

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Minutes of a meeting held in Meeting Room A on Thursday 20 October 2011 at 2.00pm

PRESENT:

Ian Marshall (Chairman)
Sarah Bird
Mungo Chapman
Cllr Barbara Cobbold
Peter Freeman
Andrew Gower
Cllr Catherine Mayhew
Kate Sander
Cllr Victor Webb

APOLOGIES:

Nathan Dickinson
Chris Jones
Cllr James Scholes

ATTENDING:

Rodney Stone (Clerk)
Geoff Levitt (Treasurer)
Steve Budden (Warden)
Julia Woodgate (Support Officer)
Jennifer Blackburn (Rusthall Parish Council)
John Barber (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons)

OBSERVING:

Maria Simmons
Samantha Payne

MINUTES

1. MEMBERSHIP

It was formally noted that Nathan Dickinson is the new Conservator representing the Manor of Rusthall.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2011 were considered, approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

3. **MATTERS ARISING**

a) **Parking on corner of Harmony Street and Upper Street**

The Warden confirmed that this was not an issue for the Conservators.

b) **The Tempest**

It was noted that the open air production had not taken place at Wellington Rocks due to lack of time, but they are hoping to put it on next year when they will start preparation earlier.

c) **Tunbridge Wells in Bloom**

The Warden reported that he had met the judges of the competition on the Common and spoken briefly about the management.

4. **WARDEN'S REPORT**

The Warden reported that the problem over the cricket club fence was resolved for the time being, as some concrete posts had been moved from behind the clubhouse to replace the broken ones, while others had been patched. There should be no further work necessary for two or three years. All the work was done by the cricket club. It was suggested that the cricket club should be encouraged to start making provision now for their replacement.

The Friends have generously funded the purchase of three new litter bins and three new dog bag dispensers which will be installed shortly. The Friends' volunteers have started their winter work parties by clearing around Wellington Rocks.

The first month with the new litter picker has gone well, even though he has had to clear a number of unusually large rough sleepers' camps.

The Warden reported that he took a group of around twenty people on a walk for Heritage Open Days in September, and has given several illustrated talks to local groups.

The lime trees outside the Spa Hotel are diseased, and one was removed earlier in the year when it split in half revealing a totally rotten heart. The remaining two trees may have to be felled, but they will be pollarded if they can be saved. The Warden is awaiting expert opinion.

Rusthall Cricket Club is considering installing showers in the club house, a necessary upgrade if they want to join a league. There are no plans yet, but the Conservators indicated a willingness in principle to allow an upgrade.

Peter Freeman arrived at this point

5. **ACCOUNTS AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Treasurer submitted Financial Statement No 2 2011/12 showing total payments of £12,118.97 and total receipts of £1,044.67 which include a substantial donation from British Military Fitness and a contribution from the cricket club towards car park repairs.

The projections for the rest of the year are mostly unchanged as most of the works occur in the second half of the year. The litter projection has been amended because the new litter picker is not registered for VAT. Offsetting that is the fact that the previous contractor will be entitled to an RPI increase of 5.3%, not 4% as budgeted. This is also the case for the grass cutting contract.

The Clerk reported that, at his quarterly meeting with the Chief Executive, they were reminded that council tax will be frozen next year and the council are hoping that the Conservators will bear this in mind when setting the precept. The mechanism would allow an increase of 5.6%. The Treasurer will speak to the Head of Finance and Governance before setting out his recommendations.

RESOLVED. To approve the Financial Statement for the period ended 30 September 2011.

6. **HARMONY STREET**

At the previous meeting, the Conservators agreed to tolerate the encroachment at Harmony Street but prevent further erosion to the bank. The Warden has met several experts and recommended that a double kerb should be installed. The first kerb would fill the eroded trench at the side of the road and enable cars to park on it, while the second kerb, installed upright, would protect the bank from further erosion. He has received two quotes, one for conservation grade kerbs, at £9,150 + VAT, and one for ordinary kerbs, at £6,125 + VAT.

This approach has the support of Cllr Maria Simmons from Rusthall Parish Council who has been leading the campaign to remove the posts and replace them with a permanent and more user friendly solution.

Councillors John Davies from KCC and Bob Atwood, leader of TWBC, have been approached as they offered funding at a public meeting in the spring, but nothing has yet been arranged. Mrs Blackburn, Chairman of Rusthall Parish Council, invited the Conservators to submit an application to them for funding although it was not clear that any would be available.

RESOLVED. To install double kerbing along the length of Harmony Street on the opposite side from Toad Rock if funding can be arranged.

Once the work has been carried out, notes will be placed on the windscreens of cars parking on the Toad Rock side advising them that they must not park on the grass.

7. **STILL GREEN**

The Chairman reminded the meeting that the problem of the potentially dangerous parking area created by the illegal tipping of hardcore into the valley has been unresolved for three years. The Conservators agreed at their last meeting to install posts at the end of Woodside Road, closing the area completely.

However, as the original area has been there for many years, it is only the recent addition that appears to be unstable, so the Warden is proposing to install concrete filled steel posts at the edge of the original area. This would preserve a turning circle and should therefore be more acceptable to residents. He has obtained a quote for £1,162 + VAT for the work.

RESOLVED. To write, including a map, to all residents explaining what is planned prior to installing posts at the edge of the original turning area.

8. **ENCROACHMENT POLICY**

The Clerk presented the implementation documents to support the agreed Encroachment Policy. The Chairman thanked the Freehold Tenants who have done most of the work to draw up these documents.

RESOLVED. To accept the implementation documents with minor changes and authorise the officers and Freehold Tenants to put them into practice.

9. **DIAMOND JUBILEE BEACON**

The Queen wishes 2,012 beacons to be lit around the country on 4 June 2012 to celebrate her Jubilee. The preferred option of TWBC is to have a bonfire on the Lower Cricket Ground. The Council have undertaken to do all the work and to make good the damage afterwards.

RESOLVED. To allow the bonfire on condition that the Warden is consulted on, and agrees to, every detail, that the undertakings are given in writing, and that the Council has adequate insurance to cover any damage.

10. **GRASSCUTTING CONTRACT**

The last five year contract is now coming to an end, so the contract will be put out to tender as soon as possible. The Warden and Treasurer believe that the contract should be for three years, with an option to extend for a further two years, although they will take into account the views of the interested firms.

RESOLVED. To advertise the contract and invite those applicants who match the list of criteria to submit a tender.

11. **EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

The Conservators have been approached by Dr Malcom Grant who wishes to promote the educational use of the Commons by developing teaching materials for schools.

RESOLVED. To support Dr Grant if TWBC or Kent High Weald Project wish to commission him to develop the materials.

12. **SAXONS ORIENTEERING**

RESOLVED. To allow orienteering events to continue to be held on the Commons indefinitely.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

a) Beacon Hotel

RESOLVED. To allow the hotel to add a Christmas sign to their existing sign on Langton Road, subject to the Warden being satisfied by the design.

b) Mount Edgcumbe Hotel

It was noted that the hotel had closed, and that the new owner should be advised not to place picnic tables on the Common.

c) Interpretative signs

It was noted that the signs put in by Kent High Weald Project are now unreadable.

RESOLVED. To invite KHWP to renew their information; otherwise to replace with spare copies of the Friends map.

d) Footpath from Major Yorks Road to Fairground car park

KCC have agreed to patch the worst part of the path.

e) Friends of Hawkenbury Church

Cllr Cobbold reported that she had given a talk on the work of the Commons. The group were very interested, and intend to ask the Warden to give them a further talk with slides. They gave a donation to support No 1 Community Centre at Showfields.

14. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Royal Wells Inn – conversion of staff accommodation to 6 guest bedrooms. Wrote to point out that no parking provision had been made.

Plant and Tools site, Eridge Road – 56 flats and 10 houses. Wrote to request mitigation payment be used on Commons.

Outside Spa Hotel – installation of broadband cabinet. Wrote to support planner in their decision, and noted that this position was preferable to the previous plan.

Applications received but not commented on:

The Pantiles Hotel – relocation of alarm box

Luigi's Hand Wash – further details

The next meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. on 26 January 2012 in Committee Room A.