

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on March 24th 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 9th 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 11th January 2022 and 7th March 2022 were considered and approved and would also be signed by the Chairman.

5. MATTERS ARISING

From the last meeting on 9th 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 4th 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 23rd 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 5th 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 Edgumbe, 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 1st March with Ashdown Forest and Banstead Commons sharing best practise information and experiences. This proved an invaluable session, with the next meeting scheduled for 21st 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 25th 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 7th 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 22nd 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 14th 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 9th December the following requests have been put to the Conservators, their outcomes are listed:

Date of request	Detail	Outcome
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 th and 6 th 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 31st March 2022, prepared on 15th 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 5th April on Rusthall Common and on Wednesday 6th 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 1st June at the Spa Hotel and the volunteers thank you lunch will take place on 11th 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 29th 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 (25th June) advertising on lamp posts one week before.
- ii) Rusthall Bonfire (29th October) advertising on lamp posts one week before.
- iii) Rusthall Christmas Market (3rd December) advertising on lamp posts one week before.

The Clerk raised an additional request, for the Community litter pick scheduled for 9th 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 24th 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 – 23rd June 2022 at 2pm.

Agreed Actions

Agenda Item	Detail	Responsibility	Progress/update
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	

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in the Rackliff Centre on 23rd June 2022 at 2pm

PRESENT:

John Barber
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron (Chairman)
Amii Errington
Ian Marshall
Nicholas Pope
Cllr Justine Rutland
Clare Sinha

ATTENDING:

Steve Budden (Warden)
Alan Leale-Green (Treasurer)
Gemma Stapeley (Clerk)
Daniel Colborne (Ranger)
Clive Evans (Chairman of The Friends of the Commons)
Liz Ellicott (Rusthall Parish Council)
Paul Gripper (Rusthall Parish Council)

APOLOGIES

Cllr Alex Britcher-Allan
Stephen Lacey
Corin Thoday

MINUTES

The Warden was thanked for hosting an interesting walk on Rusthall Common, in advance of the meeting.

As this was the Warden's last meeting, before his retirement on 30th June, the Warden was thanked for all of his hard work and achievements on the Commons. There had been a retirement lunch and presentation held prior to the meeting, with the lunch kindly funded by the Freehold Tenants and Targetfollow. At the same event, Chris Woodward was thanked for his contribution as a Conservator and Committee member.

1. DECLARATION OF BUSINESS INTEREST

There were no business declarations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Britcher-Allan, Stephen Lacey and Corin Thoday.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 2022 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 4th April 2022, 9th May 2022 and 6th June 2022 were considered and approved and would also be signed by the Chairman.

5. MATTERS ARISING

From the last meeting on 24th March 2022

Commercial event proposal

PBurnett and AErrington had distributed a proposal ahead of the meeting. The proposal suggested that a Licence to Occupy should be issued for any formal request to use the Commons for example filming and photography and signage, in addition to fitness classes.

The purpose of the licence would be to:

- Regularise the use of the Common for any purpose other than private enjoyment.
- Allows a fee to be charged that can contribute to administration of the Licence as well as maintenance of the Common.
- Provide in the Licence for any user to make good any damage caused by their use of the Common.

Process for approval:

- Pre-agreed activities to be determined by Conservators meeting such as fitness classes, filming and photography requests and signage, this can then be implemented by the Manor of Rusthall along with the Clerk.
- Other activities outside scope of the proposal to be referred to all Conservators between meetings for comment, approval or otherwise then implemented by the Manor of Rusthall along with the Clerk.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Committee would be tasked with reviewing the effectiveness of the existing Licence to Occupy, with a view to adding additional activities in the future.

Action: Committee to review the Licence to Occupy for fitness classes and report back at the September meeting.

Recyclable separation

The Clerk confirmed that the general waste collected from the litter bins on both Commons was not pre-sorted to separate recyclables but was sent to an incinerator/energy from waste plant which produced electricity. Separate collections of dry mixed recyclables could be collected from the Commons, at a current rate of £5.68 per bin lift cheaper than general waste. However, to initiate a separate recyclable stream would involve installation of separate bins, a communications campaign to ensure appropriate use and significant time spent monitoring and managing. In the Clerk's view this is not something that we currently have resource for but could and should be considered for the future.

S106 requests

At the last meeting, the Clerk was asked to liaise with David Osbourne of the Freehold Tenants, to revisit and possibly rework the justification for the financial claim per dwelling within our S106 requests to the Planning Authority. The Clerk reported that she had sent details of her work to date to David and had just received a full proposal in return, which needed time to consider and evaluate. A meeting would be organised between the Clerk and David, to discuss further.

Action: Clerk to revert to all Conservators with further information at the next meeting.

Friends' new website

The new website is available here: <https://www.friendstothecommons.org/>
CEvans explained that the joint website did not meet the needs of the Friends.

6. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden reported that minor tree problems continued to cause issues on the Commons with damaged limbs failing under the weight of foliage. During the first six weeks of the quarter very little rain fell, with evaporation in the strong sunlight and strong north-easterly winds resulting in shrinking ponds. Of particular concern for its future viability, was Cabbage Stalk Lane Pond, which dried out before the tadpoles could reach maturity. The first cut of the amenity grass contract was also challenging in areas, due to the dry conditions causing the uprooting of clumps of grass from the dust, rather than cutting.

In mid-May, this changed, with periods of rain and rising temperatures causing vegetation to grow rapidly and ponds and their tadpole and newt populations to recover. However, the amenity grass contract is still highlighting problems, with areas missed and poor cutting, the Ranger will focus on resolving these issues.

Routine works have now commenced, focusing on safety issues initially. Sightlines at road junctions, main pedestrian crossing points and the first cut of the road verges with the hedging flail have been completed. Main paths will now be cut, leading to the annual clearance of all paths and tracks.

The drainage restoration project and bench refurbishment work has been delayed for various reasons. A number of new commemorative benches have been installed and some old benches have been adopted and restored under the new scheme.

In his final report to Conservators, the Warden thanked everyone for their support and friendship and noted "Thank you all for thirty wonderfully happy years".

Action: Ranger to work through the issues with the current grass cutting arrangements.

7. CLERK'S REPORT

Volunteers

The Clerk noted that there had been three community litter picks since the last meeting, on 9th April, 30th April and 28th May. There are currently five volunteers litter picking on the Commons as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Law365 completed a morning of litter picking on Tunbridge Wells Common as part of their corporate volunteering time and AXA will be litter picking on Thursday 23rd June. The Clerk has been promoting corporate volunteering opportunities on the Common on the Facebook group and during talks and has been contacted by Cripps LLP and KCC Highways to discuss further.

The Community Payback group have been working on cutting back the path along Major York's Road, which was identified as a hazard in the Kent Police environmental visual audit (EVA). Having introduced them to the Ranger, as part of his induction, it was agreed that we would supply a list of ongoing projects to keep them motivated and provide future direction.

On 24th May, the Wells Free School completed a survey of newts in Fir Tree Pond and found 43 palmate newts and a possible great crested newt egg. To confirm the news of the great crested newt presence in the pond, the school plan to repeat the survey earlier next year to see if there are any juveniles or adult newts. The Warden confirmed there had never been great crested newts found in this pond.

Ranger Induction

The Clerk has worked hard on a full induction timetable for the Ranger to ensure that the handover time with the Warden is well utilised. The induction was approved by the Committee in advance and includes meetings with all contractors, Community Payback, Linden Park and Rusthall Cricket Club, Ian Beavis, Clive Evans, the forest schools, William Benson, LML's Ashleigh, our Treasurer, the archaeological dig site, the Friends of the Commons at two different events, Terry Hughes of the Community Safety team, the projects team and the wider Commons' community. The Warden has also been involved with a number of walks to discuss maintenance and wider management including sites of issue.

Planning

In addition to the comments on the planning applications as listed in agenda item 14, the Clerk has managed the Conservators' response to the deregistration application for the area of land along Eridge Road, linked to planning application 21/03298/FULL. If the application is approved, the Commons Conservators would receive £8,000 in S106 funds and £42,000 towards improvements to Tunbridge Wells Common, within VG22.

The Clerk has been on a two-day training course with the Open Spaces Society (OSS) titled Protecting Commons, Greens and Open Spaces. It was very worthwhile, providing invaluable information and guidance. As an organisation, the Commons Conservators have now joined the OSS to provide ongoing information, updates and to ensure we have their support for future.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC)

In securing good links with TWBC, the Clerk and Warden continue to meet monthly with William Benson. The Clerk and Warden have all started monthly guided 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.

On the 22nd April the Clerk presented at a TWBC Members' Briefing, introducing the Commons, our legislation, funding, management, projects and areas of focus. Members in attendance were asked to help support the Commons in various ways and reacted very positively.

Other information

- The Clerk has managed the office move out of the Town Hall, with files, equipment and small furniture transferred to the TWBC storage lock up on 9th June.
- On 13th June, the Clerk and Ranger met with Rusthall Parish Council (RPC) Officers to commence use of the new part time office. We are very grateful to RPC for their generosity.
- Our higher-level environmental stewardship agreement has been extended for a further 12 months, the Warden has signed and agreed to the prescriptions for 2022/23.

Requests to Conservators

Since the last meeting on 24th March the following requests have been put to the Conservators, their outcomes are listed:

Date of request	Detail	Outcome
03/05/2022	Rusthall school fair signage.	Approved.
17/05/2022	Tunbridge Wells Badminton Club end of year picnic on the lower cricket pitch.	Approved.

8. FINANCE REPORT, ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND STATUTORY ANNUAL RETURN 2021/22

Annual Financial Statement

The Treasurer presented the annual financial statement of the Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators for the year ended 31st March 2022. In comparison to budget, income was up against budget by £1.7k because of income from the Rural Payments Agency and amounts totalling £0.3k received from Lloyds Bank as compensation for slow processing of new mandates. Salaries were up against budget by £10.9k primarily because of the delayed retirement of the Warden less the Treasurer not requiring payment. Other Expenses were over budget primarily because of the legal fees of £5k expensed/accrued for the work re Eridge Road deregistration. The various costs of maintenance of the commons are difficult to budget for at times and although there are several overs and unders, the total costs of the main work are marginally over budget by £2.8k.

In comparison to the income statement for year ending 31st March 2021, income was down £19.4k reflecting that:

- The Freehold Tenant and Friends' projects were paid directly by them.
- There was no planning income.
- There was no income from Natural England (the finance report was inaccurate in that Natural England and Rural Payments Agency are in fact one and the same).

The precept increased in line with inflation.

As above Other Expenses were over budget primarily because of the legal fees of £5k expensed/accrued for the work re Eridge Road deregistration. The costs of the maintenance of the Commons in 2021/22 was like that in 2020/21, except for storm damage and Ash Die Back, meaning an increase in spend of £19.2k.

Internal audit and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) forms

Mid Kent Audit have completed the annual internal audit, following Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The auditors were unable to answer positively for objectives M and N as the Conservators didn't comply with the publication requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, a notice of the period for the exercise of public records was not published before the required date of 1 July 2021, due to lack of handover from the previous Treasurer.

The auditors also suggested some areas for improvement as follows:

- Introduction of a salary review policy.
- Update of documentation to reflect change from petty cash to expenses. (Completed)
- Consideration of a formal written Reserves of Finance Policy.

The Conservators formally adopted and approved the annual financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2022 and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) forms.

Action: The Clerk to organise signing of the AGAR forms and upload to the website, to be completed by 1st July.

Action: The Treasurer to submit the AGAR forms to the external auditor.

Action: The Treasurer and Clerk to action/organise outstanding recommendations from the internal audit – salary review policy and reserves policy.

Estimate of current financial position

On 14th June 2022, the Conservators had some £118,500 in cash at bank and on deposit, which is £15,500 less than this time last year.

IMarshall asked whether other external funding opportunities were being explored, the Clerk confirmed that an application was due to be submitted to the Sussex Lund in mid-July.

9. UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

Membership

Currently 550, 17 more than reported at the March 2022 meeting.

Projects for 2022

The new path to the Marlpit ponds will be extended beyond the original specification, at a cost of a further £1,000. This work will take place in the Summer. The removable panel into the Toad Rock fencing has now been installed.

Events

There were two recent social gatherings for the Friends, the strawberry tea at the Spa Hotel on 1st June and the volunteers' thank you lunch at the Forum on 11th June. Both events were well received by those who attended.

10. MARKETING AND PR REPORT

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

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

11. SIGNAGE POLICY PROPOSAL

The Clerk had prepared a proposed criteria for advertising on the Commons, distributed to the Conservators in advance of the meeting. If a request complied with the criteria, the Clerk would be able to give permission, without seeking full Conservator approval.

The Clerk was given authority to approve advertising on the Commons if it fulfils the following criteria:

- It relates to a temporary event (no longer than one week).
- It relates to an event taking place on Tunbridge Wells or Rusthall Common.
- It relates to an event taking place in St Paul's Church.
- It relates to a relevant community event.
- If the event is in sympathy with the roles and legal obligations of the Conservators.
- Signage will not be displayed for more than two weeks.
- Conservators to be notified of approvals made by the Clerk.

12. EVENTS

There were no requests to be discussed at the meeting.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- vi. Linden Park Cricket Club (LPCC) – storage shed request

LPCC had made a request for permission to install a storage shed between the end of the clubhouse and the practise nets.

Conservators approved the request in principle but would need to approve the design and finer details, when available.

Action: The Clerk to communicate the Conservators' decision to LPCC representatives.

vii. Bracken Cottage

TWBC granted permission for works to extend Bracken Cottage, located on the boundary of Tunbridge Wells Common. Approval was granted on the 8th June 2021 (Ref: 21/01214/FULL). Mr Tony Trifiletti of Coleman Anderson Architects Ltd had made a request for the area of Common, in front of the property, to be used for building material and equipment storage and for the access track to be used for additional vehicles associated with the construction project.

Following lengthy discussion it was agreed that the Commons Conservators approved of the second version of the proposal, dated 10th June, subject to the following:

- Receipt of a copy of the contractors' public liability insurance.
- Receipt of risk assessment for vehicle movements and any other assessments for works or activities that will take place on the Common or impact the Commons or users of the Commons.
- A mitigation plan to be agreed with the Ranger and put in place to protect the pond from materials washing into the pond. This solution should address run-off down the access track, dragging materials from the surface of the track onto the surfaced public footpath, into the culvert and ultimately the pond.
- Provision of appropriate temporary signage to be located in the vicinity of the access track, to warn pedestrians of the vehicle movements, design/wording and placement to be approved by the Conservators in advance.
- Assurance that any damage to the Commons would be made good and funded by the property owners. Specifically, regarding the access track, preference would be given to full resurfacing/restoration of the track. The surface material/system must be approved and specified by the Conservators in advance.
- The Ranger for the Commons Conservators will carry out regular monitoring of the area during the build and will call a site meeting if he finds an issue.
- A holding deposit of £10,000 will be required before commencement of the works. A charge of £500 will be retained from this deposit to contribute towards the significant administration costs. The remaining deposit will be returned to the property owners upon completion of the works, less any amount necessary to rectify damage to the access track, pond or surrounding area that has not been made good to the agreed specification.
- The Conservators reserve their right to withdraw or suspend permission at any point if the above conditions are breached.

Action: The Clerk to communicate the Conservators' decision and terms to Mr Trifiletti.

viii. Lighting on Fairground car park

IMarshall asked on progress with the project to install lighting on Fairground car park. PBurnett confirmed that the planning application was due to be submitted to the Planning Authority.

14. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

22/01092/LBC | Demolition of existing side extension. Proposed single storey rear and side extensions. Proposed external and internal alterations to existing building. Proposed hard and soft landscaping. | The Edgcumbe The Common Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 8BX. Update: original application withdrawn, as the proposed side extension would have been an encroachment onto the Village Green and therefore illegal. The revised version had just been submitted at the time of the meeting.

22/01317/FULL Addition of new flat roof infill to form roof terrace, conversion of existing integral garage to living accommodation and the reconfiguration of the basement. | Romanoff Lodge Castle Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 8BY. Response on behalf of the Commons Conservators:

The Commons Conservators have appreciated open discussions with the applicant regarding their application. The Conservators had initial concerns that the roof terrace and garden furniture used on it, would have a visual impact on the Commons. However, the applicant has provided plans of the terrace that have alleviated those concerns. As with all developments on or adjacent to the Commons, the Conservators would like to remind the applicant that the land surrounding the property is part of Tunbridge Wells Common and 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.

22/00774/FULL | Proposed erection of a single storey detached building to house restored cold bath with wellness suite and a two-storey guest accommodation building and two x temporary 'Iglu' buildings to also provide guest accommodate. Proposals also seek retrospective consent for Amphitheatre together with associated works. | Beacon Hotel Tea Garden Lane Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN3 9JH. Full response on behalf of the Commons Conservators was circulated with the meeting documents.

MEETING ENDED

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 22nd September 2022 at 2pm.

Agreed Actions

Agenda Item	Detail	Responsibility	Progress/update
3&4	Chairman to sign the minutes of the previous meetings and send to the Clerk.	Chairman	Complete
5	To review the Licence to Occupy for fitness classes and report back at the September meeting.	Committee	
5	Discuss findings of the S106 request review with all Conservators.	Clerk	
6	Work on issues and problems with the grass cutting arrangements.	Ranger	
8	Organise signing of the AGAR forms and upload to the website, to be completed by 1 st July.	Clerk	Complete
8	Submit the AGAR forms to the external auditor.	Treasurer	Complete
8	Action/organise outstanding recommendations from the internal audit – salary review policy and reserves policy.	Treasurer and Clerk	

13	Communicate Conservator decisions to the relevant parties.	Clerk	Complete
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