold Tenants are entirely in their own gift, and they will not fund maintenance on the Common.

Some Conservators showed concern that the Common is open to all for exercise and therefore it would therefore be inappropriate to start charging. Possibly there is no legal right to do so either. Concerns were also expressed over the difficulty of defining which activities can be licenced and identifying the fitness groups.

The view was also expressed that the proliferation of such classes was causing problems in all open spaces.

RESOLVED. To hold the issue over until the next meeting when the Clerk will be available to give his advice.

12. PHONE MAST APPLICATION

The application for a phone mast outside the Spa Hotel has been refused planning permission, which would imply that mobile phone companies do not have a statutory right to place phone masts where they wish.

13. INFORMATION PANELS

The Chairman of the Friends told the meeting that sponsorship for new information panels has been secured, funding raised, and the panel design and wording nearly finalised. They will be put in ten locations, mostly replacing the old ones which are in very poor condition. The panels will be A0 size with easy to clean surfaces on wooden frames.

RESOLVED. To agree to let the Friends install the panels once the Conservators have seen the design.

The Chairman congratulated the Friends on what had been a challenging project pursued with determination, and the end results would be impressive.

The office to check that planning permission is not required.

14. **RUSTHALL AND LANGTON GREEN EVENTS**

RESOLVED. To allow Rusthall Bonfire to be held on 28 October 2017, subject to the usual conditions and agreement of the details by the Warden. Also to allow signs advertising the bonfire, as well as Rusthall Fete and Langton Green Fete, to be put on the verge for one week before each event.

15. **HOSPICE 10K RUN**

RESOLVED. To allow the event to take place, subject to the usual conditions, and the agreement of the Warden to the details.

16. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Romanoff Lodge

The owner wants to cut back or remove some large trees growing on the Common which are close to his house but largely invisible to users of the Common. The Warden is happy for some trees at the back to be removed entirely and for some trees to the side to be cut back. The owner has asked for a contribution of £500 from the Conservators towards the cost of the work.

RESOLVED. To allow the work to take place subject to the Warden agreeing the details, but not to contribute to the cost.

b) Drones

The Chairman raised the increasing problem of people flying drones on the Common. Many of these people do not appear to be skilled or fully in control of the potentially dangerous machines. There are others who are both skilled and insured, but cause a great deal of noise nuisance. He believes a policy to be necessary.

RESOLVED. The Clerk to look at usage protocols by other bodies with a view to creating a policy for discussion at the next meeting.

c) Litter

A local pressure group wants to have a stall on the Common to raise support for a deposit and return system on bottles and cans. The Warden to speak to the Council's Head of Environment to discuss the merits of such a policy and the appropriateness of setting up such a stall.

d) Showfields

Following the redevelopment of part of Showfields there is some s106 money available for gym or exercise equipment, but it has proved difficult to find a location. The local Councillors asked the other Conservators to consider whether this equipment could potentially be installed on the Common or whether this would lead to too many problems such as liability and maintenance. Views should be submitted to the office.

e) Pedestrian Crossings

KCC have told the Friends that they believe widening the road to allow for the installation of a pedestrian refuge on Langton Road would have to be authorised by the Secretary of State.

RESOLVED. The Clerk to write to KCC to emphasise the Conservators' support for the crossing and question whether permission from the Secretary of State is actually required.

17. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Grounds of Bredbury House – appeal against decision to refuse permission for a subterranean dwelling. No comment.

18. SALARY REVIEW

RESOLVED. To increase the employee salaries by 1% from 1 April 2017.

The next meeting will be held at **1.30 p.m. on Thursday 22 June 2017**

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 22 June 2017 at 1.30pm

- PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Chairman)
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
George Craig
Cllr Thelma Huggett
Stephen Lacey
Clare Sinha
Corin Thoday
- APOLOGIES: Cllr James Scholes
Cllr Chris Woodward
- 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)
Nigel Stapple
- OBSERVING: Cllr Joy Podbury
Alasdair Tod
David Thorpe

MINUTES

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2017 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. RUSTHALL ARCHAEOLOGY

Nigel Stapple from WKD Archaeology gave a talk to the Conservators about the current archaeological research in Rusthall.

Nigel Stapple and David Thorpe left the meeting at this point

3. MATTERS ARISING

a) McMillan Williams

The Warden reported that he has been given a start date of w/c 26 June 2017 for the work to rebuild the bank and build a retaining wall.

b) Stranges Avenue

The Clerk has written to Amberley Homes, the developer of the new flats on London Road, to say that the Conservators will complete the work promised but not delivered, and pass on the cost.

c) Drainage

The Warden confirmed that all the Commons drainage is working well and the roadside drains appear clear, although they have not been tested.

d) Information Panels

Planning permission for the new panels has been applied for. All panels are ready to install. It was confirmed that the Conservators had approved the panel design by email.

e) Showfields play equipment

Cllr Cobbold confirmed that the equipment had now been sited on Showfields.

f) Pedestrian Crossings

Clive Evans confirmed that both crossings have been approved and funded for installation before the end of the financial year 2017/18.

4. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that the preceding quarter is usually the quietest time of the year, but this year has been busier than usual finishing the winter projects. The clearances have been graded and seeded, and the grass has now germinated, the Himalayan Balsam has been treated and the height barrier at the entrance to Fir Tree car park has been installed.

Three projects are still to be carried out: two flights of steps, one to Fir Tree pond and one on the path adjacent to the Tarry Path; and an extension to the surfaced path linking the Marlpit ponds to Common View.

Currently the sight lines are being cut and then the annual path clearance will take place. As the rough grass cutting begins, the Warden reported that he is going to start experimenting with rotational cuts as recommended in the new management plan.

The wildflowers on London Road are still not very successful, mostly because they are restricted to the areas immediately under the trees. He is planning to have a survey done this year and then the Conservators can make a decision on their future at the September meeting. He believes it to be a worthwhile project, but possibly not being carried out in the best place.

5. **RISK REGISTER**

RESOLVED. To adopt the final version of the Risk Register, as recommended by the Committee.

6. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT no 5 2016/17**

RESOLVED. That the statement be approved.

7. **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

The Treasurer explained that this was the first page of the annual return. This year all boxes were ticked as the outstanding issue last year had been resolved.

RESOLVED. To confirm all statements in Section 1.

8. **UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS AND BALANCE SHEET 2016/17**

The Treasurer reported that the internal audit had found the design and performance of controls for the ten relevant objectives to be sound.

RESOLVED. To approve the accounts.

9. **STATUTORY ANNUAL RETURN**

The accounts appear in the format required by the external auditors so that they can track changes in future years and spot any discrepancies.

RESOLVED. To approve the Annual Return.

10. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT no 1 2017/18**

RESOLVED. That the statement be approved.

11. LICENCES

The Clerk informed the meeting that he had looked carefully at the problems that might arise if Targetfollow require fitness classes to have a licence. The problems are:

- a) The Conservators have two statutory duties, one of which is to ensure inhabitants have free access.
- b) Any issuing of licences should be a management issue not an ownership one.
- c) How to divide the income from the licence payers.
- d) Enforcement – the Warden cannot be expected to police it.

Targetfollow expressed their concern that classes could claim prescriptive rights over their use of the Common if allowed to continue on the current basis. Their belief is that the people running the classes are charging the public for the service so they are not exercising their right to free use of the Commons.

They also pointed out that licences give more control because they can be cancelled if the activities are unacceptable, whereas there is currently no mechanism for discontinuing classes.

Some Conservators felt that whether or not the instructors were running a business, the members still had the right to be there freely.

Some disquiet was expressed about damage to the Conservators' reputation, and it was agreed that they should be distanced from it. If licences are issued by the landowner, they should not refer to the Conservators at all.

In reply to Conservators' concern that they would no longer receive donations for the upkeep of the Commons and repair of wear and tear from the classes, Targetfollow offered to make up the lost donations.

The other major concern was that Targetfollow may start to issue licences for activities other than fitness classes. Targetfollow assured the meeting that no other activities would be licenced without the explicit permission of the Conservators.

RESOLVED. To allow Targetfollow to issue licences to fitness classes on the Common providing:

- a) Targetfollow makes up for the shortfall in donations to the Conservators;**
- b) no licences are granted except to fitness classes unless explicit permission by the full Conservators body is given;**
- c) the licence is between Targetfollow and the fitness class and the Conservators have no part.**

12. DRONE PROTOCOL

The Clerk reported that he had researched the subject and, although there are no byelaws to prevent the flying of drones, it would not be legal on most parts of the Common. A warning from the Warden that they are breaking the law should be sufficient in most cases. Given that the regulations are currently changing, he does not feel that a protocol is necessary at the moment.

RESOLVED. Clerk to write to the relevant government department to enquire about changing the bye-laws.

13. DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME

A local group is collecting signatures for a petition to introduce a deposit scheme on bottles and cans to encourage people to return them, which should reduce litter. Sufficient signatures will entail a parliamentary discussion.

RESOLVED. To allow a stall or table to be erected on the Common so that the organisers can collect petition signatures.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Dandara land swap

A request was made to use some of the money paid by Dandara to clear up the area between the Common and the new piece of land. The Warden stated that it was in the plan and will be done shortly.

b) Rusthall Arts Festival

RESOLVED. To give permission for the Rusthall Community Arts Festival 2017 to use the Quirky Tree area and the Toad Rock area for some of the weekend activities on condition that the Warden is satisfied with the arrangements.

c) Management Plan

The Management Plan is now starting to be implemented, and the Warden will include a regular update with his quarterly report. The Freehold Tenants will fund a wall chart to assist planning. The first element to look at is the tender document for the new grasscutting and litter contracts.

15. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Pantiles Car Park – Lawful Development Certificate. Wrote to point out that the area on the plan was too large, the car park has been used as a fairground within the last ten years and to query whether granting the certificate would be contrary to the Borough Council's legal duty towards the Commons. Certificate granted.

22 Rusthall Road – rebuild chimney. Wrote to point out that no materials should be stored on Common.

The Chairman stated his disappointment that Targetfollow had not mentioned the application for the Pantiles Car Park at the previous meeting, even though the application had already been submitted. Targetfollow accepted that they should have informed the Conservators.

16. MEETING TIMES

The Chairman stated that the earlier start time was extremely difficult for him, and for several other Conservators, to manage. He therefore proposed changing it back to 2.00.

Targetfollow opposed this as they have a long journey back to Norwich and the half hour can be critical in traffic build up.

RESOLVED. Meetings to revert to 2.00 start.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

**Minutes of a meeting held in the Council Chamber on Thursday 21 September 2017 at
2.00pm**

PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Chairman)
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Cllr Thelma Huggett
Stephen Lacey
Cllr James Scholes
Clare Sinha
Cllr Chris Woodward

APOLOGIES: George Craig
Corin Thoday

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)

OBSERVING: Cllr Joy Podbury
Alastair Tod

MINUTES

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2017 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING

a) McMillan Williams

It was noted that the work was not completed and the Warden was asked to speak to them again.

b) Strange's Avenue

The developer has not completed the agreed work. The Warden was asked to write to him again.

c) Drainage

The office has been in touch with KCC about the soakaways and they are sending an engineer to meet the Warden on site.

d) Information Panels

Targetfollow reported that planning permission has been granted but it appears that it will last for only five years. Clive Evans confirmed that the panels will be installed as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked Paul Burnett for all his hard work in obtaining planning permission.

e) Pedestrian Crossings

KCC expects to do the work in Major Yorks Road in February 2018 but this is not confirmed. No date has been given for Langton Road. However, KCC have confirmed in an email to the Chairman of the Friends that the work will be done before the end of this financial year.

f) Risk register

The officers are working to reduce the liability of the items currently marked as high risk. The Clerk confirmed that he has spoken to the Chief Executive who has indicated that the Borough Council are aware of, and considering solutions to, the potential risks.

g) External Audit

The Treasurer informed the meeting that the external auditors have passed the accounts with no problems arising.

h) Licences for Fitness Classes

Targetfollow confirmed that licences have been sent to four classes. BMF have indicated their willingness to pay and Uberfit have moved their classes elsewhere.

i) Bye-laws

The Clerk confirmed that he has written to the Secretary of State to request advice on reframing the bye-laws with a particular view to including the use of drones.

j) Land Swap

The Warden confirmed that more of the hedge would be removed and the area has received its first cut of grass but some tidying remains to be done.

3. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED – That the meetings of the Commons Conservators be held at 2.00 p.m. on the following dates:

22 March 2018
21 June 2018
20 September 2018
6 December 2018

4. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Commons suffered another incursion from travellers, this time on Rusthall cricket pitch, shortly after the last meeting, but they were swiftly moved on by the police. They arrived on a Friday evening, left on the Saturday morning, and the cricket club did the clean-up in time to hold their match on the Saturday afternoon. Relatively little damage was caused.

The new flight of steps on Rusthall Common and the hard surface to the remainder of the path from the Marlpit Pond to Common View have both been completed thanks to the funding from the Freehold Tenants.

The Warden is now starting to follow the new management plan: the grasscutting regime in glades and clearances has been amended to create different stages of growth; KHWP are sending their volunteers to assist with keeping the heather areas clear; some pond clearance will be carried out at Fir Tree Pond; and the volunteers will start to clear scrub growing on Wellington Rocks.

The budget may need some reorganising to take the new priorities into account, and the Warden warned that protection of roadside edges is increasingly important and expensive.

5. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

RESOLVED – that the statement be approved.

6. **GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT**

The draft contract is similar to the existing contract and will run for three years with an option to renew for a further two years. The specifications have changed slightly to increase path widths to two metres on either side to prevent nettles and other long growth from falling over the paths. In addition, the Toad Rock and Apsley Street

areas and two further paths have been added. The contract covers only the regular cuts to the short grass areas.

The Freehold Tenants wish to see a flail contract for the long grass introduced.

RESOLVED. To approve the tender document for distribution to applicants.

7. LITTER CONTRACT

The draft litter contract is also similar to the existing contract, and will also run for three years with an option to renew for two years. The draft shows the number of days reduced, but talks with the current contractor have confirmed that seven day working in the summer is essential to keep the litter under control.

The Chairman confirmed that the current contractor is not registered for VAT and has an agreement with Bridgland which leads to lower disposal costs.

RESOLVED. To approve the tender document for distribution to applicants.

8. WILDFLOWER AREAS

The Warden briefly outlined the history. An experiment was begun in 2012 to leave the areas of grass between Inner London Road and London Road as wildflower areas. It quickly became apparent that past disturbances had left the soil on most of it too fertile for wildflowers, but the lower portion, south of Church Road, was promising. After some initial opposition from the residents, the experiment has continued, albeit confined to circles beneath the trees with paths cut through.

Several sowings of yellow rattle have weakened the grass, and this year has been extremely good for diversity, if not for colour. The Council Landscape Officer is keen that it should continue.

AGREED. To allow the experiment to continue.

The Warden confirmed that he has looked at extending the experiment to other areas. The triangles by Vale Road may be suitable when poppies are no longer planted there. He will sow more poppy seed to try to make a better showing there in the final commemorative year, 2018. He is also encouraging the spread of the wildflowers on the new area of Common by removing mowings to reduce fertility.

9. TELECOMS BOX IN RUSTHALL ROAD

Targetfollow have received a request to install a new telecoms box on Rusthall Road. Although Openreach are usually flexible over the exact location they have a statutory right to install them. The Warden requested that the box be placed well back on the verge to be clear of large machines. The Warden to liaise with Targetfollow to establish how far back it needs to be.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Flamingos

Around 400 plastic flamingos on stakes were placed overnight on the Common beside the Forum and left there for three days to promote a festival at Edenbridge. The officers were not aware of it and no application for permission was made.

AGREED. Not to allow promotion of this event on the Common in future. If a promotion is installed it will be removed, and the Conservators will charge for its removal and storage.

b) Rusthall Arts

The Warden gave them permission to place posters on the verge for the weekend of their festival.

c) Dandara

The officers have obtained a s106 contribution in excess of £9,000 from the developers of Union Square. It should be payable in 2019.

d) Management Plan

The Chairman read a draft letter to Hadlow College to see if they would be interested in using the Commons as part of their coursework, assisting the volunteers and helping to develop the management plan. The meeting approved the letter.

e) Apsley Street

A householder in Apsley Street has requested permission to place a skip on the grass verge for no more than two weeks to assist with his extension. The Warden expressed doubt that this could be done without harming the grass.

AGREED. To allow this on condition that the skip is placed on timbers for no more than one week.

f) Town Centre Management

As part of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Together promotion, Targetfollow has been asked if they can incorporate the Common in some way. They suggested a sculpture trail or something similar. Targetfollow to request a proper proposal for the next meeting, and for them to discuss it with the Warden first.

g) Christmas lunch

Targetfollow offered to host a lunch for the Conservators before the December meeting.

AGREED. To gratefully accept Targetfollow's offer.

11. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

44 Common View – side porch. No comment but issued warning about protecting grass verge.

Information panels on Common – wrote to support application. Approved.

17 Eridge Road – rebuild partly demolished wall. Wrote to point out that land outside the verge is Common.

The next meeting will be held at **2.00 p.m. on 7 December 2017.**

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**