

## **TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS**

### **Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 2pm**

#### PRESENT:

John Barber (via videoconference)  
Cllr Alex Britcher-Allan (via videoconference)  
Paul Burnett  
Ewen Cameron (Chairman)  
Amii Errington  
Ian Marshall  
Cllr Justine Rutland  
Clare Sinha  
Cllr Chris Woodward

#### ATTENDING:

Steve Budden (Warden)  
Alan Leale-Green (Treasurer)  
Gemma Stapeley (Clerk)  
Daniel Colborne (New Ranger)  
Liz Ellicott (Rusthall Parish Council)

#### OBSERVING

David Clover

#### APOLOGIES

Stephen Lacey  
Cllr Nicholas Pope  
Corin Thoday  
Clive Evans (Chairman of The Friends of the Commons)

### **MINUTES**

The Chairman welcomed Daniel Colborne and congratulated him on his appointment as Ranger.

The Warden was thanked for hosting an interesting walk on Tunbridge Wells Common, in advance of the meeting, where a number of the recent projects were highlighted and discussed.

#### **1. DECLARATION OF BUSINESS INTEREST**

There were no business declarations.

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Stephen Lacey, Cllr Nicholas Pope, Corin Thoday and Clive Evans.

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021 were considered and approved. A copy to be signed by the Chairman and returned to the Clerk.

#### **4. MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The minutes of the Committee meetings held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were considered and approved and would also be signed by the Chairman.

#### **5. MATTERS ARISING**

From the last meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Working groups progress reports – Projects retrospective review

JBarber presented a verbal summary of the retrospective review, completed by CWoodward, AErrington, and IMarshall. The aim was to provide guidance for future project planning and implementation.

##### **Most benefit/least benefit projects**

Clearances generally, with holly particularly mentioned, and pond creation/improvement were strongly appreciated as was the creation of the new Conservators' website. (Rock clearances had largely been undertaken outside the projects per se except where they were part of clearances, and they were also highly valued.)

Some of the projects lacked the resources (officers and/or volunteers) to take them forward adequately (e.g. biodiversity development, including wildflowers, and especially species surveys - bar birds, which had been surveyed) and some additionally were too loosely described to even assess progress e.g. ones related to trees and green issues. Some projects perhaps could have been done in a different way e.g. wildflower plugs instead of seeds, clearance of reedmace on Brighton Lake.

##### **Lessons learned/necessary actions**

- A. Site visits to understand what is being proposed were seen as of huge value and these need to be properly noted, incorporating any key observations and decisions at the time of the visit, along with the photo record; all of which can be used in follow up planning processes and post project reviews conducted on a systematic basis, including the effectiveness of the contractor and value for money.
- B. It was felt that before and after photographs with visual representation via site maps indicating precise locations is necessary, especially for those who were not involved in the site visit.
- C. Similarly, it is felt necessary to have a prior statement of objectives against which to assess project appropriateness and thereafter implementation, together with detailed specifications agreed by all the parties involved e.g. Freehold Tenants and Friends where they are financing the work, and competitive quotes.
- D. Outside bodies such as contractors and organisations (e.g. KHWP) need to have specifications in place for projects that they are handling, be doing work that is in line with their expertise and charging and be supervised throughout.
- E. Undertaking of community engagement before and after via surveys and social media has been raised as a further means to strengthen project acceptance.
- F. As a general point an early update of the management plan would be useful, even necessary, as soon as the Ranger is able to contribute meaningfully to that, so that projects can continue to be guided by and referenced to it.

G. Conservators need to have a basic understanding of the geography and features of the Commons to enable them to input effectively in the projects area: so we need to ensure that the aspect of the Conservator Induction programme that deals with Commons familiarisation is undertaken and that in accepting a Conservator position there is this awareness.

#### Working groups progress reports – Funding

The Funding group has revised their draft contact letter, to be sent to significant local companies with sizeable assets. The letter will now come from the Friends of the Commons and has been sent to the Committee for their review and approval at their next meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

#### Events on the Commons

The commercial event proposal remains outstanding and will be re-presented at the June Conservators' meeting by PBurnett.

#### Litter bins

JBarber, on behalf of the Funding group, had distributed a proposal for sponsorship of litter related items, in advance of the meeting (emailed on 23<sup>rd</sup> March). It was clarified that any and all actual proposals for sponsorship would be presented to the Committee who then, depending upon the size and nature of that sponsorship, to all Conservators. The proposal was approved by Conservators.

On the matter of litter bins AErrington queried whether recycling bins should be provided on the Commons. The Clerk mentioned that on the 5<sup>th</sup> March litter pick, cans were collected separately which was a success, other materials could be separated if pickers worked together and shared bags. Regarding separate recycling bins on the Commons, the Clerk raised her concerns about contamination and the challenges that segregation raised. DColborne suggested discussing sorting options with the Contractor.

**Action: The Clerk to discuss sorting options with Countrystyle and report back.**

#### Monthly invoicing

At the last meeting, the Warden had an action to ensure that monthly invoicing is one of the terms and conditions of the Bridgland contract extension. This commitment has not been included in the agreement wording received from Bridgland, but the Warden assured everyone that he would proactively encourage monthly invoices. The Treasurer reiterated the importance of monthly invoices from all Contractors to ensure accuracy of budget reporting and financial planning.

## **6. WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Warden explained that the first quarter had been busy with four projects funded by the Freehold Tenants. The first two projects involved scraping of the surface debris of the 2021 clearance sites, at Fir Tree car park and behind Wellington Rocks. The scrapings were heaped into mounds incorporating the dead timber and roots. The scraped areas will be left to see what develops from dormant seed in the substrate. At the same time a section of south facing bank was excavated to repair a badly gullied path above Wellington Rocks. The excavated bank should prove to be an attractive new breeding site for solitary bees and wasps who already thrive in the area.

The third project to have taken place in quarter one is the clearance of the steep bank facing London Road between St Helena and Gibraltar Cottage. Scrub and bramble were removed to re-expose the rock outcrops, to create greater biodiversity in the area and prevent further succession towards secondary woodland.

The last of the projects was another significant clearance of holly scrub to the south of Hungershall Park through towards the Racecourse, linking it to the first clearance from thirty years ago. The work has flooded the area with light, which should assist with the development of new ground flora.

The Warden thanked the Freehold Tenants for their ongoing support in funding the projects.

In February, the Commons were hit by Storm Eunice, the worst storm for thirty years. The majority of trees that came down were birches and relatively small, with most paths reopened within 48 hours. The largest and most prominent tree to come down was a triple stemmed oak next to Brighton Lake, with one stem falling partially across the A26, fortunately there were no injuries or significant damage. The Warden estimates the storm cost £5,000 in clearance work.

## **7. CLERK'S REPORT**

### Actions from the previous meeting

As follow up to actions raised in the December 2021 meeting, the Clerk confirmed the following:

- Final plans for the traveller protection measures at Rusthall Cricket Club to be circulated to Conservators for approval. All work has been completed.
- Notify Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) of the precept request. Completed, with acknowledgement in writing received 20/12/21.
- To further investigate the matter of disabled access options to the Forum. The Clerk has reconnected with the Forum on this matter.

### Volunteers

The Clerk noted that there had been six volunteer sessions since the last meeting, four community litter picks and two sessions tackling cherry laurel. Community Payback are proving a good source of support, they have cleared all of the grass and scrub from Wellington Rocks, cleared the path behind Wellington Rocks through to Mount Edgcombe, created habitat stacks, cleared around the Wellington Rocks toilet block and started to cut back the path edges along Major York's Road. There is opportunity to use them to repaint bins and benches, which would greatly assist the budget.

IMarshall provided an overview of the work that has taken place to minimise cherry laurel on the Commons. The ongoing project has involved twenty days of work, injecting, popping, cutting back and pulling up laurel, with an estimate that two thirds of the Commons has now been cleared. IMarshall looks forward to DColborne's support on this project in the future. The Chairman acknowledged the remarkable effort of those involved.

### Planning

The Clerk submitted a representation to the Planning Inspectorate, on behalf of the Conservators, in response to Aldi's application to deregister Village Green. As part of this work the Clerk has connected with and sought advice from the Open Spaces Society and engaged with Leo Hickish of Batchellor Monkhouse to investigate and negotiate options on our behalf. A final response from Aldi and their representatives is pending.

In Quarter one, there have been two planning applications, in close to proximity to Tunbridge Wells Common, where the Clerk has submitted a S106 request as the development would create an increased impact on the Common due to increased recreational pressures. TWBC's Planning Department have required a financial figure per dwelling to contribute towards a mitigation strategy or specific ring-fenced projects. While we don't have any set calculations for a contribution, we have been told by Planning that requests must be reasonable and related to the application. As such the Clerk has sought guidance from Kent Wildlife Trust, researched Ashdown Forest's SAMMs strategy, looked at precedent, compared contributions from other bodies for the same developments and discussed figures with the Treasurer. It was agreed that at this stage, £200 per dwelling would be requested. IMarshall asked the Clerk

to revisit the proposal submitted by the previous Director of the Commons (rejected by TWBC) and discuss further with David Osbourne.

**Action: Clerk to revisit value of S106 contributions.**

Case study research

The first of the Clerk’s “Common Therapy” group meetings with other equivalent organisations took place on 1<sup>st</sup> March with Ashdown Forest and Banstead Commons sharing best practise information and experiences. This proved an invaluable session, with the next meeting scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> June, with a full agenda already proposed.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

The Clerk and Warden continue to meet monthly with William Benson and have made some good connections and been given some great advice for development work. From 25<sup>th</sup> March, the Warden and Clerk will be hosting monthly walks on the Commons for officers at the Borough Council. The walks are intended for enjoyment, to enable officers to understand the Commons further and to make useful connections.

The Jubilee tree was planted on the land between Inner London Road and London Road on 7<sup>th</sup> February and was a successful event for all involved.

By the end of July, the Conservators’ office in the Town Hall needs to be emptied as the room is included in the areas being handed over to the appointed management company. As such, the Clerk and Warden will progress the removal of documents and furniture as appropriate into the storage lock-up on the TWBC Depot and the Clerk will produce options for a working space for the Ranger.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April the Clerk has been invited to present at the TWBC Member’s Briefing.

Other information

- The Clerk has completed the social media training provided by Social Fireworks.
- The Clerk and Warden are working closely with the relatively new occupants of Romanoff Lodge as they look to fully restore the house and surrounding grounds of the property.
- Similar to the panorama board on Mount Ephraim, the Clerk has been approached about a board for the Happy Valley viewpoint. Approval given for the Clerk to research this further.
- The Funding group met with Greg Clark MP on 14<sup>th</sup> January to walk on Tunbridge Wells Common and discuss the financial constraints and issues that we are faced with. It was a useful walk, and a repeat is scheduled for June.

Requests to Conservators

Since the last meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> December the following requests have been put to the Conservators, their outcomes are listed:

<b>Date of request</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
11/1/2022	TWBC Beacon request to mark the Queen’s Jubilee.	Approved, but TWBC no longer plan to hold this event.
17/01/2022	WildChild! 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> April.	Approved
19/01/2022	Traveller protection measures for Rusthall cricket pitch.	Approved.

**8. FINANCE REPORT**

The Treasurer presented the preliminary estimate for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, prepared on 15<sup>th</sup> March. The Treasurer reports a number of variations between actual and budget with an estimation that we will be over budget by £6,422 due to the following:

- Salary expense due to delayed retirement of Warden.
- Agreed training for the Clerk.
- Legal costs for the deregistration of small area of Tunbridge Wells Common.
- Ash dieback costs.
- Excess expenditure on benches, rectified for future.

SLacey was thanked for producing the budget for the year.

#### Financial Resources Level

At the December 2021 meeting, it was agreed that a minimum of 25% of regular income would be held, equating to £44,000. There is currently £48,762 held, an excess of £4,762.

#### Barclays bank account

The Treasurer reported that the new Barclays bank account was up and running.

### **9. UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS**

In the absence of CEvans, the Clerk presented the report from the Friends.

#### Membership

Currently 533, 13 more than reported at the last meeting.

#### Projects

The Friends have funded a security gate for Rusthall cricket pitch as part of the traveller protection measures.

#### Events

WildChild! forest school activities will be taking place on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April on Rusthall Common and on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April on Tunbridge Wells Common. Conservators were asked to promote the event through their own contacts and communications.

The strawberry tea will take place on 1<sup>st</sup> June at the Spa Hotel and the volunteers thank you lunch will take place on 11<sup>th</sup> June at the Forum.

IMarshall questioned why the Friends had created a new website, despite having the joint website which was launched in early 2021.

**Action: The Clerk to discuss with CEvans why the Friends had created a new website.**

### **10. MARKETING AND PR REPORT**

The report highlighted press coverage, data for the Facebook group, website analytics and data for the new Instagram account.

Four blogs had been published during the last quarter which had both informed and pushed visitors to the website.

### **11. RANGER RECRUITMENT**

DColborne explained that he was very grateful to have been appointed as the new Ranger and was excited to start his dream job. He was looking forward to time spent with and learning from the Warden before his retirement at the end of June.

## **12. RISK MANAGEMENT**

Following a full Committee and officer review the Risk Register for 2021/22 was provided to Conservators in advance of the meeting for their consideration. Significant changes from last year were highlighted as follows:

- Persistent encroachment has a higher likelihood, it is currently happening outside Dingley Dell and despite Warden, Police and TWBC Planning enforcement getting involved the matter continues and demonstrates our limited ability to enforce.
- Violent /sexual offence has increased in likelihood, following the incident on Major York's Road. As a positive, our response has improved and was better managed.
- Anti-social behaviour has reduced in likelihood due to better response, management and relationship with Police and Community Safety.
- Cost above RPI has increased in severity, due to the very challenging financial position facing many, including our contractors, e.g. waste disposal will be going up by 7.8% from 1st April.
- Incident/accident/injury has become a highlighted risk due to the accident on Wellington Rocks in 2021. Our reaction to the incident was well managed.

It was noted that a task for the new Ranger will be to review the risks in his area of responsibility.

## **13. EVENTS**

Permission was granted by Conservators for the following event:

- i) To hold Rusthall Bonfire on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022. Plans as per in previous years, with additional caveat that parking must be prevented on the triangle of grass between Coach Road and Rusthall Road.

Permission was granted by Conservators for the following signage:

- i) Rusthall Fete (25<sup>th</sup> June) advertising on lamp posts one week before.
- ii) Rusthall Bonfire (29<sup>th</sup> October) advertising on lamp posts one week before.
- iii) Rusthall Christmas Market (3<sup>rd</sup> December) advertising on lamp posts one week before.

The Clerk raised an additional request, for the Community litter pick scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> April to be included in the activities planned by Rusthall village to raise funds for the Ukraine. Conservators approved the request.

## **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- i. Classic car rally.

PBurnett had had a request from RCP to allow a classic car club to use part of Fairground car park as a stop point for their charity drive between Lewes and Tunbridge Wells on 24<sup>th</sup> April, to include a catering truck.

Conservators approved the request subject to the following caveats:

- Catering only for participants in the event.

- A check must be made on charity referenced.
- Donation to be made to the Friends of the Commons.

ii. Fir Tree Road car park

CSinha noted that the car park seemed very full. The Warden explained that this was very common and related to normal footfall on the Commons.

The Treasurer commented that the car park should not be resurfaced and that instead a sign should be put up saying users do so at their own risk. This matter will be discussed with the Committee.

iii. Bishops Down planning application for mobile phone mast

JRutland queried the application and following discussion it was agreed that she would find out if it had been approved. UPDATE: Application rejected.

iv. Linden Park Cricket Club: dogs on outfield

The Clerk had been contacted by Mike Taylor of Linden Park Cricket Club asking for Conservator permission to review existing signage and to install an area of mesh along the bottom of the perimeter fencing, by Curly Vera's coffee van. Conservators agreed to the requests subject to Warden and Clerk approval.

v. TWBC response to accepting Ukrainian families

ABritcher-Allan explained that TWBC were implementing a response to accepting Ukrainian families into the Borough. She highlighted that culturally Ukrainians enjoy outdoor activities and would therefore enjoy the Commons, providing an opportunity to promote the Commons to them when they join our communities.

## **15. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

**21/03785/FULL Ephraim Lodge The Common Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 8BX.** Garden wall to match the existing. Response on behalf of the Commons Conservators:

The Commons Conservators would like to remind the applicant that the land surrounding the property is part of Tunbridge Wells Common. The Conservators wish to make it clear that no building materials, tools or equipment may be placed on the land and no construction or delivery vehicles may park there or overrun the grass at any time. **UPDATE: Application approved**

**22/00301/TN0T56 Land Between Bishops Down And Bishops Down Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent** Telecommunication Consultation: Proposed installation of a 20m monopole supporting 6 no antennas, 2 no dishes together with 2 no ground-based cabinets and ancillary development. **UPDATE: Application rejected**

**22/00238/FULL. W A Turner Ltd, Broadwater Lane, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 5RD.** Demolition of existing buildings and structures on site and construction of 94no. residential dwellings (36no. houses and 58no. apartments) and a remote working/community hub with open space, landscaping, roads, access, footpaths, public lighting and all associated site development works including retaining walls/structures where required.

**MEETING ENDED**

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING** – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 at 2pm.

## Agreed Actions

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Progress/update</b>
3&4	Chairman to sign the minutes of the previous meetings and send to the Clerk.	Chairman	Complete
5	To create a commercial event proposal for Conservator review.	PBurnett	
5	Discuss recyclable separation with Countrystyle.	Clerk	
7	Revisit/rework financial requests per dwelling for S106 claims.	Clerk	
9	Discuss with CEvans why the Friends have launched their new website.	Clerk	