

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

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on 22nd September 2022 at 2pm

PRESENT:

John Barber
Cllr Martin Brice
Ewen Cameron (Chairman)
Amii Errington
Stephen Lacey
Ian Marshall
Chris McHugh
Cllr Justine Rutland
Clare Sinha
Corin Thoday

ATTENDING:

Daniel Colborne (Ranger)
Alan Leale-Green (Treasurer)
Gemma Stapeley (Clerk)
Cllr Paul Gripper (Rusthall Parish Council)
Joy Podbury (The Friends of the Commons)

APOLOGIES

Paul Burnett
Cllr Nicholas Pope

MINUTES

Conservators were invited to attend a pre-meeting walk on Tunbridge Wells Common, led by the Clerk and Ranger, to highlight items relevant to the meeting and to discuss possible projects.

1. DECLARATION OF BUSINESS INTEREST

There were no business declarations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Paul Burnett and Cllr Nicholas Pope. Joy Podbury was attending on behalf of Clive Evans.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 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 July 2022 and 5th September 2022 were considered and approved and would also be signed by the Chairman.

5. MATTERS ARISING

From the last meeting on 23rd June 2022

Commercial event proposal

Following discussions at the 5th July Committee meeting, the Clerk was asked to conduct a review of the existing fitness class licensing system to establish whether events and filming/photography could be added at a later stage. The Clerk has now completed the review and will feedback to the Committee at their 3rd October meeting.

S106

David Osbourne of the Freehold Tenants has written a paper supporting an increase in our S106 requests, based on Ashdown Forest's SANGs and SAMMs policies (see background reading here: <https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/protecting-ashdown-forest>). David Osborne brought the paper to the Councillors' attention and the reaction to it highlighted the importance of good quality survey data, to justify the level of protection and management of the Commons. IMarshall suggested that David Osbourne should present his paper to Conservators at the next meeting, a proposal agreed by the Conservators.

IMarshall queried whether we were still waiting for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Planning Department to release S106 money, linked to Union House. The Clerk explained that despite chasing David Scully in five emails between May and August of 2022 and asking William Benson to investigate, the money was not being made available. The project that the money was due to fund was being reconsidered by the Ranger, so it was not causing delays, however it was clearly a point of principle and a concern for the release for future S106 money.

Action: The Clerk to continue to chase and consider a new strategy to obtain the S106 money.

Grass cutting problems

The Ranger has worked with our contractor, Bridgland, to resolve a number of issues with the quality of the cutting. He will continue to monitor the situation and liaise with Bridgland again if required.

AGAR and audit

All forms were signed on time, uploaded to the website and sent to the external auditor. At the time of the meeting we await feedback from the external auditor. Two of the recommendations of the internal audit were development of a reserves policy and a salary review policy. The reserves policy is now a working document while the salary review policy was included under agenda item A14, for Conservator approval.

Linden Park Cricket Club shed proposal

The Clerk confirmed that although another version of the drawings had been submitted by the Club, it did not contain any further information to justify circulation to Conservators at this time. Further detailed drawings had been requested and a planning application was pending.

Fairground Car Park

Targetfollow have submitted a planning application for the lighting on Fairground car park, 22/02262/FULL, the application is currently awaiting decision.

Use of the Town Hall for future meetings

The terms of any future booking arrangements need to be organised via Town Square who now manage the Town Hall.

Councillor Conservators

IMarshall queried whether a fourth Councillor Conservator had yet been appointed, to join Cllr Martine Brice, Cllr Nick Pope and Cllr Justine Rutland. The Clerk confirmed that she had been contacted by Democratic Services with details of the new Conservator, but that until the full Council meeting to be held on the evening of the 22nd September, she was not at liberty to give out the details.

6. DATES OF PROPOSED FUTURE 2023 MEETINGS

The agenda contained proposed dates for the year ahead, following a similar schedule to previous years. However, the Treasurer requested that these dates be reviewed so that the quarterly meetings took place after a quarter end rather than before so that the financial accounts can be prepared with fewer estimates. He explained that there was no information about meeting scheduling in the County of Kent Act 1981 and that the budget didn't need to be prepared for early December but would indeed be more accurate if scheduled for February.

Conservators agreed that the scheduling should be reviewed, and all agreed that the dates could be moved.

Action: The Clerk to research the historical minutes to determine the reason for current meeting scheduling. The Clerk and Treasurer to consider and propose revised dates for Conservator approval.

7. RANGER'S REPORT

Health and Safety

The Ranger reported no health and safety accidents or incidents during the previous quarter and explained that he was reviewing and expanding the existing risk assessments for his role.

Tree safety and surveys

Due to the extremely dry weather throughout the year, it is clear that the impact and severity of ash dieback, affecting ash trees on the Commons, has increased. The Ranger has been surveying the condition of the trees since his arrival in June. Each ash tree has been marked on a digital map with their own note describing their location, condition and how it is being prioritised for future remedial work/removal.

In addition to ash dieback, the Ranger explained that the pre-meeting walk had set the context of his concerns about the condition of many other trees, noting that all trees, including side path trees would now be assessed and managed. The Ranger had initially sought permission from the Committee to enlist assistance from a tree consultant to produce an independent survey to assure the approach already being taken, ensuring appropriate prioritisation and sequencing for the required tree works. However, when an initial meeting with the consultant was held, the consultant stated that he felt that the Ranger's approach and methodology was clearly robust, based upon a good knowledge and experience of tree safety surveying and within the National Tree Council/government guidelines for managing ash dieback. It was therefore agreed that instead of helping to carry out the detailed survey itself, the consultant would meet with the Ranger and undertake guided walks on the Commons to provide specific advice regarding all trees along the roads and main paths and the Ranger would explain his plans and scheduling in full detail. The consultant would be asked to provide his professional opinion on the robustness of the surveys and subsequent decision making and the Ranger would also explain the strategy for formalising and progressing his knowledge and qualifications.

The Ranger has prioritised a significant amount of emergency tree work across both Commons, including removal of a number of trees along Tea Garden Lane. Work starts on trees along the Tarry Path in Rusthall on 20th September, to remove a significant number of overhanging trees and several ash trees will be removed by the bus stop on the left-hand side of the road at the entrance to Langton Green as part of this project. This operation will take 4 days and a full specification for each tree being worked upon is being provided to the contractor in advance

of the works. In addition a series of public information articles and notices is being produced for the local press to ensure that the reasoned justification for the works is in the public domain.

Further significant tree work will be required along the Rusthall Road, Langton Road and Tea Garden Lane this Autumn and Winter. There will also be work taking place on individual ash trees on Hungershall Park, Harmony Street, Apsley Street and Mount Ephraim. The work schedule (A7ii) has been updated in terms of anticipated work required for the next financial quarter and quarter four. Conservative estimates have been made in relation to anticipated costs for dealing with ash die-back before the end of this financial year. However, it must be stressed that the costs may be significantly higher. Once full quotes have been obtained these estimates will be properly revised and the implications will be explained for proper consideration at a later meeting.

Discussion with Conservators concluded that the tree work justified a very good case to use the financial reserves and that the Ranger should make everyone aware if costs are estimated in excess of this, when full quotes are received.

Grass Management

Drought conditions meant that less grass management was required during the quarter. This was especially the case in August when no cuts were needed. However, there are additional areas that need cutting for ecological reasons this autumn so this saving may be allocated for further flail mow collecting. This will be given further thought, especially in light of the additional ash die-back budgetary pressures.

There were some quality issues with the cut along London Road in early July due to the prevalence of plantain stalks. This has been discussed with the contractor for future consideration and monitoring.

The flail mower cutting style in Rusthall has been amended slightly in order to allow ecological and minor aesthetic changes. These received positive feedback from the public without increasing the costs.

The next grass/verge cut has been scheduled to take place over the last two weeks of September. A reduced cut will also be considered for October as appropriate depending upon how weather conditions will have affected growth rates etc.

In terms of grass management contracts, the Ranger has carefully considered the current financial climate and has concluded that it would be prudent to continue with existing contracts for an additional year from 1st April 2023, Conservators agreed and asked the Ranger to discuss options with Bridgland.

Action: Ranger to discuss options for a further extension of the grass cutting contract with Bridgland for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Volunteers

Community Payback have been helping to clear brambles from the gorse hedge near Wellington Rocks. They have been extremely effective and made a significant difference. The payback team have also been cutting back cherry laurel and sycamore saplings at Happy Valley. Additional projects are under consideration in consultation with them as we go into winter.

Other individuals are now coming forward offering their assistance with ecological related tasks. The Ranger has met with several and more meetings are being arranged. Small working parties have helped with the control of invasive pond weeds. Volunteering opportunities have been detailed in the local publications that the Ranger has written for recently.

Anti-social behaviour issues

Fire/BBQs - The issue of fires and disposable BBQs was a very serious concern for the safety of wildlife, habitat, people and property during this period. Considerable evidence of BBQs was obvious, and patrols were put in place in an attempt to make it as clear as possible that there would be a zero-tolerance approach. The Fire Brigade were called on at least one occasion. Climate change is now causing extremes of weather which will present increasingly chaotic and difficult issues. Planning for this is an important factor that the Clerk and the Ranger are aware of going forward.

Graffiti - Graffiti is and will always be an ongoing issue but an inexpensive product has been identified and is now being used to good effect. This will reduce our reliance upon external contractors and the associated costs of removal and/or repainting of bins etc.

Car break-ins - There was evidence of a break-in of a vehicle in Fir Tree car park during the first week of September. This is not something that we routinely monitor but is perhaps a concern that we should raise with the police in terms of data collection to inform decisions, for example whether warning signage is appropriate.

Dog Issues - It was brought to the Ranger's attention on several occasions during the last few weeks that dogs have been hurt by other dogs that had attacked them. In particular this occurred twice in Happy Valley from a dog which is known to the owner to be dangerous, but that is not kept on a lead.

8. CLERK'S REPORT

Ecological surveys and management plan

The Clerk reported that the current Management Plan was adopted by the Conservators in March 2017. There is renewed enthusiasm for a more relevant, defined and workable plan to take the Commons forward for the next five years.

The Ranger and Clerk have been liaising with ecologist Kate Ryland (Dolphin Ecological Services) and had a very successful site visit on 9th September. Kate is a very well-respected ecologist and along with having worked with the Ranger at Crowborough Town Council, has worked with many organisations including Brighton & Hove Council, Petersfield Heath, South Downs National Park and Tenterden Town Council.

All will be very aware of our severe shortage of ecological survey data to assist in the planning of future projects and management of the Commons. As such Kate would be able to help create a coordinated plan to prepare all of the background research, implement surveys (with experts that she recommends) and create a robust and workable 5-year management plan.

Kate is proposing data gathering takes place during the coming Autumn and Winter of 2022/23, including existing survey data (e.g., Ian Beavis' data), historical records and management plans, photographs and postcards. She will then help us to identify appropriate biological surveys to take place in 2023. Getting targeted survey results should help with decisions on what the overall management objectives should be, which habitats are in good condition for their important species, and which need work to enhance them. By the autumn of 2023 we would have collated data, new survey data and engagement with all the stakeholders over the management strategy and objectives. Kate will then be in a position to assist us in putting together a management plan based on sound data with community and stakeholder support.

Conservators gave permission to progress the project and it was noted that the Freehold Tenants and Friends of the Commons would be delighted to fund some of the work.

Benches

- 8 benches around Linden Park CC (LPCC) and Wellington Rocks have been refurbished using Conservator budget.
- A further 8 benches have been refurbished using materials and manpower provided by LPCC to whom we are most grateful.
- We are hoping to completely refurbish the two very poor condition benches adjacent to Belleville on Tunbridge Wells Common and to move the bench by Thackeray's further away from the busy main road, subject to budget.

Volunteers

Since the last meeting, there have been three successful community clear up events held on the Commons, on 25th June, 9th August and 6th September, the latter included a deep clean of glass between the joints in Wellington Rocks. AXA have completed two sessions of litter picking as part of their corporate volunteering in the community.

Introductions

The Clerk and Ranger have met with many of the Commons' stakeholders, interested parties and neighbours to both introduce the Ranger and better understand their interests and involvement on the Commons. Meetings have included Greg Clark, Borough Council Officers, The Friends of the Commons, Cllr Liz Ellicott, Kent High Weald Partnership, Hospice in the Weald and many residents from neighbouring properties.

Other

- The Funding and Projects group have continued to meet and make good progress. Minutes of these meetings are available on request.
- Since the last meeting, the Clerk has hosted two walks for the Borough Council Officers, supported by the Ranger. Officers in attendance were from the Planning Department, Health Team and Property Department which resulted in very valuable connections and conversations taking place.
- The Clerk continues to meet monthly with William Benson.
- South East In-Bloom judging took place on 30th June and 13th July. The awards ceremony was due to take place on 13th September but has been delayed due to the national mourning period and was rescheduled for 23rd September.

Requests to Conservators

Since the last meeting on 23rd June, the following requests have been put to the Conservators, their outcomes are listed:

Date of request	Detail	Outcome
07/2022	Nuffield fitness class requests.	Approved, but didn't go ahead.

9. FINANCE REPORT

The Treasurer presented an estimate of the financial position on 30th September 2022. On 13th September the Conservators had some £74,200 in cash at the bank of which £73,000 is on deposit. This is £17,600 less than this time last year.

The accounts show that expenditure is currently £15,200 under budget. However, as indicated in the Management Plan Work Schedule, a conservative estimate for next quarter's expenditure is £42,421 compared to a budget of £24,625 which will bring the surplus into a deficit of £2,600.

At the time of the meeting the Treasurer was awaiting notification of the conclusion of the external audit by PKF Littlejohn LLP, the audit has now concluded, and the final report has been received.

Conservators approved the finance report and agreed that it can be published on the website.

10. UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

Memberships

The current memberships stand at 550.

Projects for 2022

The Friends have funded some additional clearance work to enhance the St Paul's Forest School area on Rusthall Common, this was to provide more light into the space and to ensure surrounding trees were safe.

The new path to the Marlitt ponds will be extended beyond the original specification, at a cost of a further £1,000. This work was due to take place in the Summer however the contractor is holding up this project and has been chased many times by the Ranger.

The new website for the Friends of the Commons is up and running and has been well received.

The Friends have funded high visibility tabards for the volunteers and the Ranger is also looking to see if we need extra equipment for the volunteer parties which are now continuing throughout the year. We have budgeted for this in our next year account

Events

AGM – 28th September 2022 at Linden Park Cricket Pavilion.

Committee

Sadly, Lynne Lane, who organises the Wildchild! Forest School experiences and volunteer lunches is leaving the committee. Her efforts in this field have been immense and she will be hard to replace. The secretary, Terry Coulthard is giving up the secretarial role but will continue to organise the two social gatherings. The new secretary will be announced at the AGM.

Action: The Friends have previously agreed to fund tools required for the volunteer work parties. The Ranger was reminded to submit the tool list.

11. MARKETING AND PR REPORT

The report highlighted that there had been three articles in the Times of Tunbridge Wells during the quarter, on 29th June (introduction to the new Ranger), 10th August (warning of fire risk on the Commons) and 21 September (work on trees affected by ash dieback).

The Facebook group now has 1,841 members and monthly reactions from members between 1,400 and 1,600. The most popular posts, during the quarter, related to:

1. Removal of graffiti from the Commons' bins by the Ranger and Clerk.
2. Refurbishment of benches.
3. Hummingbird hawk moth spotted.
4. Markings/graffiti on Wellington Rocks made by radio-controlled car group.
5. Signage to warn people using the Common not to light fires/BBQs or drop lit cigarettes.

The Instagram account has 215 followers, while the website has monthly users of between 400 and 600. Two blogs had been published during the last quarter which had both informed and pushed visitors to the website.

12. SIGNAGE REVIEW

The Clerk and Ranger had prepared a paper in advance of the meeting, which included photographs of the current signage on the Commons. It clearly illustrated that signage was cluttered, confusing, not accessible or clear for non-English speakers, children etc. The paper included recommendations for a standard design of visually led signage with images and reduced wording, without diluting the key messages.

JRutland raised the issue of the actual danger from dropped cigarette butts and, following discussion with the Ranger, it was clear that this should be included as one of the key messages on the signs. Could we incorporate QR codes?

Conservators approved the Clerk's request to progress the project.

Action: The Clerk to progress the signage review project and update Conservators at the next meeting.

13. EVENTS AND SIGNAGE

Request from Julian Leefe-Griffiths

Mr Leefe-Griffiths, of the Tunbridge Wells Hotel, was refreshing permission from Conservators to allow him to put up marketing signage for Pantiles events on the area of Tunbridge Wells Common, adjacent to the Pantiles. The Clerk suggested that fixed concrete sign footings might be less damaging to the land.

Conservators approved the signage request and agreed in principle to the sign footings, subject to approving the design and style.

14. SALARY REVIEW POLICY

One of the recommendations of the internal audit was the production of a salary review policy, to formalise the processes that were already taking place. The Committee produced a draft document for the meeting and the Conservators approved the document.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. Sale of the Commons and Pantiles

The Commons and Pantiles are currently listed on the Targetfollow website as being on the market for offers around £40m. IMarshall asked if there was an update and CThoday explained that the Common is an asset of Community Interest and that if it was sold it would need to be advertised in the local press.

ii. Notices on the Commons

IMarshall queried the new signage outside properties on Bishop's Down Road stating "Private Parking for Flat/House by order of the Manor of Rusthall". CThoday wasn't aware of any new signage but the Treasurer confirmed that there had been signage in this location for many years.

Action: CThoday to investigate the new signage in question and feedback to Conservators.

iii. Change to Freehold Tenant Conservators

JBarber has taken the decision to step down as a Conservator and as such he was thanked for all of his hard work and extensive contributions as one time Chair of the Friends, Freehold Tenant and Conservator. JBarber commented that the Commons were a huge benefit to the whole community and thanked all those who gave up their time to help look after it.

Chris McHugh has agreed to stand as a Conservator again and was welcomed back by all.

iv. Common View grass cutting

The Ranger confirmed to PGripper that the grass on Common View was due to be cut on Friday 23rd September.

v. Large maps of the Commons

The Freehold Tenants were funding large, poster sized, prints of the Commons that could be used to help identify specific areas of the Commons during future discussions.

vi. A264/Langton Road crossing

JRutland asked whether there was an update on the much needed A264 crossing. Rusthall Parish Council had taken up the lead on this project and had reported at their Finance Committee meeting in March 2022 that UKPN and SE Water had estimated a total of £125,000 for the works and they were still awaiting a cost from Virgin Media. This puts the project in the region of £170,000 which far exceeded expectations. The project was put on hold in the medium term.

vii. Forum disabled access

JRutland queried whether this project had moved forward. The Clerk explained that the Forum were due to be investigating plans with their contractors and architects and to date hadn't provided further feedback to the Clerk.

Action: Clerk to discuss progress on the Forum disabled access projects with Jason Dormon and Richard Simm.

viii. Memorial tree planting for Her Majesty the Queen

The Clerk has been contacted by Peter Blackwell, who coordinated the Platinum Jubilee tree planting, to ask for permission to investigate the planting of a memorial tree on the Common. Conservators approved the request.

ix. Planning concerns

IMarshall raised concern that Bracken Cottage contractors were storing bricks on the Common. It was noted that there was no formal agreement covering all originally proposed terms, due to a breakdown in communication relating to the financial deposit request. However, storing materials on the Common had been part of the original request and was something that was agreed to. The bricks are currently being stored under a tree and were not thought to be causing significant concern, but he will continue to monitor.

Action: The Ranger to continue to monitor the impact of the Bracken Cottage extension project.

The Treasurer raised concern that contractors working for Park View House were driving onto footpaths on the Common.

Action: The Clerk to notify the Park View House contractors that they cannot drive onto the Common.

14. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

22/01576/FULL | Demolition of 110 existing residential units and existing garages and construction of 146 new residential units (Use Class C3) with associated vehicular and pedestrian access, car parking, cycle parking, refuse storage and other associated works including servicing and landscaping, works to public highways, public realm improvements and a new sub-station | Showfields Estate Showfields Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent. The Clerk submitted a S106 request of £7,200 to help mitigate against increased recreational pressure.

22/02260/FULL | Conversion of existing offices into 4No. flats | The Lodge On The Common London Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN2 5BF. The Clerk submitted an objection to the application.

22/02439/FULL | Conversion of the two existing flats to two semi-detached houses, demolition of the existing rear projection, erection of new two storey rear extension and associated works. | 25A Eridge Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 8HJ. Response on behalf of the Commons Conservators as follows: The Commons Conservators would like to remind the applicant that the grass at the front of the property is part of Tunbridge Wells Common and is registered as Village Green (VG22) as such no materials, tools or equipment can be stored on the land and no vehicles can park on the grass. For further information please see www.twcommons.org

22/02304/FULL | The redevelopment of the former Cinema Site comprising the demolition of no. 41 Mount Pleasant Road, removal of existing hardstanding and the provision of an extra care retirement community comprising extra care accommodation together with associated facilities (Use Class C2), new commercial floorspace Use Classes E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d) (soft/indoor play only) E(e), E(g i& ii) & Sui Generis Uses (beauty related uses and drinking establishments); access; landscaping, public realm improvement works; engineering and earthworks; associated infrastructure; and the re-alignment of Public Right of Way ref WBX17 and extinguishment of Public Right of Way ref WBX18. | Former ABC Cinema Site Mount Pleasant Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1PN. The Clerk submitted a S106 request of £33,200 to help mitigate against increased recreational pressure.

MEETING ENDED

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 8th December at 2pm on Zoom.

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 continue to chase and consider a new strategy to obtain the outstanding S106 money held by TWBC Planning.	Clerk	
6	To research the historical minutes to determine the reason for current meeting scheduling.	Clerk	To bring the final meeting of each year forward to December in order to agree the precept before the end of the year, as required by the

	To consider and propose revised dates for Conservator approval.	Clerk and Treasurer	County of Kent Act 1981. The precept can be agreed at an October meeting. Dates proposed as 26 th January, 27 th April, 13 th July and 19 th October. To be discussed at the Committee meeting of 3 rd October.
7	To discuss options for a further extension of the grass cutting contract with Bridgland for the period 1 st April 2023 to 31 st March 2024.	Ranger	
10	The Friends have previously agreed to fund tools required for the volunteer work parties. The Ranger was reminded to submit the tool list.	Ranger	List submitted to Clive Evans on 28 th September.
12	To progress the signage review project and update Conservators at the next meeting.	Clerk	
15ii	To investigate the new signage in question and feedback to Conservators.	CThoday	
15vii	To discuss progress on the Forum disabled access projects with Jason Dormon and Richard Simm.	Clerk	Meeting scheduled for 10 th October.
15ix	Continue to monitor the impact of the Bracken Cottage extension project.	Ranger	
15ix	To notify the Park View House contractors that they cannot drive onto the Common.	Clerk	Completed

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held via videoconference on 8th December 2022 at 2pm

PRESENT:

Cllr Martin Brice
Paul Burnett
Ewen Cameron (Chairman)
Amii Errington
Stephen Lacey
Ian Marshall
Chris McHugh
Cllr Nicholas Pope
Cllr Justine Rutland
Clare Sinha
Corin Thoday

ATTENDING:

Daniel Colborne (Ranger)
Alan Leale-Green (Treasurer)
Gemma Stapeley (Clerk)
Clive Evans (The Friends of the Commons)

APOLOGIES

Cllr Jamie Johnson

MINUTES

1. DECLARATION OF BUSINESS INTEREST

There were no business declarations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Jamie Johnson.

3. PRECEPT 2023/24 APPROVAL

RPI showed an annual increase of 12.6% in September 2022, based on this year's precept of £175,890 the Conservators can request a precept for 2023/24 of £198,052. Conservators approved the precept request to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC).

Action: The Clerk to notify TWBC of their precept request.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. Draft building and development work affecting the Commons policy

In advance of the meeting, the Clerk had circulated a draft policy document. The policy was approved by the Conservators.

Action: The Clerk to upload the document to the website.

ii. Planning permission – Fairground car park lighting

PBurnett confirmed that permission had been granted for the installation of lighting in Fairground car park. Conservators have only approved the installation of two out of the three sets of lights, should the final set be considered necessary then further approval will be sought from the Conservators before installation.

iii. Annual review

CSinha explained that annual reviews would be taking place on Wednesday 4th January 2023. As such she would imminently be sending round an email request for general thoughts and feedback on successes and areas for improvement, officer performance and priorities for 2023.

iv. Meeting room bookings for 2023

Meeting room hire at the Town Hall has now become cost prohibitive, based on the new room charges from Town Square, who manage the rooms on behalf of TWBC. The Clerk has booked the Rackliff Centre in Rusthall and proposed booking a room in The Amelia Scott. It was decided that this might be considered for the September 2023 meeting, subject to further consideration.

MEETING ENDED

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 26th January 2023 at 2pm on Zoom.