

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held via video conference on Thursday 25th March 2021 at 2pm

PRESENT:

John Barber
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron
Stephen Lacey
Ian Marshall (Outgoing Chairman)
Antony Moore
Cllr Joy Podbury
Clare Sinha
Cllr Chris Woodward (Incoming Chairman)

APOLOGIES/UNABLE TO ATTEND:

Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Cllr James Scholes
Corin Thoday

ATTENDING:

Steve Budden (Warden)
Alan Leale-Green (Treasurer)
Gemma Stapeley (Clerk)
Liz Ellicott (Rusthall Parish Council)
Clive Evans (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common)

MINUTES

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Mr Alan Leale-Green, the newly appointed Treasurer and welcomed back Clare Sinha as Conservator for the Freehold Tenants.

1. DECLARATION OF BUSINESS INTEREST

The Treasurer declared that he was a social member of Linden Park Cricket Club, reference to agenda item 14 vii. There were no other business declarations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Corin Thoday.

3. 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.

Conservators agreed that Cllr Chris Woodward, representative of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillors, be appointed as Chairman until the quarterly meeting of the Conservators in March 2022.

Cllr Chris Woodward continued as Chairman.

The Chairman conveyed his grateful thanks to Ian Marshall for his year in office, it was noted as being a year filled with challenges for the Commons Conservators.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2020 were considered and approved. A copy to be signed by the Chairman and returned to the Clerk.

5. MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The minutes of the Committee meetings held on 11th January 2021, 8th February 2021 and 8th March 2021 were considered and approved and would also be signed by the Chairman. The work of the Committee was acknowledged and appreciated by all Conservators.

6. MATTERS ARISING

Storm drainage

In January 2021, Alex Brauning of Kent County Council's Drainage Planned Works team conducted a site visit with the Warden to review and adjust the position of one of the planned attenuation tanks. The outline design for the scheme has now been completed on that basis, by their consultants. The next step is for Alex's team to work the outline design into the detailed design which incorporates issue of the drawings, all components and pre-construction health and safety information. This will be progressed from April 2021 and include liaison meetings with the Warden and Clerk, representing the Conservators, to finalise the finer details and answer queries.

Director's report

The Clerk, Warden and outgoing Chairman met with William Benson on the 18th of December 2020 to discuss the headline issues affecting the Commons. During the meeting, it was agreed that a review of the precept mechanism could be discussed for the 2022/23 budget.

ACTION: The Clerk and Treasurer to approach Lee Colyer, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's (TWBC) Director of Finance, Policy and Development, on 1st September 2021 to start discussions regarding the possibility of reviewing the precept mechanism.

Proposed zebra crossing on London Road

The project has been completed.

Volunteer work parties

The Chairman acknowledged the significant support given to the Commons by all volunteers.

Membership

There have been two changes to membership since the last meeting. For the Freehold Tenants, Clare Sinha has replaced Chris McHugh.

ACTION: IM asked to thank Chris McHugh for his contribution to the Conservators since he joined in March 2019.

For the Borough Councillors, Cllr Joy Podbury will not be standing for re-election in May, this meeting will be her last as a Conservator. Cllr Podbury was thanked for her contribution. She noted that she would still be supporting the Commons as a Friend. TWBC Democratic Services have confirmed that they will nominate a replacement by the end of May, in time for the June Commons Conservators' meeting.

Warden's report

Due to Covid restrictions, the British Mountaineering Council's sandstone volunteers have been unable to clear scrub from the rocks at Bull's Hollow and Happy Valley, but they are still committed to this work.

Budget report

SL was thanked for his support in the period when there was not a Treasurer in post.

Review of Open Spaces policy

The Clerk and PB met on Tuesday 23rd March to discuss proposed revisions to the Open Spaces policy.

ACTION: The Clerk to present a draft version of the reworked Open Spaces policy to the Committee for approval.

Feedback on process and procedures

Officers will be briefed on any issues of relevance raised in the exempt sessions.

Planning Applications

The Clerk had been informed that the owners of 4 Onslow House have decided to sell their property, rather than extend.

The Chairman noted his frustrations with the Local Planning Authority, not giving enough attention to the concerns of the Conservators. The Chairman has asked TWBC's Head of Planning to discuss the matter further on his return from paternity leave.

ACTION: The Chairman to feedback to Conservators, progress made with the discussions.

Actions

All meeting actions were reviewed and closed.

7. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden noted that the past three months had continued to be another busy period on both Commons. Amongst other impacts, the paths have suffered considerable damage due to the number of users and wet weather. It is hoped that with the free draining soils of the Commons, recovery will be relatively quick, but this will be monitored.

Serious problems were reported with the sheer volume of waste and litter generated on the Commons, not helped by somewhat haphazard servicing. The Warden hoped that with the new waste contracts starting on 1st April and

with the easing of restrictions, reducing visitor numbers, we should be able to regain control of the problems. The volunteer group will soon be able to add their efforts to the clearances too.

The grass cutting contract has now been extended for a further year, with 8 contracted cuts and a fixed price for any additional cuts. Cutting is due to start in the next couple of weeks.

Lockdown restrictions have prevented a number of work projects on the Commons; we couldn't hold our volunteer scrub clearance and litter picking sessions, the British Mountaineering Council's sandstone volunteer group couldn't clear scrub at Happy Valley and Bull's Hollow, and the Community Payback group have not been able to operate as planned.

Having worked to a seriously restricted budget for the majority of the season, there has now been a small amount of the maintenance budget made available. Work totalling £12,000 has been authorised for tree work highlighted in the annual tree survey and clearance of the piles of brush left from storm damage works.

The Warden acknowledged the generosity of the Freehold Tenants and Friends in funding a number of projects across the Commons as follows:

- A new 600 plant hedge around Fairground car park.
- Ditch and bund dug around the perimeter of Fir Tree car park, to reduce the damage and cost of anti-parking post replacement. Grass seed is due to be sewn on the bund imminently.
- Removal of holly, cherry laurel and sycamore scrub at the rear of Fir Tree car park to allow additional light to reach the ground and promote greater plant diversity.
- Removal of a large stand of holly behind Wellington Rocks. This work has revealed a large group of mature oak trees, provided opportunity for invertebrate colonisation, and has restored one of the old viewpoints, stunning in all directions.

The installation of steps at the new Marlpit ponds and seeding of the margins of the new ponds are to follow shortly.

In addition to items raised in his report, the Warden discussed a recent increase in anti-social behaviour on the Commons and an attempt by travellers to enter Rusthall cricket club ground. He confirmed that payment is still made to TWBC for their services in managing travellers. The Warden authorised work to dig a ditch by the toilets/Wellington Rocks to prevent access in future.

Discussion turned to benches; Chris Gurr of the Friends is kindly marking up all of our benches on maps for Conservator use. There was a recent request raised at the Town Forum, to move the bench in front of Thackeray's along the London Road, which will be considered.

The ongoing cost of commemorative benches is a concern. It was suggested that the charge for new benches should include a maintenance cost and or a limited time of ten years after which they can renewed or made available to other families, all to be considered. The Friends offered to fund the restoration of a further ten benches, in addition to those proposed by the Warden, which was gratefully accepted with thanks.

Conservators agreed to the finance for the restoration of ten additional benches, ten new bench ends and installation of a new litter bin at Wellington Rocks.

ACTION: Warden and Clerk to review bench maps once complete and consider a revised policy for benches, to be discussed with the Committee.

8. CLERK'S REPORT

At the beginning of March, the Facebook group had over 1,200 members and topped 2,500 reactions during the month of February, the highest level of interaction to date.

The current top posts provide valuable insight into what matters to our community and cover the following topics:

1. Graffiti across the Commons, particularly around the Lower Cricket Pitch.
2. Litter picking by Oliver as part of his Duke of Edinburgh's award.
3. Happy Valley – dangerous glass bottles.
4. Owls (engraved into the trees) on Rusthall Common.
5. Glass and litter on the Bumps.

The new website was launched on 24th February and has received lots of positive reactions. It was included in the TWBC weekly email to residents and was the most clicked item on the email for the week. The Clerk will be updating the website regularly to keep the news up to date and appealing. Blogs are planned on the new waste contracts, a piece from the new Chairman, news from the Friends, an item on litter picking by Mark Howden and the Warden's regular blog will return.

The Clerk summarised the changes to the waste contracts and thanked the Conservators for their responses to the many requests made to them regarding the project.

Meetings with William Benson, TWBC Chief Executive, have been occurring monthly with the Warden and Clerk. These have been an opportunity to share relevant news and updates and have already proved to be invaluable.

On 23rd February, IM, the Warden and Clerk met with Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager at TWBC to discuss proposed cycle routes that would impact the Commons. The meeting concluded with Mrs Smith having a clearer idea of routes that could be approved by Conservators, which would be mapped and detailed, thereby disregarding certain routes once and for all.

The Clerk has made a number of connections with the local Police to help register and get support with anti-social behaviour. Positive discussions and meetings have been had with Inspector Betts, of the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Unit and the two PCSOs covering the Commons. The Clerk has been asked to report all incidents, as this helps create a casefile that can be used to justify resource.

The Clerk's report collated all Conservator requests since the last meeting as follows:

Date of request	Detail	Outcome
21/01/21	Request on behalf of Stills Montcler for a filming and photography shoot on Wellington Rocks, 25 people in total.	Declined due to lockdown restrictions.

22/01/21	Request from Linden Park Cricket Club to install a storage container between clubhouse and nets.	Approved.
12/02/21	Request from the Friends to authorise the fundraising for their all-abilities trail.	Approved.
05/03/21	Request from the Mead school for their year 6 to use Happy Valley for filming.	Approved.
12/03/21	Request from Rusthall Cricket Club for new roof material.	Approved - This will not commence until next year as the club need to fundraise first.

9. FINANCE REPORT

The new Treasurer, Mr Alan Leale-Green, was welcomed by all Conservators.

The Treasurer acknowledged that the accounts had been well prepared by the previous Treasurer, who departed at the end of November 2020. He set out a preliminary estimate of the results for the year ending 31st March 2021, with the numbers subject to change due to final accrual adjustments. On 12th March there was £91,405 in the Lloyds bank accounts.

The dates of the Conservator meetings were queried by the Treasurer, who suggested slight movement to coincide with the financial year.

ACTION: Treasurer and Clerk to work to propose dates for 2022 that work with the financial calendar.

10. UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

Clive Evans, Chairman of the Friends, provided an update on membership numbers, currently 453 with 55% living in Tunbridge Wells, 35% in Rusthall, 10% in Kent County and 10% classed as other. In the last six months, the Friends have contributed £15,450 towards projects for the Commons, they were thanked for their significant contributions.

ACTION(S): CE reminded the Clerk and Treasurer about a £2,000 contribution to the new website that needed to be recharged and asked the Warden for suggested new project proposals for the Sussex Lund Fund for 2022.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT

CS introduced the latest version of the Risk Register for the Commons and highlighted the key risks as follows:

Amber

- One-off encroachment (travellers etc).
- Persistent encroachment (parking etc).
- Permanent encroachment.

- Extensive storm damage.
- Contractors unavailable/no contractors.
- General contract issues.
- Expenditure exceeds budget and reserves.
- Anti-social behaviour.
- Increased usage pressures.
- Habitat degeneration.
- Extensive disease.

Yellow

- Invasive species.
- Loss of protected or priority species.
- Violence/sexual offence.
- Access lost to accounting facilities.
- Cost increase above RPI.
- Addition of new land.
- Fire damage.
- Public disorder.
- Reduced funding.
- Employee H&S.
- Negative media.

It was noted that the key risks had been discussed in the meeting so far, emphasising that the right risks were being focused upon.

JB commented that the severity and frequency of extensive storm damage should be reviewed, with consideration given to increasing the risk due to climate change and recent extreme weather.

ACTION: The committee to review the risk of storm damage.

12. CROWDFUNDING PROPOSAL

Several members of the Facebook group and JP had suggested that the Conservators investigate the option of Crowdfunding to generate essential funds for the Commons. As such the Clerk provided a paper in advance of the meeting that introduced the concept of crowdfunding and reviewed three of the most popular platforms.

It was agreed that while fundraising efforts should be directed at the Happy Valley all-abilities trail, further crowdfunded projects would be put on hold.

The Clerk had introduced JB to Crowdfund Kent, which was launched on 17th March 2021, as a Kent County Council project to match fund up to 50% (capped at £20,000) of money raised through their crowdfunding platform. JB was investigating opportunities for the all-abilities path further.

13. EVENTS

Permission was granted by Conservators for the following event:

i. Hospice in the Weald 5km and 10km run on Sunday 19th September 2021 and associated signage.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. Request from The Forum Community Interest Company to consider investigation into further streetlights on Castle Road.

The request to investigate street lighting on Castle Road was considered at length, concluding that input was required from the Community Safety Manager and a lighting expert to provide guidance on the impact of additional/revised lighting compared to or in addition to raising the vegetation canopy or scrub clearance. Concern focused on the impact of additional lighting on the habitat and wildlife of the Commons and whether additional lighting would increase the safety risk.

ACTION: Clerk to feedback to The Forum Community Interest Company to explain that a decision was postponed until further expert information was available. The Clerk to pursue investigations with the Police and Community Safety Manager.

ii. Return to meetings at the Town Hall

Subject to covid restrictions, it was agreed that the September 2021 meeting would be held at the Town Hall while the December 2021 meeting would be held via Zoom.

For 2022 onwards the following was agreed:

March:	Town Hall meeting with walk prior.
June:	Zoom/Town Hall to be discussed further at the June 2021 TWCC meeting.
September:	Town Hall meeting with walk prior.
December:	Zoom

ACTION: Clerk to manage room bookings and arrange walks. Chairman to agree meeting plan for June meetings from 2022 onwards.

iii. Process for invoice approval

The following revised process was approved by Conservators to be implemented with immediate effect:

1. Invoice agreed by individual who instructed the work, mainly the Warden, occasionally Clerk/Committee.
2. Invoice sent to Treasurer with approval and note relevant to budget.
3. If expense is within budget, the Treasurer approves the invoice. Payment can then be set up on the Lloyds online system. For the payment to work, it requires approval from 2 out of 3 signatories (currently SL, GS or ALG).
4. Any unbudgeted items or items causing a budget to be exceeded by more than £300, will be referred to the Committee, prior to authorisation.

iv. Eligibility to be appointed to Committee

No longer applicable.

v. Jubilee of the accession tree planting February 2022

Approved.

vi. Permission in principle for gatherings on the Commons

Conservators agreed to an in-principle set of criteria that would allow the Clerk to approve gatherings without further Conservator approval being required.

ACTION: Clerk to propose the in-principle criteria to be approved by the Committee.

vii. Linden Park Cricket Club storage container Plan B

The Club requested to recommence discussions with the Conservators, as the proposed location of the container (between clubhouse and nets) as requested on 22nd January 2021, has been identified as posing a risk of damage to the drainage system. The Club suggested two alternative locations, at the southern end of Fir Tree car park or in the scrub behind the pavilion, neither were particularly appealing on initial consideration but needed to be evaluated further.

ACTION: Clerk and Warden to meet with representatives of the Club on site, to discuss the options further and revert to Conservators for further consideration.

viii. Historical re-enactment event request

Approved, subject to the standard caveats as follows:

- No structures, such as gazebos.
- No vehicles on the Common.
- No sound systems.
- No enclosure of the area, obviously people can be asked to politely move on.
- Keeping the Warden and Clerk up to date as plans develop, to include a site visit before the event to run through the plans.
- Copies of relevant insurance and risk assessments as applicable.

ix. Rascal's pizza van request to trade from Fir Tree car park

Declined

15. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

27 Apsley Street Rusthall. Demolition of existing shed; Single storey building with a flat roof in garden for use as ancillary residential accommodation. On behalf of the Commons Conservators the following comment was made: The Commons Conservators would like to highlight that Apsley Street is an unadopted road which has been extended onto the Common without Conservator permission and as such our Warden would like to discuss with

the applicant the limitations of where trade vehicles can park. Materials and tools must not be stored on the Common.

Application approved.

31 Upper Street, Rusthall. New conservatory and replacement of uPVC windows to timber sash windows; loft conversion; installation of roof light; addition of new windows. On behalf of the Commons Conservators the following comment was made: The Commons Conservators have a number of concerns with this application and raise the following points:

- The Commons Conservators would like to register concern that the property is located on Rusthall Common and that the short fencing in front of the property marks the edge of the Common as such measures must be taken to protect the land and no equipment, tools or material can be stored on the Common.
- It was a further concern that the Heritage Report did not acknowledge that the property is adjacent to a designated SSSI, see map <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx?startTopic=Designations?tielayer=sssiIndex&query=HYPERLINK%3D%271003220%27>
We would expect discussion with Natural England regarding the management of activity in such close proximity to the SSSI. Further details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/request-permission-for-works-or-an-activity-on-an-sssi>
- We would also like to highlight that access would be via Apsley Street, this is an unadopted road which has been extended onto the Common without Conservator permission and as such our Warden would like to discuss with the applicant the limitations of where trade vehicles can park.

Application approved.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 24th June 2021 at 2pm, via videoconferencing.

Agreed Actions

Agenda Item	Detail	Responsibility
4&5	Chairman to sign the minutes of the previous meetings and send to the Clerk.	Chairman.
6	Approach Lee Colyer of TWBC on 1 st September 2021 to discuss precept mechanism.	Clerk and Treasurer.
6	Thank Chris McHugh for his contribution as a Conservator.	Ian Marshall.
6	Reworked Open Spaces Policy to be presented to the Committee for approval.	Clerk.
6	Feedback on discussions with TWBC Planning regarding improved incorporation of Conservators concerns in applications.	Chairman.
7	Review bench maps once complete and consider a revised policy for benches, to be discussed with the Committee.	Warden, Clerk and Committee.
9	Work to propose dates for 2022 meetings that work with the financial calendar.	Clerk and Treasurer.

10	Recharge the Friends for a £2,000 contribution to the new website.	Clerk and Treasurer.
10	Suggested new project proposals for the Sussex Lund Fund 2022.	Warden.
11	Review the risk of storm damage.	Committee.
14i	Feedback to The Forum Community Interest Company to explain that a decision was postponed until further expert information was available. Pursue investigations with the Police and Community Safety Manager.	Clerk and Warden.
14ii	Arrange room bookings and walks.	Clerk.
14ii	Confirm arrangements for June meetings for 2022 onwards.	Chairman.
14vi	Propose in-principle criteria for approval of gatherings on the Commons.	Clerk to liaise with Committee.
14vii	Meet with representatives of Linden Park Cricket Club to discuss options for alternative sites for the storage container.	Clerk and Warden.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held via video conference on Thursday 24th June 2021 at 10am

PRESENT:

John Barber
Cllr Alex Britcher-Allan
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron
Stephen Lacey
Ian Marshall
Antony Moore
Cllr Nicholas Pope
Cllr Justine Rutland
Clare Sinha
Cllr Chris Woodward (Chairman)

APOLOGIES/UNABLE TO ATTEND:

Corin Thoday

ATTENDING:

Steve Budden (Warden)
Alan Leale-Green (Treasurer)
Gemma Stapeley (Clerk)
Liz Ellicott (Rusthall Parish Council)
Clive Evans (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common)
Nigel Stapple (WKDArchaeology for agenda items 1-4)

OBSERVING:

Tim Gomez

MINUTES

1. DECLARATION OF BUSINESS INTEREST

There were no business declarations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Corin Thoday.

3. CONSERVATOR CHANGES

The Chairman expressed thanks on behalf of all Conservators for the significant contributions made by Cllr Barbara Cobbold and Cllr James Scholes, who stood down as Conservators since the last meeting.

The Chairman went on to welcome three new elected Borough Councillor Conservators, Cllr Alex Britcher-Allan, Cllr Nicholas Pope and Cllr Justine Rutland, who were wished success in their new roles.

4. RUSTHALL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE UPDATE

Nigel Stapple of WKDArchaeology had provided an overview document in advance of the meeting which highlighted the archaeological finds and features of the site.

Focusing on the scope and intended plans for the site, Nigel confirmed that the site in Rusthall would not increase in footprint size due to resource limitations and that they were backfilling areas once data had been recorded. He estimated that the site had a further season of work to be deemed completed.

Nigel expressed a desire to extend the trench in the pond but acknowledged that health and safety measures needed to be managed. The Clerk will contact Zurich, the insurance company, to consider risk management, liability, and guidance.

JohnB commended the work done by Nigel and his team and acknowledged significant community interest and engagement. Anyone interested in receiving the full reports produced by Nigel or would like to visit the site should contact the Clerk for arrangements to be made.

Action: Clerk to discuss further with Zurich.

5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th March 2021 were considered and approved. A copy to be signed by the Chairman and returned to the Clerk.

6. MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The minutes of the Committee meetings held on 19th April 2021, 10th May 2021 and 7th June 2021 were considered and approved and would also be signed by the Chairman. The significant work of the Committee was acknowledged, with minutes improving transparency.

7. MATTERS ARISING

Storm drainage

As noted at the March 2021 meeting, the next step for this project was for Kent County Council's Drainage Planned Works Team to work the outline design into the detailed design which incorporates issue of the drawings, identification of all components, and pre-construction health and safety information. This has not progressed during the last quarter, but the Clerk will continue communication to report on progress.

Request from The Forum Community Interest Company to consider investigation into further streetlights on Castle Road.

After the March meeting the Clerk contacted The Forum to explain that a decision on their request was postponed until we had further input from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's (TWBC) Community Safety team. A Zoom meeting took place on 6th April during which Terry Hughes agreed to organise a safety review for the road, this is outstanding and has been politely chased.

Return to meetings at the Town Hall

It was confirmed that from 2022 onwards the arrangements for meetings would be as follows:

March: Town Hall meeting with walk prior.
June: Zoom
September: Town Hall meeting with walk prior.
December: Zoom

Linden Park Cricket Club storage container Plan B.

This is now at Plan C, following a second site visit with representatives of the Club, officers, and the committee. The Clerk is awaiting a final proposal for the container to be sited to the left of the practise nets along the left-hand boundary of the ground. Once received, this will be distributed to all Conservators for consideration. It was noted that the Club's previous request to cordon off large areas of the outfield for reseeding had not happened, the Warden explained that this was on hold until the end of the season.

Benches

The Warden and Clerk were awaiting the map of benches, and rating of their condition, to be produced by Chris Gurr.

Blogs

The Clerk asked for any contributions and or suggestions for the website, which had been received from a number of attendees.

ACTION: The Warden to restart his weekly/monthly blog.

Actions

The following actions were outstanding:

- Suggested new project proposals for the Sussex Lund Fund 2022 – action for the Warden to draft a proposal.

All other meeting actions were reviewed and closed.

8. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden's report discussed the traveller incursion on Rusthall cricket pitch in early April, noting that damage was limited by the quick response of the Police and TWBC's Community Safety team. Rusthall Cricket Club are working on plans to improve the security of the site with a combination of a stronger barrier at the entrance and a bank and ditch plus some larger tree trunks around the perimeter. When the Warden receives the plans, they will be distributed to Conservators for their consideration.

The remaining tasks from the Winter work schedule have been completed with the installation of the Marlpit pond steps and seeding of the site with restoration grass mix. Seeding of the edges of the Marlpits and new scrapes at Bull's Hollow are to follow.

Unseasonable winds during the last period caused damage to minor trees. The old, leaning apple tree by the Marlpits was brought down.

Bench restoration is progressing well, with eleven completed on Rusthall Common. The other nineteen, on Tunbridge Wells Common, will be benches away from the centre, which have received less attention in the past.

South and South-East in Bloom judging will take place during the afternoon of 24th June, with a judge accompanying the Warden for a walk on the Commons, which is much preferred to the virtual judging of 2020.

The next tasks focus on the clearance of all tracks and paths, cutting verges and sightlines and following on with the cutting and clearing of glades and meadows.

In early July, selected areas will be sprayed with Asulox to control bracken and the Japanese knotweed that has reappeared on the steep slope below Mt Ephraim, near Gibraltar Cottage, will be attended to.

The Warden confirmed he had not yet found any Himalayan balsam yet this year, so there is no need for additional control.

Having used the remaining 2020/21 budget on roadside tree work, the Warden felt that risk to the 2021/22 budget had been minimised, although he noted that extreme weather could generate emergency response costs.

9. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's report emphasised the success of the new litter bin servicing contracts with LML Services and Countrystyle Recycling Ltd. Both contracts have been operating since 1st April and despite significantly more waste being generated on the Commons than originally advised by Oakbourne, both have been flexible and reliable with the result being exemplary servicing and no complaints. Conservators agreed that formal thanks should be extended to both companies. The Clerk was also asked to investigate the possibility of the Paintmechanics decorating the bin store to hide existing and future tagging.

Working alongside the new contracts, the monthly community litter picks have been successful in removing litter and enhancing community engagement.

The Clerk submitted a representation on TWBC's pre-submission local plan on behalf of the Conservators. The exercise highlighted three key areas:

- The need to continue to push forward on planning contributions for the Commons when assessing open space for new developments.
- The Commons should not only be identified for their importance in conservation/ecology work but also for informal recreation also.
- The value of showing support for policies within the plan that fit with the plans and ideals of the Conservators.

Work on the submission has assisted in the understanding and progress of the wider S106/planning contributions project, started by the previous Clerk.

The Clerk highlighted the significantly improved communication links that have been developed with Kent Police. Of note, was a successful walk around Rusthall Common with William Benson, Lee Colyer and Chief Inspector Omid Changizi. Omid was significantly impressed by our beautiful Commons and commended the work done to engage with the local community. The Clerk and Warden will continue to report appropriately to our PCSO contacts, with additional support from Omid, who offered to escalate any such issues that required his input.

The new promotional film produced by Cordis Creative has been very well received and has already been placed on our website, used in a presentation to the Town Forum, posted on our Facebook group, in TWBC's e-newsletter and sent to the In Bloom judges.

The Clerk's report collated all Conservator requests since the last meeting as follows:

Date of request	Detail	Outcome
20.04.21	Citizens Advice Bureau Walk	Approved but now not going ahead.
20.04.21	Linden Park Cricket Club banner request	Approved.
29.4.21	Drone use for promotional film.	Approved.
30.4.21	Crafted butterflies on the Commons to promote U3A.	Approved.
24.5.21	Linden Park Cricket Club container.	Ongoing.
28.5.21	Sign for Pantiles car park.	Approved.

Action: Clerk to formally thank LML Services and Countrystyle Recycling Ltd. The Clerk to follow up on conversations with the Paintmechanics to establish prices for decoration of the Rusthall bin store.

10. FINANCE REPORT, ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND STATUTORY ANNUAL RETURN 20/21

The Treasurer presented the annual financial statement for the year ended 31 March 2021, including a comparison against the income statement for the year ended 2020. He also presented the comparison of the income statement for the year ended 31st March 2021 against the original budget for the year ended 2020.

In a year-on-year comparison, income was down £17.3k reflecting that the Freehold Tenant projects were now paid directly by them. The precept increased in line with inflation. Salaries and expenses were up £6.5k due to amounts paid in relation to the previous Clerk leaving his position. Other expenses were higher by £5.9k for web design and email upgrade, which were mainly funded by the Friends. The costs of the maintenance of the Commons in 2020/21 was broadly like that in 2019/20. There was a conscious effort to reduce costs to reduce a potential budget deficit which in the end did not transpire. The surplus for the year can be analysed as £3.5k arising from the Freehold Tenants and Friends projects.

In comparisons to budget, income was up against budget by £4.0k because of project funding of £4.3k. Salaries and expenses were up against budget by £9.4k because of the settlement with the previous Clerk and the web and email upgrades, which were funded by the Friends. The costs of maintenance of the commons were under budget by £4.5k. Conservators formally adopted and approved the annual financial statement.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return forms were adopted and approved by Conservators and will be submitted, by the Treasurer, to the external auditor.

The auditor's report highlighted a need to review the risk register, specifically the need to identify a risk owner to take responsibility of the risk. The Officers and Committee will work together to rectify this.

The Treasurer was thanked for all of his work on the finance report and audit.

Action: Officers to review the risk owners on the risk register.

11. UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

Membership of the Friends now stands at a very healthy 480. Since the last meeting, £5,000 has been spent on the new website, bench refurbishment and the latest edition of Common Ground.

The event planned for the Friends and volunteers on the 12th September is being rescheduled to include forest school and adult bushcraft sessions hosted by the Kent High Weald Partnership. The Friends will liaise with the Clerk to collate a request to Conservators.

The Friends have decided to issue thank you certificates to the various volunteers helping on the Commons, the Clerk will liaise with CliveE to share volunteer distribution lists.

When asked about progress with funding for the Happy Valley all-abilities trail, it was explained that a funding application for £75,000 had been submitted to the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). Feedback is expected within a 12-week response period although concerns had been raised by NLCF that the funding would ultimately be a benefit to the landowner, despite explanation from Targetfollow to the contrary.

Chris Gurr has been busily working on the bench survey, he doesn't require additional help as offered and his report will be available for the next meeting in September.

It was confirmed that the old website belonging to the Friends will be archived at the end of October 2021, when the last PayPal subscription payments are taken through the site.

The Chair of the Friends thanked the Treasurer for his help in reviewing the accounts for the Friends.

Action: Clerk to liaise with the Friends to collate a request to Conservators for the forest school event in September and to provide volunteer contact details.

12. MARKETING AND PR REPORT

This is a new addition to the standard meeting reports. It highlights the number of press items that included the Commons, a review of Facebook interactions and website analytics.

The report highlighted the value of the Facebook group, with over 1,500 members and consistently over 2,000 reactions each month. However, there are other social media platforms that might bring further benefit to the Conservators, and these will be explored.

JustineR commended the Warden and Clerk for a successful presentation to the Town Forum on 17th June.

Action: Social media review to be carried out by the Community Engagement project group, using Conservator and external input.

13. BENCH SCHEME REVIEW

Working with the Warden, the Clerk presented a paper with a proposal for new commemorative bench pricing to include two refurbishments during the lifetime of the bench. Conservators agreed to the structure and gave approval for the price to be automatically adjusted annually, based on material costs. As such, for the remainder of 2021 a new bench will be £1,010 plus plaque with individuals encouraged to look at an existing bench refurbished for a price of £720 plus plaque.

Action: The Clerk to create a one-page flier to include current pricing and to review records for existing benches that might require a renewal agreement.

Action: The Warden was asked to investigate other sustainable plastic/composite materials that wouldn't require refurbishment.

14. FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REVIEW

On the 15th June, the Committee met with the Warden and Clerk to review plans for the year. It was agreed that work would be focused on priority themes rather than feeling that it is always firefighting. As such the following was proposed and agreed:

1. Agree 2022 priorities for work on the Commons, including:
 - a. Dealing with wood chippings where holly scrub has been cleared.
 - b. Rock clearances.
2. Strengthening links to encourage (appropriate) usage of and love for the Commons, including:
 - a. Schools/children's activities like the Forest School.
 - b. The Friends.
3. Funding sources and barriers.
4. Management:
 - a. Annual Plan (not a long document but a set of agreed and budgeted priorities to be agreed at the same time as the annual budget and Friends/Freehold Tenants' projects for the year) with clear linkage to long-term Management Plan.
 - b. Quarterly committee reviews focusing on strategy and structured list of priorities.
 - c. Consider whether/when Conservators should discuss bigger strategic questions/refresh Management Plan.
5. Improving our ability to respond to planning issues/applications.

ClareS queried when it would be appropriate to consider a new Management Plan, which would be incorporated into the Management project.

To clarify, the Committee consists of one representative of each of the three Conservator groups (elected Borough Councillors, Freehold Tenants and Lord of the Manor). It has no fixed remit other than those delegated by Conservators.

Action: The Clerk would send communication to all Conservators and The Friends to request their contributions on the priority theme projects.

Action: Consideration of a new Management Plan.

15. EVENTS

Permission was granted by Conservators for the following events:

- i. Rusthall Bonfire on Saturday 30th October 2021 and associated signage.
- ii. Southborough & District Wheelers Cycling Fair - various matters required further clarification. (UPDATE: the organisers have now been granted permission to hold the event at Calverley Grounds, so retract their request).

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. New Conservator Induction

It was agreed that as standard, all new Conservators will be invited to an introductory Zoom to include role of Conservators, background and essential information relating to the Commons and an invitation to walks on both Commons with the Warden and Clerk.

ii. Request for “No Fish to be removed” sign on Brighton Lake

The Warden explained that this had been requested by concerned residents following observation of inappropriate behaviour. It was agreed that as the by-laws state that no fishing is allowed on the Commons, that the Warden should order “No fishing” sticker signs to be affixed on the bins at each end of the Lake. This would enable enforcement to be actioned.

Action: With Conservator approval, Warden to organise appropriate “No fishing” signage.

iii. Fairground car park, confirmation of requirement to seek Conservator approval for changes

This matter related to frustrations concerning the installation of an ANPR system, inappropriate lighting, and a new cabin without full Conservator approval. PaulB had addressed the issue in advance of the meeting, having circulated an email detailing action plans to address the matters. It was agreed that the Warden would accompany PaulB at a meeting with a lighting expert to agree an appropriate proposal.

iv. London Road Zebra Crossing

The Clerk explained that the finish of the zebra crossing project was not up to standard and she had put in a complaint to KCC Highways, who requested and obtained Conservator approval for the project. As such, KCC Highways had responded to explain that they agreed that the finish wasn't in accordance with the design and requested that the Warden join a meeting with KCC and the contractors to resolve the matter.

Action: Progress on this matter would be reported at the September meeting.

17. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

i. Bracken Cottage - Two Storey side extension and porch addition. Response on behalf of TWCC as follows:

Bracken Cottage is located on the boundary of Tunbridge Wells Common, with its sole access and parking on the Common. The Cottage is in a very scenic part of the Common which is important for wildlife and features on both our website and our walking maps. Bracken Cottage is granted an easement to access the property via the Common and for vehicles to park close to the property. There are 3 spaces in front of Gorse Cottage, which are shared between Bracken and Gorse Cottage and are generally fully used. Access to the property from the parking area is via a short pedestrian path across the Common.

The proposed extension raises a number of serious concerns as follows:

There would be no further parking available on the Common to cater for increased long- term demand generated by enlarging the property.

- Due to the site location and access constraints, construction work would cause serious damage to the Common. There would not be any land available for trade vehicles to park or for materials to be delivered and stored.
- The proposal includes a yoga studio for home yoga tuition. There would be no parking for visiting vehicles for this purpose. We would also query whether this requires a change of use?
- There is a mature oak tree on the boundary of the Common that would be affected by the proposal.
- There is significant concern that the building and associated works would interrupt the watercourse for Bracken Cottage Pond or otherwise damage the pond and its wildlife.

We would reiterate that applicants/agents are invited to contact the Commons Conservators during the pre-application stage to discuss planning applications that directly affect the Commons, such as this one, communication should be via the Clerk, Gemma Stapeley - gemma.stapeley@twcommons.org.

Application approved.

Action: The Warden to collate a number of photos as evidence of the current condition of the Common adjacent to Bracken Cottage. The process of managing the proactive response to the planning application approval was devolved to the Committee, to report back to all Conservators.

- ii. **69 London Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1DX - Listed Building Consent: Reconfiguration of the internal layout of the basement including tanking, insertion of stud walls, relocation of staircase into the basement and reinstatement of windows.**

Response on behalf of TWCC as follows: The Commons Conservators have no comment to make on the application but would remind the applicant that the land in front of the property is part of Tunbridge Wells Common. The Conservators wish to make it clear that no building materials may be placed on the land and no construction or delivery vehicles may park there or overrun the grass at any time.

- iii. **The Forum, The Common, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 8YU – erection of café servery.**

Response on behalf of TWCC as follows: The Commons Conservators support the work of The Forum and have engaged positively with The Fine Grind.

We do however have concerns about the application, as the increased footfall and inevitable increases in littering and rubbish generated will impact the Common, its wildlife, other users and financial budget for waste disposal. We would be looking to see ongoing support from both The Forum and Fine Grind in this matter.

During construction, we would like to remind the applicant that materials, equipment and machinery cannot be stored on the Common and that vehicles should pay due care and attention to the verges of the Common when using Castle Road. Any damage must be made good.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 23rd September 2021 at 2pm at the Town Hall.

Agreed Actions

Agenda Item	Detail	Responsibility	Progress/up date
4	Contact Zurich insurance to discuss liability and guidance for the archaeological dig site.	Clerk	
5&6	Chairman to sign the minutes of the previous meetings and send to the Clerk.	Chairman	
7	Restart Warden's blog for the website.	Warden	
7	Suggested new project proposals for the Sussex Lund Fund 2022.	Warden	
9	Formally thank LML Services and Countrystyle Recycling Ltd.	Clerk	
9	Follow up on conversations with the Paintmechanics to establish prices for decoration of the Rusthall bin store.	Clerk	
10	Review risk owners on the risk register.	Officers	
11	Liaise with the Friends to collate a request to Conservators for the forest school event in September.	Clerk	
11	Provide Friends with volunteer contacts for certificates.	Clerk	
12	Social media review to be instigated.	Community Engagement team.	
13	Create a one-page flier for commemorative benches to include current pricing and to review records for existing benches that might require a renewal agreement.	Clerk	
13	Investigate other sustainable plastic/composite materials to replace bench timbers that wouldn't require refurbishment.	Warden	
14	Send communication to all Conservators to request their contributions on the priority theme projects.	Clerk	
14	Consideration of a new Management Plan	All	
16ii	With Conservator approval, organise appropriate "No fishing" signs for the bins at each end of Brighton Lake.	Warden	
16iv	Progress on London Road Zebra crossing to be reported back at September meeting.	Warden	
17i	Collate photographs as evidence of current condition of the Common adjacent to Bracken Cottage.	Warden	
17i	Proactive response to the planning application approval.	Committee	

