

Index

- 1) Summary
- 2) Best practice principles for managing rocks
 - 2.1 recording the condition of rocks
 - 2.2 managing growth on rocks
 - 2.3 managing growth around rocks
- 3) The locations and names of the rocks
- 4) Categorisation of rocks

1) Summary

This rocks management plan has been prepared to help the Conservators and the Warden to manage the condition of the rocks on the commons on an ongoing basis. It summarises advice on how best to do this and is intended to be of practical assistance.

Status of document on 12 September 2016:

Feedback to be received from freeholders and feedback and endorsement to be received from the warden and experts

When this has been issued formally we recognise it is a matter of judgement and practicality for the Conservators and the Warden as to how to manage grass on the rocks.

2) Best practice principles for managing rocks

The following lays out the best practice to keep the rocks in good condition and visible enough to be able to be enjoyed. This includes clearance and maintenance considerations and what to leave (e.g. mature significant trees). This is based on recommended advice, suggestions on how to treat rocks from the previous management plan (1992?) and [has been confirmed by independent experts as appropriate].

In order to keep the perpetual task of managing plants to a manageable level, it is important to prevent regrowth as much as possible. Therefore treatment to prevent regrowth should be considered at the same time as plants are cut back.

2.1 Recording the condition of rocks over time

It is recommended to photograph the significant rock formations every ~3-5 years to monitor their status and more importantly any deterioration in their condition. Photographs of all significant rocks have been made over the summer of 2016, however it is suggested to photo them in the winter when the undergrowth is naturally less and then repeat this process.

[These photos will be marked up to show matters of interest / actions to be taken and shared with the freeholders' committee]

Volunteers could be responsible for these photos and sharing them with the Warden and freeholders and identifying any material changes to the condition of the rocks.

2.2 Managing growth on rocks

2.2.1 Grass

Grass growing in cracks in between rocks should be removed.

Grass growing on the surface of rocks may be acceptable. This should be considered on a case by case basis.

Examples of these 2 different scenarios are shown in appendix 1 and 2

What to do:

Recommendations on how best to remove the grass include killing the grass through chemical treatment and pulling out the dead grass at a later date. This reduces the chance of damage to the surrounding rocks.

Abbi Bamping, Natural England suggests:

“to apply glyphosate in the active growing season, the grass will wither back to the roots and will then be easily removed. The important thing is to keep an eye on it taking hold again then you may be able to hand weed it out and not have to use a herbicide.”

Frequency:

For prominent and significant rocks, it is suggested to review and do this on a 2-3 year cycle. For less significant rocks, it is suggested to do this on a 3-5 year cycle.

Who:

The Warden or his professional assistants only should use herbicides, however volunteers could remove dead grass from the initial treatment and hand weed subsequently.

[To consider: the need to cordon off areas during / post treatment, the optimum time of year to do this]

2.1.2 Shrubs and undergrowth (e.g. brambles, gorse)

Such plants which are growing out of or over rocks should be removed.

What to do:

Best practice includes cutting back or chemically spraying the plants.
Plants could be sprayed in the Spring to prevent annual growth.

Frequency:

For prominent and significant rocks, it is suggested to review and do this on a 2-3 year cycle. For less significant rocks, it is suggested to do this on a 3-5 year cycle.

Who:

The Warden or his professional assistants only should use herbicides.
Volunteers could cut back undergrowth from Autumn-Spring as part of the workparties.

Similar considerations apply with chemical treatment as for grasses, above.

2.1.3 Trees

Small trees should be removed. More mature or significant trees growing out of rocks should remain as features of the rocks. Examples of mature trees are in appendix 3

What to do:

Cutting them close to the ground and treating the stumps with eg asulox, in a similar fashion to the treatment of shrubs. Chemical treatment should follow very shortly after initial cutting to avoid regrowth.

Frequency:

For prominent and significant rocks, it is suggested to review and do this on a 2-3 year cycle. For less significant rocks, it is suggested to do this on a 3-5 year cycle.

Who:

Volunteers could cut back small trees so long as is safe to do so and under supervision as part of the workparties. The Warden or his professional assistants only should use herbicides.

2.3 Managing growth around rocks

In order to keep the views around some rock formations and to enhance the views of rocks, it is recommended to create sight lines by cutting back undergrowth, low hanging branches and trees where appropriate.

The areas around Toad Rock, Bishop's Head, the Loaf, Ship and Little Toad are good examples where their view and views around them are being obscured. The rocks north of Gibraltar cottage which are visible from the path between Gibraltar Cottage and St Helena is also a good example of rocks which are becoming obscured. The example of Toad Rock and Bishop's Head is in appendix 4.

Frequency:

It is suggested to review and do this on a ~5 year cycle. For less significant rocks, it is suggested to review this on a 7-10 year basis.

3) The locations and names of the rocks

Existing maps sufficiently identify where the rocks are on the commons. It is not suggested to update these maps.

Copies of maps are in appendices 5 & 6 (thanks to the Friends of the Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons).

4) Categorisation of rocks

This section of the report attempts to group the rocks into sensible areas and put a prominence, status and prioritisation against each area. This should enable work, including volunteer work, to be planned for each area.

Categorisation is naturally subjective so this is suggestive rather than definitive.

Definitions:

Prominence – a measure of how important the rocks are:

High	known landmarks of the commons
Medium	significant footfall or significant rock formations
Low	all other rocks

Status – a measure of how overgrown they are with grass / brambles / scrubs / trees etc. - simplified to a coding of:

Red	work required to bring to good condition – i.e. visibility being obscured
Green	regular maintenance required

Prioritisation:

Each area has been given a prioritisation measure - from 1 (most urgent) to 5 (least important). This prioritisation is a function of both prominence of site and its status.

It is intended to label on existing maps the specific areas which have been broken down below, to assist people who are unfamiliar with the names of the rocks to understand precisely where these are [not completed yet].

September 2016

4) Categorisation of rocks (cont.)

Rock area	More specific areas	prominence	Status	Status description	Prioritisation
Toad Rock and surrounds	Toad rock	High	Red	Trees and bushes growing inside its fence. View from the area above the rock becoming limited.	1
	Bishop's Rock, Dog's Head, Fox's Hole and surrounds	High	Red	Significant gorse on east side of Bishop's Rock will hide the rock in 2 years. View of rock from Upper St becoming limited.	1
	Table, Water rock, Elephant and surrounds	High	Red	Some trees and shrubs growing in and around it. Views from top towards Salomons becoming very limited due to growth of holly, birch and gorse. Significant yew should remain.	1
	Loaf, Ship, Little Toad	Medium	Red	View of Little Toad very limited through growth of birch and shrubs. Loaf has significant sycamore growing out of its base.	2
	Between Apsley St and Rusthall Road	Low	Red (access difficult)	Long length of rocks to east of Rusthall Road increasingly hidden by growth on rock face and under it. Difficult to access. Rocks north of Apsley St East of Rusthall Grange greater priority and easier to access than others. Being lost to undergrowth.	4
	Parson's nose and surrounds near Rusthall Park	Medium	Green	Rock opposite Parson's Nose has birch, brambles and gorse growth.	3

4) Categorisation of rocks (cont.)

Rock area	More specific areas	prominence	Status (RAG)	Status description	Prioritisation
Bulls Hollow	The quarry	High	Green	Generally in good condition. Annual maintenance to keep views open.	1
	The Lion and path from Rusthall Road to Harmony St	Medium	Green	Rocks to northwest of path by Harmony St have gorse etc growth, beginning to obscure its view. Rocks to west of path becoming overgrown and grass seeping over them. Lion has bramble growth beginning to cover it.	3
	The hollow (between the Parson's nose, the Lion and the quarry)	Medium	Red by badger's sett, green otherwise	Southern part by the old badger's sett not been cut back so rocks still hidden by predominantly holly. Could open up. Parson's nose and rocks to the west good condition with some significant trees growing in rocks – suggest to keep them.	2
	The path from Rusthall Road to the quarry	Medium	Red	Path slippery - trees to south east to be cleared to enable path to be safe.	3

September 2016

4) Categorisation of rocks (cont.)

Rock area	More specific areas	prominence	Status (RAG)	Status description	Prioritisation
Happy Valley	West of the 101 steps	High	Green	Generally good condition. Brambles and bracken beginning to infringe on the 'cave rocks' and on ground rocks on path from the bottom of the valley up to the Beacon. Rock platform surrounded by dead trees – good condition – some growth around base of trees.	1
	Just east of the 101 steps	Medium	Green	Rock nearest the 101 steps in good condition. Next ones east are hidden – suggest leave for now.	2
	Happy Valley rocks north west of the Midway	Medium	Red	The significant rocks by the lower path (the ones with supporting stonework – Cunliffe memorial?) have significant rhododendron and other growth on top – need attention. Rocks further east are well overgrown. Friends may pay for clearance work here.	3
	Paths in South East corner of Happy Valley	Low	Green	Top of Happy Valley rocks have some grass growth which needs attention.	

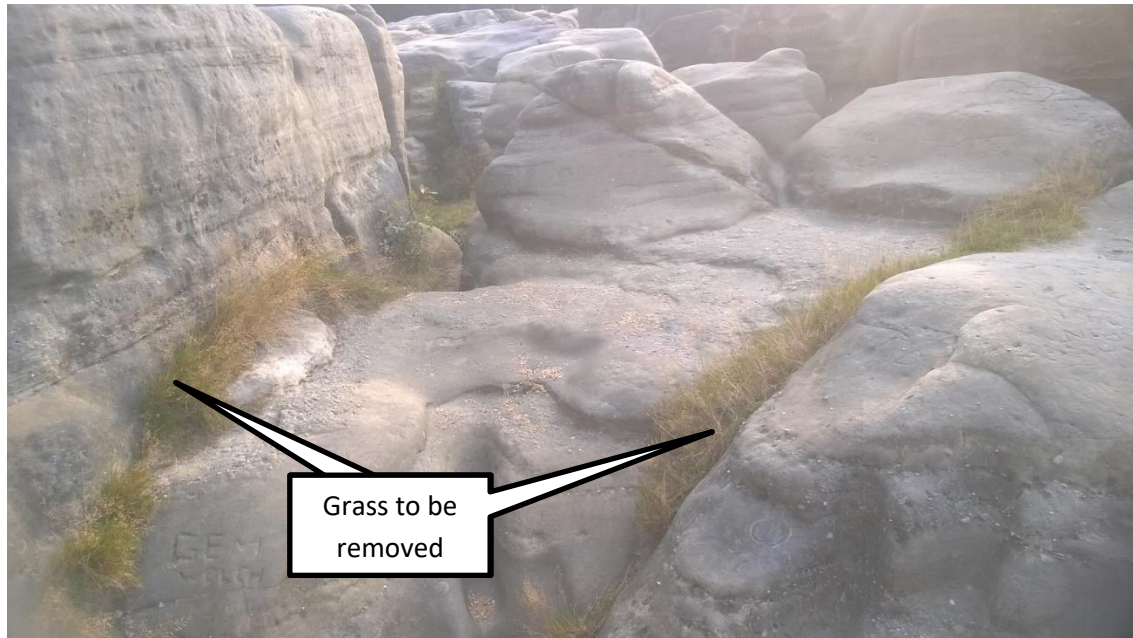
4) Categorisation of rocks (cont.)

Rock area	More specific areas	prominence	Status (RAG)	Status description	Prioritisation
Tunbridge Wells common	Wellington Rocks	High	Red	Grass in cracks, gorse and young trees on rock need removal. Infringement from the north.	1
	Mount Edgecombe	High	Green	Flat rocks to West exposed and in good condition. Base of Mount Edgecombe rocks needs annual flail but in good condition otherwise. Ground rocks in triangle by Church Rd / Mount Ephraim need regular clearance.	2
	By the bat cave north of Fir Tree car park	Low	Red	Rocks becoming overgrown to left and right of batcave. Needs clearance.	3
	North of Gibraltar cottage (visible from path between Gibraltar Cottage and St Helena)	Medium	Red	View of rocks becoming overgrown from southern path. Could be cut and treated in the spring.	2

A more comprehensive photographic list of all rocks exists and will be marked up with actions and shared with freeholders and the Warden.

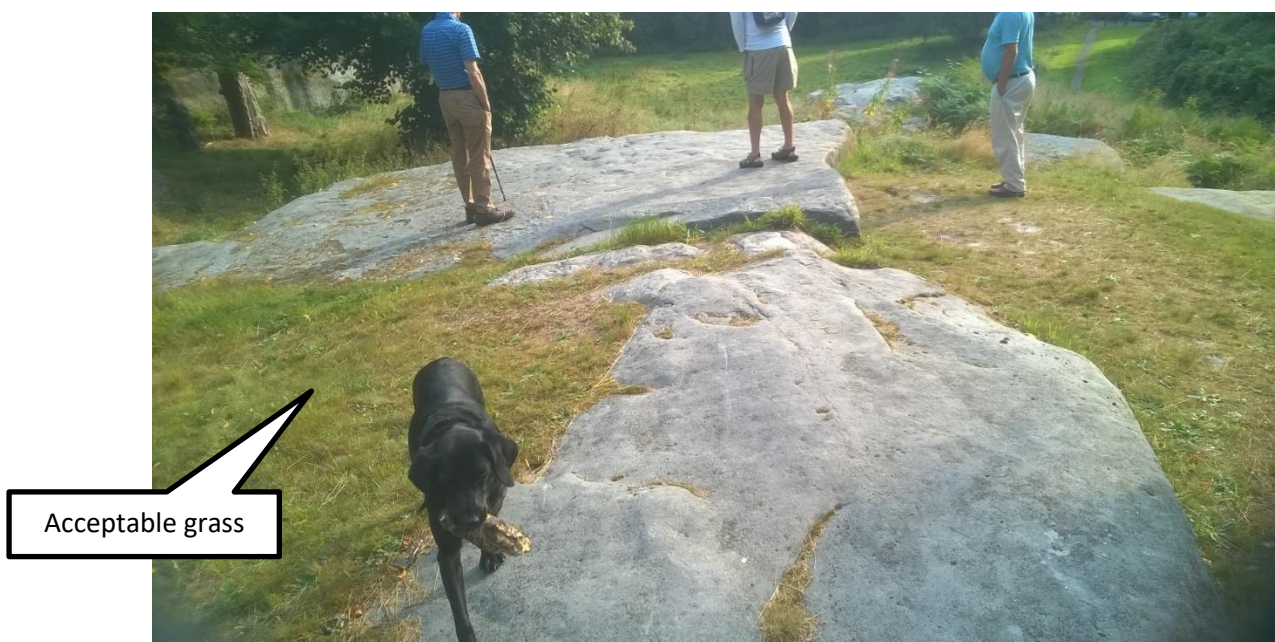
Appendix 1

The below is an example of grass growing in cracks between rocks at Wellington Rocks. The plan is this type of grass would be removed.



Appendix 2

The below is an example of grass growing over rocks near the Mount Edgecombe Hotel. This type of growth is likely to be acceptable.



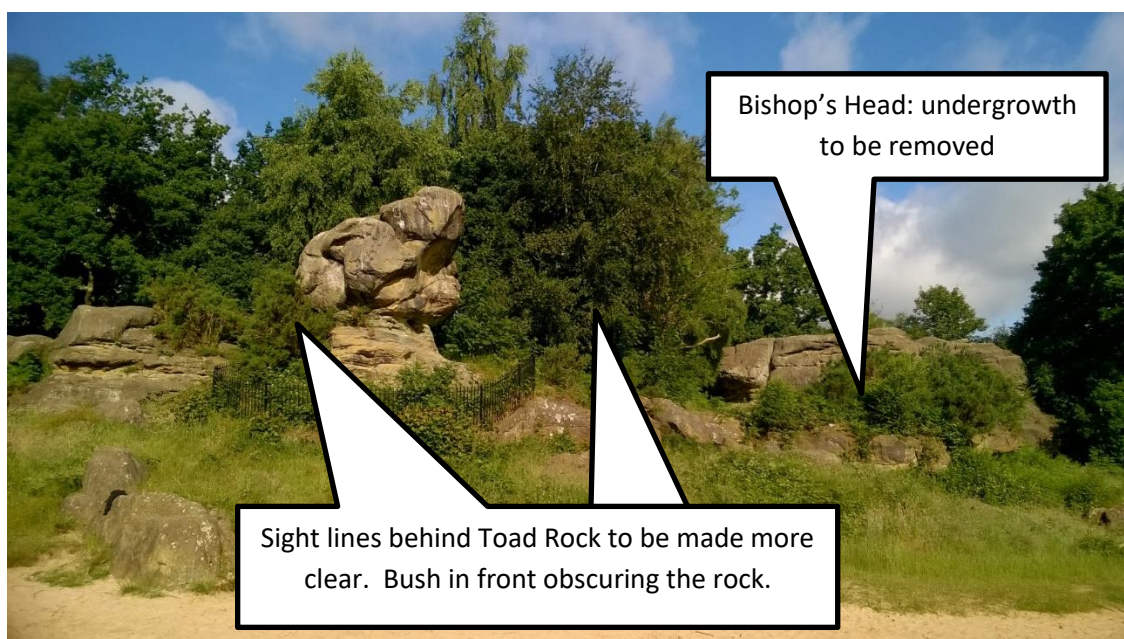
Appendix 3

Bulls Hollow – this shows mature trees adding to the features of the rocks. It also shows shrub growth on the rocks which should be managed at a level (if access can be gained).



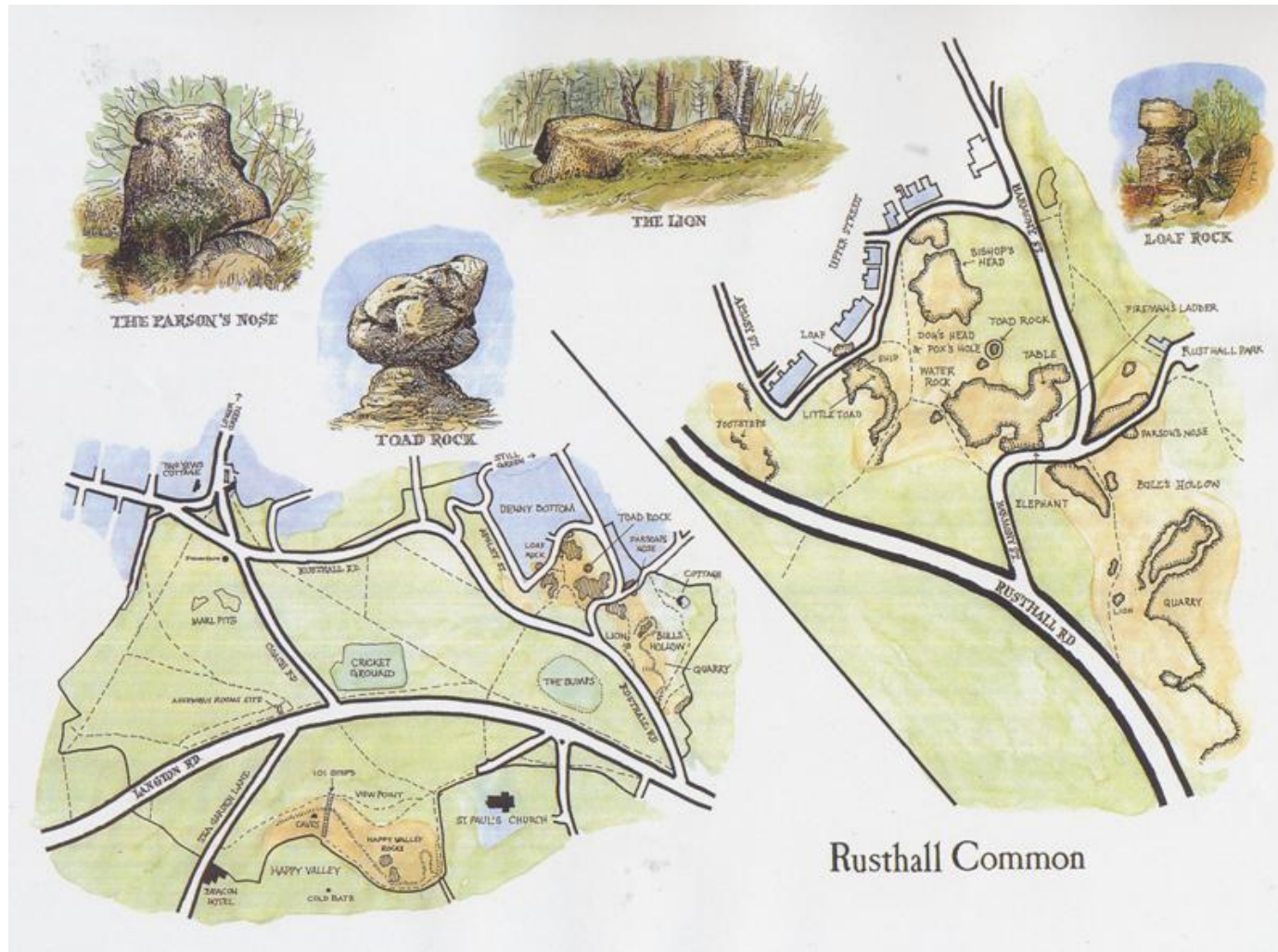
Appendix 4

Toad rock: Sight lines to the rock and behind the rock to be made clear. This also shows growth of trees etc beginning to obscure the surrounding rocks.



September 2016

Appendices 5 & 6 – maps of the Rusthall Common and Tunbridge Wells Common which name most of the rocks:



Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons
Rocks Management Plan
John Barber & Richard Preston

September 2016

