

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Committee Room A on Thursday 26 January 2012 at 2.00pm

- PRESENT: Ian Marshall (Retiring Chairman)
Cllr Barbara Cobbold (Incoming Chairman)
Sarah Bird
Mungo Chapman
Chris Jones
Kate Sander
Cllr James Scholes
Cllr Victor Webb
- APOLOGIES: Nathan Dickinson
Peter Freeman
Andrew Gower
- ATTENDING: Rodney Stone (Clerk)
Geoff Levitt (Treasurer)
Steve Budden (Warden)
Julia Woodgate (Support Officer)
Jennifer Blackburn (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons)
John Barber (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons)
- OBSERVING: Maria Simmons

MINUTES

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

In accordance with the third schedule of the County of Kent Act 1981 it was noted that the Conservators were required at the first meeting held on or after 1 January each year to appoint a Chairman for the ensuing year.

RESOLVED – That Barbara Cobbold, representative of the Borough Council, be appointed as Chairman until the annual meeting of the Conservators in January 2013.

BARBARA COBBOLD IN THE CHAIR

The Chairman thanked Ian Marshall for his excellent work as Chairman and expressed her appreciation for all he had done.

2. **MEMBERSHIP**

The Chairman reported that the under mentioned Conservators had been appointed by the bodies specified to serve for the period indicated.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:

Cllr Barbara Cobbold)	
Cllr Victor Webb)	one year term ending
Cllr Catherine Mayhew)	31 December 2012
Cllr James Scholes)	

Freehold Tenants:

Mungo Chapman)	
Peter Freeman)	3rd year of three year term until
Ian Marshall)	31 December 2012
Kate Sander)	

Manor of Rusthall:

Sarah Bird)	
Andrew Gower)	2nd year of three year term until 31
Chris Jones)	December 2013
Nathan Dickinson)	

3. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS 2012/13**

RESOLVED – That the meetings of the Commons Conservators be held at 2.00pm on the following dates:

19 April 2012
12 July 2012
25 October 2012
31 January 2013

4. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2011 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

5. **MATTERS ARISING**

a) **Beacon Hotel sign**

It was pointed out that, although permission was granted at the previous meeting for a temporary addition to the Beacon Hotel sign for the Christmas period, there had recently been a rash of small white signs stuck all the way down the post.

RESOLVED. The owner of the Beacon Hotel to be instructed to remove them.

b) **Mount Edgcumbe Hotel**

It was noted that the Hotel was in new ownership and was expected to reopen by Easter.

c) **Interpretative Signs**

The Warden to discover whether KHWP intend to renew the signs.

6. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Warden reported that the recent high winds had caused very few problems with trees on the Commons, which is a result of his policy of active inspection of the trees near roadsides and footpaths so potential problems are dealt with before they arise. It also vindicates the management plan policy of pushing back roadside trees.

He noted that the posts had been installed at Still Green and had been well received, and that funding was now in place for the double kerb in Harmony Street, due to be installed in February.

The next few weeks, until the start of the nesting season, will see the bulk of the annual tree work take place.

7. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 3 2011/12 showing total payments of £51,055.25 and receipts of £68,593.26.

RESOLVED – that the report be approved.

8. **PROPOSED BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2012/13**

The Treasurer told the meeting that there was great pressure on public finances although the rate of inflation has started to fall. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council are not planning to give any pay increases this year, so the Treasurer recommended that the Conservators should not increase the pay of their officers either.

As the grasscutting contract and litter contract were not finalised, he has kept the budget for these two at the same level as the previous year, but increased the contingency to cover any unexpected increases. The budgets for tree work and maintenance of cleared areas have increased, as this work is essential, but this has been offset by small savings elsewhere.

Interest rates continue to be exceptionally low, but a small grant is paid under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

The formula would allow for an increase in the precept of 5.6% but, in view of the Borough Council's financial position and their past support, and the fact that reserves can be maintained within prudent levels, the Treasurer recommended that the precept should be kept at the same rate as last year.

RESOLVED – that the proposed budget for 2012/13 be approved. Proposed by Ian Marshall, seconded by Victor Webb

RESOLVED – that the precept of £128,000 be approved.

9. GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT

Discussion held to end of meeting for confidentiality.

10. LITTER CONTRACT

Discussion held to end of meeting for confidentiality.

11. FREEHOLD TENANTS' PROJECTS

The Warden reported that the Freehold Tenants have been very generous over the years and have indicated their willingness to fund five projects in 2012:

- a) Desilt central portion of Brighton Lake. Preparation would take place during the summer with the work being carried out in the autumn in order to cause as little disturbance as possible to wildlife. Spoil will be stored behind a barrier to drain and dry out, and then be used as fertiliser for roadside hedging;
- b) Continue large clearance between London Road and Castle Road to rear of Highbury and Stranges Avenue retaining roadside trees as a screen. Stumps to be ground out for ease of future maintenance;
- c) Open up blocked part of Lower Terrace Walk behind Brighton Lake;
- d) Create new clearance at top of 101 Steps;
- e) Create new path to link Sweeps Cave path to Beacon Hotel ending in flight of steps.

RESOLVED – to approve the proposed projects with gratitude.

John Barber, for the Friends of the Commons, stated that the Friends wished to plant two oak trees for the Diamond Jubilee, one on each Common. He also thanked Sarah Bird for her assistance in obtaining five free trees from KHWP; they have been planted near Mount Ephraim.

RESOLVED – to approve the project with gratitude.

Cllr Scholes requested that a press release about these projects be sent to the Courier.

John Barber informed the meeting of the death of Patrick Shovelton, the founder of the Friends. The Clerk added that he had had an enormous role in transforming the Conservators into the forward looking and outgoing body they now are.

RESOLVED. To write to Dame Helena Shovelton to express the sympathy of the Conservators.

12. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

A proposal to develop educational resources for the Commons has been drawn up by Kent High Weald Project, to include a range of option including loanable kits for schools and local groups, eTrail nature trail, childrens' events, school clubs, etc. The project would be run by KHWP and the Friends would apply for funding as the anomalous position of the Conservators means they do not meet the criteria for most grant applications. It was suggested that some of the initiatives (for example, designated walks) should be suitable for all Commons users.

Cllr Scholes offered to help obtain a grant from KCC.

AGREED. To support KHWP in their development of educational resources for the Commons.

13. RUSTHALL WAR MEMORIAL

A group from Rusthall wish to renovate the War Memorial which has become very neglected, and are applying for grants for this purpose.

RESOLVED. To allow the renovation to take place.

14. HOSPICE IN THE WEALD 10K RUN

RESOLVED. To allow the run to take place on 16 September 2012 on the same basis as in previous years.

15. FUNFAIR

Another funfair has requested permission to use the Lower Cricket Pitch as part of the Jubilee celebrations.

RESOLVED. To refuse permission for a funfair to take place on the Common.

16. NURSERY SCHOOL

As the annual review of the nursery school was required, the meeting expressed their support for the school and felt that its existence enhanced the Common. It had led to very few problems.

RESOLVED. To grant indefinite permission for the school to continue, and to cease annual reviews; the subject to be revisited only if problems arise.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Roadside car parking

The Clerk reported that the Borough Council is conducting a review of street parking and has invited the Conservators to nominate those areas that need further yellow lines. Both the bend in Hungershall Park and the top of Major Yorks Road are long running problems and it was noted that roads on the Common should not allow all day parking so that the spaces are free for Commons users. The Conservators were asked to feed in any further thoughts to the office.

b) Diamond Jubilee

The Clerk requested suggestions for ways of marking the Jubilee. As the Friends are to plant commemorative trees and a bonfire is to be lit on the Lower Cricket Pitch, it was felt that the event was being marked. There are no suitable sites for further avenues or circles of trees, unless Stranges Avenue was to be replaced.

c) Bishops Down Road

A member of the public has requested that a footpath be installed along the grass verge as parking on the opposite side forces pedestrians to walk into the road. It was thought unnecessary as the road is not busy enough for pedestrians to require protection, and a footpath on the opposite side would require them to cross the road twice.

d) Sunnyside Road

The Warden reported that parking is starting to encroach onto the Common as most of the posts have been knocked over. He recommended installing taller posts in the original positions, possibly with reflective bands. This would cost £2,950. The turning area would remain. The intention would be to protect

residents' parking while preventing parking by shoppers and stopping delivery vans being driven across the Common

RESOLVED. To allow the posts on condition that the residents have been consulted and are in favour.

e) Helicopter landings.

Targetfollow have received several requests lately to land private helicopters on the cricket pitch. The meeting agreed that the Air Ambulance should always be given priority, and safety issues should also be considered. It was suggested that applicants should be referred to the Spa Hotel, who, it is believed, have a landing pad.

RESOLVED. To refuse permission for private helicopters to land unless the Air Ambulance service no longer need it and there is no landing pad at the Spa Hotel.

f) Easement.

Targetfollow has received an application from a householder in Harmony Street to remove the bollards that were installed to prevent parking on the Common, and to grant an easement to use the driveway again. It was pointed out that an easement gives the right to pass and repass, but the householders have nowhere to park their cars, and will therefore continue to use the drive as a car park if an easement is granted. It was pointed out that the bollards will be removed shortly and double kerbing installed which will prevent any future access.

RESOLVED. Not to allow an easement for this drive.

18. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Clerk pointed out that the applications are listed for information only as they have already been responded to. The Chairman indicated that, for her year in the Chair, she will take part in any Conservators' discussions that may be necessary. This would mean she will not discuss these applications as part of the Western Area Planning Committee.

Linden Park Cricket Club - removal of limited time condition on previous permission. Wrote to indicate Conservators have no objection.

23 Upper Street, Rusthall – paving over front garden. Wrote to point out previous application for parking bay.

Applications received but not commented on:

13 Lower Green Road – demolition of garage and erection of extension.

John Barber, Jennifer Blackburn and Maria Simmons left the meeting at this point.

19. **GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT**

Three tenders have been received and the Warden distributed a spreadsheet showing the details. The Clerk confirmed that the Conservators were not obliged to take the lowest tender, but needed to seek value for money, and therefore the involvement of the Warden in managing the contract must be considered.

RESOLVED. To award the three year grasscutting contract to G Bridgland Ltd. Proposed by Ian Marshall, seconded by Mungo Chapman.

20. **LITTER CONTRACT**

The Warden reported that the new litter contractor, Oakbourne, was doing an excellent job and the Common was now cleaner than it had been for several years.

The Warden was concerned that, at the current rate of payment, he may find it difficult to continue at the same level of commitment.

RESOLVED. To award a three year contract to Oakbourne and to authorise the Warden, Clerk and Chairman to negotiate a fair rate of payment.

21. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on 19 April 2012 at 2.00 p.m.