



CONSERVATORS' PUBLIC MEETING
to be held on
Monday 3 April 2023 at 4.30pm
in the Wimbledon Common Golf Club, Camp Road
SW19 4UW

AGENDA

PART A(1) PUBLIC

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|-----------------|---|---------|
| 04.23.1 | Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence | |
| 04.23.2 | Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests in Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting | |
| 04.23.3 | Election of Chairman of the Board of Conservators | |
| 04.23.4 | WPCC Board Meetings | |
| | i. Resolutions of the Board Meeting of
13 February 2023 | Page 1 |
| | ii. Minutes of the Part A(1) Board Meeting of 13 February 2023 | Page 2 |
| 04.23.5 | Matters Arising | Page 10 |
| 04.23.6 | Levy for 2023/24 | Page 11 |
| 04.23.7 | Chief Executive's Report – Non-Confidential Items | Page 28 |
| 04.23.8 | Fundraising Update | Page 38 |
| 04.23.9 | Land Management Plan | Page 39 |
| 04.23.10 | Conservation Update | Page 75 |
| 04.23.11 | Update on the Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons | Verbal |
| 04.23.12 | WPCC Forum/Group Meetings | |
| | No matters to report | |
| 04.23.13 | Public Questions on Matters Considered in Part A(1) of this Meeting | |
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CONSERVATORS' CONFIDENTIAL MEETING
to be held on
Monday 3 April 2023 at 4.30pm
in the Wimbledon Common Golf Club, Camp Road
SW19 4UW

AGENDA

PART A(2) CONFIDENTIAL

In accordance with the Resolution from the Board meeting held on 12 July 2021, this part of the meeting is considered confidential and therefore closed to members of the public.

- 04.23.14 Declarations of Interest**
- 04.23.15 WPCC Board Meetings**
 - i. Minutes of the Board Meeting of 13 February 2023
- 04.23.16 Matters Arising**
- 04.23.17 Committee Business**
No matters to discuss under this item
- 04.23.18 Licences and Leases**
- 04.23.19 Putney Lower Common Facilities**
- 04.23.20 Business Plan Update**
- 04.23.21 Election Date and Appointment of Returning Officer**
- 04.23.22 Management Reports and Accounts:**
 - a) January 2023
 - b) February 2023
- 04.23.23 Chief Executive's Report – Confidential Items**
- 04.23.24 Constitutional Matters**
- 04.23.25 Fundraising Update**
- 04.23.26 Top Ten Risks**
- 04.23.27 Draft Minutes/Notes**
To receive
 - i. Draft notes of the Stakeholder meeting held on 14 December 2022
 - ii. Draft Minutes of the Constitution Committee held on 28 February 2023
 - iii. Draft minutes of the Finance and Investment Committee held on 24 January 2023
- 04.23.28 Items for future consideration**
- 04.23.29 Items for Inclusion in a Media Release by the Board**



Wimbledon and Putney Commons
Recommendations and Resolutions
agreed at the Board Meeting held
on Monday 13 February 2023 at 4.30pm

Part A1 Public

There were no Resolutions taken at this part of the meeting.

Part A2 Confidential

02.23.17 Committee Business

Resolution

The Board approved the amendment to the FIC Terms of Reference.

02.23.19 Public consultation on Masterplan and Levy

Resolution

The Board

- i. approved the Masterplan/levy consultation report prepared by the independent consultant and agreed that the report should be published on the WPCC website.
- ii. agreed that the draft Wimbledon Putney Commons Masterplan be amended to reflect the consultation survey responses and the letters received in response to the consultation.

Present

Conservators: Mrs Diane Neil Mills, Chairman

Mrs Sue Bucknall
Mr Oliver Bennett
Mr Peter Hirsch
Mr David Hince
Mr Peter Shortt
Mr Nigel Ware

Officers:

Mr Stephen Bound, Chief Executive
Mrs Angela Evans-Hill, EA to Chief Executive and Communications Officer
Mr Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer (for Part A1)

Apologies:

Mr Michael Johnston, Conservator
Ms Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk and Ranger
Mrs Maggie May, Fundraising Manager

**Draft Public Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on
Monday 13 February 2023 at 4.30pm at the Wimbledon Common Golf Club, Camp
Road, London SW19 4UW**

Conservators: Mrs Diane Neil Mills, Chairman (DNM)
Mr Oliver Bennett (OB)
Mrs Sue Bucknall (SB)
Mr David Hince (DH)
Mr Peter Hirsch (PDH)
Mr Peter Shortt (PS)
Mr Nigel Ware (NW)

Officers: Steve Bound, Chief Executive (CE)
Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer
Angela Evans-Hill, EA to Chief Executive/Communications
Officer (EA to CE/CO)

Members of the public: Four members of the public attended.

ITEM		ACTIONS
02.23.1	<p>Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies were received from:</p> <p>Mr Michael Johnston, Conservator Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk and Ranger. Maggie May, Fundraising Manager</p>	
	<p>The Chairman began by expressing the Board's sadness at the passing of Sir Robert Andrew, a past MoD appointed Conservator. He was a long-standing Conservator, having served for 36 years from 1973 to 2009.</p> <p>Sir Robert had, despite being in his 90s, remained active, attending the 150th anniversary event at the House of Commons in July 2022 and the Conservators' Dinner in October 2022. He would be deeply missed.</p> <p>The funeral was scheduled for 2.30pm on 8 March 2023 and all were welcome to attend.</p>	
02.23.2	<p>Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests in Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting</p> <p>None</p>	
02.23.3	WPCC Board Meetings	

	The Resolutions of the Board meeting held on 12 December 2022, and the Minutes of Part A(1) of the Board Meeting held on 12 December 2022 were approved.	
10.22.4	Matters Arising The Board noted the report on Matters Arising. There were no further comments.	
02.23.5	Levy The Board noted the Chief Executive's report. The Chairman reported that confirmation of the Council Tax base and the per household rate for 2023/24 had been received from the local Councils. The levy for the average (Band D) property would be £35.96 for the year, which represented an increase of £3.82 per household per annum on 2022/23, or 32p per month. The increase reflected the decision taken in December 2022 to increase the levy by the September 2022 RPI, the maximum allowable under the 1990 levy regulations. The Conservators had given a great deal of consideration to the matter in view of the current cost of living crisis. A letter had been received from the Leader of Wandsworth Council, Cllr Simon Hogg, setting out his opposition to the Board's decision. The Chairman had circulated the letter to all Conservators, also setting out the procedure necessary should any Conservators wish to reconsider and revoke the decision. No requests for the matter to be considered were received and therefore the increase remained agreed. In respect of responding to Cllr Hogg, the Chairman would draft a response, explaining further the reasons for the decision and that none of the Conservators had made a request to reconsider the matter. As Councillor Hogg's letter had been published on Wandsworth Council's website, this had been picked up by some local press and a brief response from WPCC had been provided. WPCC's practice was not to publish letters of this nature or share them with the media when being sent to the recipient. In response to a question, it was noted that it was not possible for WPCC to ask the Council to keep the letter confidential because Wandsworth Council was considered a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and even if WPCC requested that the letter be considered confidential, this exemption (if it applied) would be subject to the public interest test and it was felt that it would very much be in the public interest for the letter to be disclosed. It was also noted that some of the Conservators had received a copy of the Councillor's letter via their personal e-mail accounts and the Chairman would address this matter in her reply. A copy of the draft letter would be circulated to Conservators for comment.	

	<p>A meeting had also been held with Merton Council on 8 February 2023 at which Merton had remained concerned about the proposed 2023/24 increase and also that the levy was included in their Council Tax “ceiling”. If so, their Council Tax income would drop by some £26,000.</p> <p>With regard to the re-basing of the levy, at the meeting, Merton did not express a single view. There were mixed views on the potential confusion from the inclusion of WPCC’s levy in the council tax invoice as well as more general concerns about the collection mechanism.</p> <p>In response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that at present the effect of the ceiling was a bigger issue for Merton than either Wandsworth or Kingston Councils. It was agreed that a further meeting would be held with Kingston Council as this issue had not been considered when they last met.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>It was agreed that the Chairman would prepare a letter to Councillor Simon Hogg in response to his letter of 24 January 2023 setting out the basis for WPCC’s decision regarding the 2023/24 levy increase.</p>	DNM
02.23.6	<p>Chief Executive’s Report – Non-Confidential Items</p> <p>The Board noted the Chief Executive’s report.</p> <p>Walk and Talk/Healthy Walks</p> <p>The Chairman and the Chief Executive met with representatives of the Walk and Talk Movement, a Merton based CIC who organise group walks in open spaces with the aim of improving physical and mental health and combating loneliness. They currently have walks taking place in a number of open spaces in Merton but would like to organise a regular walk on the Commons. They carried their own public liability insurance and the walks were led by trained volunteers.</p> <p>WPCC’s Conservation and Engagement Officer previously organised and led a programme of Healthy Walks, but these had not taken place since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. The Walk and Talk Movement events appear to be a suitable alternative which place no demand on staff time. The walks are held nationwide and all take place at 10.30am on Saturdays. As this might clash with Parkrun traffic, there would need to be some thought given to a suitable meeting point, preferably one that people could reach on foot.</p> <p>The Board were supportive of the walks.</p> <p>Management Accountant Appointment</p> <p>The Chief Executive reported that terms had been agreed with the preferred candidate. The contract was currently being finalised and should be signed in the next few days. A hand over meeting needed to be arranged with NW.</p>	SB/NW

	<p>New members of the Stakeholder Forum</p> <p>Following attempts to secure greater representation from Putney and Roehampton on the Stakeholder Group, the following have been appointed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carey Botting – who represents a Residents Association in Roehampton (the Chairman advised that Cary Botting was known to her socially). • Angus Robertson – who represents Alton Action, a group established to provide the residents of the Alton Estate with a voice in future plans for the estate. <p>Crooked Billet Consultation</p> <p>Young’s had been in touch to advise that they wished to renew the licence to put deck chairs on the Commons outside the Crooked Billet. However, before offering a new agreement, it had been agreed that a public consultation on the pub’s use of the land would be undertaken. This would need to be put in place in the next few weeks.</p> <p>The consultation materials would be based on those used by WPCC when gathering views on the Spencer benches, with members of the public being able to provide responses via an online survey or a Freepost postcard.</p> <p>The fee would be based on the previous year, increased by RPI.</p>	SB/AEH
02.23.7	<p>Fundraising Update</p> <p>The Board noted the Fundraising Manager’s report and the CE reported in her absence.</p> <p>Several grant applications had been submitted for path restoration works. The public appeal to raise the match finding had now raised some £11,500, halfway towards the £24,000 target.</p> <p>The Community Orchard at Putney Lower Common had now been planted with 10 of the 12 trees having been sponsored. A new sign would be installed to explain the value of the orchard and the varieties used. A community event was being arranged for Sunday 5 March 2023. Concern was expressed about the wooden frames around the trees but it was noted that they would only be in place until the trees were established.</p> <p>Donations from the donation car parking machine were starting to decrease. New clearer signage and posters were being designed with a harder ask to promote the donation scheme to drivers.</p> <p>The Board wished to record their appreciation to Maggie May for her success, particularly with the path appeal and the orchard appeal.</p>	

<p>02.23.8</p>	<p>Land Management Plan</p> <p>The Conservation and Engagement Officer reported that all operational chapters had been written and passed to the Wildlife and Conservation forum for comment. A meeting of the forum was being held on 24 February 2023 to discuss the work so far and to also prepare summaries for each chapter which would also include the key actions. These would provide the basis for the document that the Board would eventually approve.</p> <p>The Board expressed their delight at the involvement of many of the volunteers and the level of their feedback.</p>	
<p>02.23.9</p>	<p>Conservation Update</p> <p>The Board noted the Conservation and Engagement Officer’s report.</p> <p>He mentioned the following points:</p> <p>Holly thinning – The work had finished for this year. Since the work started in 2016, over 40 hectares of woodland had been thinned of holly, with 10% of holly being left in each area cleared. This work had opened up the woodland, creating glades and generally letting in more light to allow the flora in the understorey to regenerate.</p> <p>The most recent work had been in the Stag Bog valley mire system to significantly open that up. Another key part of the work was to improve the safety of visitors to the Commons, particularly around the edges of the golf course where sight lines had been improved.</p> <p>The Maintenance Team had been working on Lower Gravelly Ride, opening up the ride to allow light in and improve the biodiversity along the woodland edge. Mature trees had been left as they provided a valuable habitat in their own right. The cut timber was either left to rot down or buried to provide habitat for invertebrates. The latter was particularly good for stag beetles. Some wood was also moved to other sites across the Commons to create habitats.</p> <p>The team had also been working in Stag Bog, clearing some more of the trees which were used on site to create dams. Dead hedging had also been created to help keep visitors away from the area whilst it recovered.</p> <p>Volunteers continued to work on Putney Heath clearing the scrub. Work had also continued cutting back invasive trees around the edge of the small meadow that was located close to the southern section of Centre Path.</p> <p>OB commented that he was preparing some communications on the work being carried out on the mires that could be shared on social media once the areas had started to recover.</p>	

	It was confirmed that the bog feasibility study was well underway.	
02.23.10	<p>Update on the Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons</p> <p>SB gave a verbal update on the Friends.</p> <p>Friends membership was still going well with 585 members. A few members had been lost recently so a membership drive was planned, including some new signs for the notice boards.</p> <p>The Friends Committee was working on a number of forthcoming events, starting with a Zoom talk by Alan Blower on Wednesday 15 February 2023. Following up on the 150th Anniversary Games Day, the talk went into more detail about the history of sports and games played on the Commons. The Conservation and Engagement Officer would be taking the Friends on a Conservation walk in the Autumn.</p> <p>Several walks were being organised including a birdsong walk on 22 April 2023 and a summer walk led by Alan Blower and Nick Manning on the Grand Houses and Residents of Rushmere (date tbc).</p> <p>The Committee was currently working on some events to mark the King's coronation in May 2023.</p> <p>The first quarterly round of the Art on the Commons competition for 2022/23 would come to an end at the end of February 2023.</p>	
02.23.11	<p>WPCC Forum/Group Meetings</p> <p>The Board noted the draft notes of the Wildlife and Conservation Forum meeting held on 10 January 2023.</p> <p>The Board recorded its appreciation for the work of the Forum members, particularly in relation to the current work on the Land Management Plan.</p> <p>OB reported that a meeting was being held on 24 February 2023 with a representative of Citizen Zoo. They had recently reintroduced water vole at the Hogsmill and the meeting would discuss the possibility of reintroducing water vole in the Beverley Brook.</p> <p>The EA to CE/CO reported that Wimbledon Common had been nominated in the BBC Wildlife Magazine's best places to see wildlife. The public were encouraged to vote for their favourite and details would be circulated on social media and via an e-newsletter shortly.</p>	
02.23.12	<p>Calendar Update</p> <p>Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) - As the Chief Executive could not attend the ARC meeting currently scheduled for 7 March 2023 an alternative date would need to be arranged.</p>	AEH

	<p>Constitution Committee At the request of the Chairman, the date of the Constitution Committee meeting scheduled for 26 September 2023 had been brought forward a week to 19 September 2023.</p> <p>Updated meeting invitations would be sent out.</p> <p>The Board congratulated the team for organising a very successful Winter Talk on 7 February 2023 about the importance of ponds as a habitat. OB asked if the Commons could purchase some of the water testing kits that had been mentioned.</p>	<p>AEH</p>
<p>02.23.13</p>	<p>Public Questions on Matters Considered in Part A(1) of this Meeting</p> <p>Before opening the meeting for questions, the Chairman congratulated Windmill Trustee, Asif Malik, for a successful live interview about the Windmill on BBC London recently. A link would be circulated.</p> <p>Crooked Billett</p> <p>██████ was supportive of the Conservators raising money and entering into a licence with the Crooked Billet pub. ██████ did however raise a number of important points, which were addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ██████ questioned the arrangements of the Hand in Hand using the land adjacent to the pub; it was explained that the land in question was not owned by WPCC - ██████ questioned the potential for bias in the survey by customers of the pub; it was explained that WPCC’s experience with surveys of this nature were than non-clients were normally also prepared to participate in the survey and this would be monitored by WPCC in analysing the feedback - ██████ raised the issue of the pub taking responsibility for the impact on local residents including picking up all the detritus that gets left, including cigarette butts; it was agreed that this was an important point and would be addressed in the licence - ██████ raised the issue of the noise of the deckchairs being taken in and out with no consideration for the noise impact on local residents; it was agreed that this was also an important point and would be further investigated by WPCC <p>The Chairman thanked ██████ for taking time to come and express ██████ views. The decision by the Conservators to enter into a licence last year was prompted by a need to regularise the arrangements and a licence did allow the Conservators to set terms on which the permission would be granted, so this was a positive move. The Board undertook to grant the licence for one year, followed by a public consultation as this would give people the opportunity to give feedback on the arrangements so the points ██████ raised were very helpful.</p>	<p>AEH</p>

	<p>There were a number of considerations that need to be thought about, including the interference of other users of the Commons to enjoy the Commons, impact on the site and the noise issue and whether it was something appropriate for the Commons and did it facilitate people's ability to use the Commons. For example, the licence would stipulate that members of the public could make use of toilet facilities regardless of whether they were using the pub. This was important as WPCC did not provide any toilet facilities in this area of the Common.</p> <p>The CE commented that although the Hand in Hand could not demonstrate that they own the land they use, it was definitely not owned by the Conservators, the land was unregistered.</p>	
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The meeting finished at 5.40pm.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators Meeting	3 April 2024	04.23.5
Subject: Matters Arising from the Board meeting of 10 October 2022		Public
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons		For Decision and Information

Item	Action	Update
02.23.5 Levy	The Chairman would prepare a letter to Councillor Simon Hogg in response to his letter of 24 January 2023 setting out the basis for WPCC's decision regarding the 2023/24 levy increase.	Done
02.23.6 Chief Executive's Report	Management Accountant Appointment Contract was currently being finalised and should be signed in the next few days. A hand over meeting needed to be arranged with NW. Crooked Billet Consultation – carry out a public consultation on the use of the Common outside the Crooked Billet for deckchairs.	Contract now signed, a handover meeting had been held and the successful candidate has started work. Completed and results in the April CE Report.
02.23.12 Calendar Update	Send out meeting invitations when new ARC date agreed	Done.
02.23.13	Circulate link to BBC London interview with Asif Malik, Windmill Trustee	Done

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	3 April 2023	04.23.6
Subject: Levy	Public	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Decision and Information	
<h1>SUMMARY</h1>		
This report provides an update on matters relating to the Board's decision to increase the levy by RPI for 2023/24.		

2023/24 levy

In response to the Leader of Wandsworth Council's letter of 24 January 2023, which asked the Conservators to reconsider the 12.6% levy increase for 2023/24, the Chairman responded on 15 February 2023. In her letter (see Appendix 1), the Chairman explained the Board's decision to increase the levy by the maximum amount allowable, in particular emphasising that:

- i. The Board had given careful consideration to the increase in the current economic climate, giving due consideration to WPCC's financial situation of budget deficits, unplanned capital costs and the impact of inflation on WPCC's operating costs. The Board also considered the impact of the proposed inflationary cost (based on September 2022 RPI) on levy payers.
- ii. The Board had however received assurances from the local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC that any benefits and reductions to which residents are entitled for council tax purposes also applied to the levy.
- iii. Under charity law, the Conservators had a duty to act only in the best interests of the charity. This included a duty of prudence, ensuring that WPCC protected the charity's assets.
- iv. Under the 1871 Act, the Conservators had a duty to protect and preserve the Commons and make the Commons available for the purposes of recreation and exercise.
- v. In terms of the impact on households, the RPI increase for 2023/24 represented an additional payment of 32 pence per month for a 'Band D' property.

On 21 February 2023, Fleur Anderson MP for Putney wrote to the Chairman setting out her opposition to the Board's decision to increase in the levy by RPI and asking that Conservators reconsider the decision (see Appendix 2). The MP was particularly concerned about the impact of the levy increase on households in the most deprived part of Wandsworth. On 7 March 2023, the Chairman sent a letter in response (Appendix 3) in

which she explained that she understood the MP's concerns for households that were struggling. The Chairman also explained the basis for the increase and also requested a meeting to discuss the proposed rebasing of the levy. A meeting with Fleur Anderson MP has now been scheduled for 18 April 2023.

On 16 February 2023, the Chair of the Putney Society wrote to the Leader of Wandsworth Council criticising the position he had taken on WPCC's proposed RPI increase (Appendix 4) with particular criticism of the political pressure that was being applied to WPCC. In response to an invitation from WPCC to understand the Putney Society's views on the rebasing of the levy, the Chairman and Chief Executive met with the Chairman of the Putney Society and the Convenor of the Putney Society's Open Spaces Panel on 7 March 2023. In the meeting, the Putney Society reiterated their support for WPCC's decision to increase the levy by RPI. They also reiterated their support for WPCC's longer term proposal to rebase the levy but stressed the need for WPCC to engage with some of the less well-off levy payers who may be least able to afford an increase.

In addition, a local independent Wandsworth Councillor had contacted WPCC asking for an explanation of the basis of the rise, a detailed response to which was sent on 26 February 2023. The Councillor had subsequently published a supportive article about the proposed 2023/24 increase in the levy in his newsletter (Appendix 5).

Following the meeting on 8 February 2023 with officers and councillors of Merton Council, including the Leader and Deputy Leader of Merton Council, the Leader of the Council sent a letter to WPCC setting out the Council's opposition to the proposed increase and also stating that he felt the arrangements for collection of the levy were not fit for purpose (Appendix 6). A response to this letter was sent by the Chairman on 2 March 2023 (Appendix 7) explaining the basis for WPCC's decision. A joint statement by the Leaders of the two councils (LB Wandsworth and LB Merton) criticising the increase in the levy was posted on LB Merton's website on 14 February 2023.



Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Councillor Simon Hogg
Leader of the Council
Leader's Room, The Town Hall
Wandsworth High Street
London SW18 2PU

15 February 2023

Dear Councillor Hogg,

Re: Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC)

Thank you very much for your letter dated 24 January 2023 and in particular for your kind remarks regarding the standard of care that is provided for Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common (together known as 'the Commons').

Your letter sets out your opposition to the proposed increase in WPCC's levy from £32.14 per year in 2022/23 to £35.96 per year in 2023/24, representing an increase of 32 pence per month for a Band D property.

In addressing the concerns set out in your letter, I thought it might be helpful to explain the constitutional and regulatory framework that governs the Commons.

Under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 that established the Commons, the Conservators have a duty to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise. In addition, the Conservators are trustees of the charity that owns and manages Wimbledon and Putney Commons. Under charity law, the Conservators have a duty to act only in the best interests of the charity. Conservators also have a duty of prudence, which includes a responsibility to protect the charity's assets.

These statutory responsibilities include caring for both the natural and built environments: ensuring that the landscape and buildings are properly maintained and protected from irreversible decline and that the path network allows visitors to access the Commons. This framework is quite distinct from the statutory and regulatory framework in which local authorities in England operate.

The 1871 Act established a levy, paid by the local community, as the principal way in which the Commons are to be funded. The 1990 regulations governing the levy for the management of Wimbledon and Putney Commons allow the Conservators to raise the levy by RPI each year. Although there have been many years in the past in which the Conservators elected not to increase the levy to its maximum level permitted under legislation, given the Conservators' statutory duties and the continued pressure on operational budgets, the Conservators took the decision in December 2016 and again in 2020 to set the levy at the maximum level permitted for the following five-year period.

Despite this resolution, given the recent significant increase in RPI, the Conservators felt it was important to review this decision before setting the levy for 2023/24, which they did at their December 2022 Board meeting. Consideration was given to the current rise in the cost of living and the impact on residents,

particularly those who were already struggling financially. The Board had however received reassurance from the local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC that the benefits and reductions to which residents were entitled for the purposes of council tax also applied to the levy.

Board members were also however very aware of, and concerned about, the increases experienced in WPCC's capital and operational costs as a result of the recent increases in inflation and the impact of such increases on WPCC's operational budget. Despite continued restraint on expenditure, WPCC was operating a deficit budget in 2022/23 and this was unlikely to change in 2023/24, particularly given the increasing inflationary pressures. The Conservators fully recognised that a budget deficit was not sustainable and have been seeking ways of addressing this very difficult financial situation with urgency. Although WPCC has recently bolstered its fundraising capacity to support the delivery of capital projects, the operating budget will continue to rely on WPCC's regular income stream, in which the levy is the key component. In light of this, and given the considerations noted above, the Board's view was that it would be neither prudent nor in the best interests of the charity to propose an increase in the levy that was below the maximum permitted under the 1990 regulations.

As was explained to you during our meeting, to address the deteriorating financial situation, in 2018, the Conservators embarked upon a review of the constitution to, inter alia, investigate an amendment to the levy. In support of this initiative, a public consultation exercise was carried out in late 2022, during a period of very high inflation, to test support for an increase in the levy in principle. The consultation received overwhelming public support, a reflection of the great affection that is felt by the community for the Commons and a recognition of the importance of properly caring for and maintaining this special open space.

In response to your request for the Conservators to reconsider the proposed increase in the levy for 2023/24, I sent a copy of your letter and a notification to all Conservators of the legislative procedures governing the revocation of Board resolutions that would enable the Board to reconsider the matter. No request from Conservators for the matter to be reconsidered was received. As such, WPCC's levy for 2023/24 remains as per the formal notification of 23 January 2023 of £35.96 per year (£3.00 per month) for a Band D property.

Your letter reaffirms Wandsworth Council's commitment to delivering high quality services at low prices, a principle that both the Conservators and staff fully endorse. There is therefore no doubt in our belief that the Band D levy for 2023/24 of £3 per month represents outstanding value for levy-payers.

On a separate point, your letter was copied to all Conservators and the Chief Executive of WPCC. It appears however that the letter was sent via personal email addresses to a number of Conservators, which is somewhat concerning. In accordance with the policy stated on WPCC's website, any correspondence for the attention of Conservators is to be sent via the Ranger's Office. In order for any potential personal data issues to be understood, it would be helpful if you could please explain the basis on which you hold the personal email addresses of a number of Conservators. I would also ask that in the future, you please direct any correspondence for the Conservators' attention to the email address stated on our website at <https://www.wpcc.org.uk/contact-us/contact-us>.

Thank you very much.

Kind regards,



Diane Neil Mills
Chairman of Wimbledon and Putney Commons



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Diane Neil Mills
The Ranger's Office
Manor Cottage
Windmill Road
London
SW19 5NR

21 February 2023

Dear Diane,

Re: Wimbledon & Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC) Levy

I hope you are well. I am writing to you as I understand that the WPCC are intending to increase the levy charges to residents by the maximum 12.6%. If this is correct, I am extremely concerned over how this will impact upon families at this time of a cost-of-living crisis, particularly those residents in Roehampton ward, which remains the most deprived ward in the entire borough of Wandsworth.

My postbag in parliament and my email inbox is now dominated by constituents' worries over the rising cost of energy bills, food and rents. Families tell me they are being forced to choose between heating and eating. The last thing families in Putney need now are additional charges on their bills.

I warmly welcome Wandsworth Council's decision to freeze council tax for the next financial year. This will help prevent families from slipping into further poverty as we continue to live through this period of economic uncertainty and downturn. As you know, Wandsworth Council is responsible for the management of large areas of green space across the borough, I would encourage you to reach out to them to explore whether joint working or collaboration with them could help cut costs and improve efficiencies for both parties.

I urge you to reconsider this proposal. As always, I'm really happy to meet if needed to discuss in more depth as required.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Fleur Anderson MP
Shadow Paymaster General
Member of Parliament for Putney, Roehampton and Southfields

Ms Fleur Anderson MP
Shadow Paymaster General
Member of Parliament for Putney, Roehampton and Southfields
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By e-mail only: fleur.anderson.mp@parliament.uk

3 March 2023

Dear Fleur,

Re: Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC) Levy

Thank you very much for your letter dated 21 February 2023 in which you set out your concerns about the proposed increase in WPCC's levy in 2023/24 and in particular your very understandable concerns about the impact that it will have on families during the current cost of living crisis, particularly those living in the most deprived parts of Wandsworth.

Whilst I fully agree that the increase in percentage terms of 12.6 percent seems high, particularly in the low inflationary environment of the past 30 years, in absolute terms it represents an increase of £3.82 per year (or 32 pence per month) from £32.14 per year in 2022/23 to £35.96 per year in 2023/24 for a Band D property. That said, WPCC fully appreciates the responsibilities inherent in its levy-setting powers and the importance therefore of carefully deliberating any increase in the levy, regardless of the amount.

As you are aware, the 1871 Act established a levy, paid by the local community, as the principal way in which the Conservators are to fulfil their statutory duty to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise. The Commons are also a registered charity and under charity law, Conservators have a duty of prudence, which includes a responsibility to protect the charity's assets. The 1990 Statutory Instrument that governs the levy allows the Conservators to raise the levy by RPI each year. There is no other provision for any year on year increase in the levy revenue and in particular no adjustment for any increase in the number of households in the levy area. This is very different from the way in which council tax operates for the local authorities in that even without an inflationary increase, the total revenue raised from council tax increases in line with the growth in number of households.

Since 1990, outer London in particular has experienced considerable population growth, which has led to a sustained growth in the number of visitors to the Commons. This increase in usage has had a direct impact on the costs associated with the day to day management of

the Commons, particularly in areas such as footpath maintenance, litter collection and disposal, cleaning of amenity facilities and general repair of infrastructure. As you know, this was particularly evident during the pandemic when the surge in the numbers of people using the Commons took a heavy toll on the Commons leaving WPCC with several major restoration projects.

The growth in visitor numbers has occurred alongside a period of sustained low inflation, averaging 3.2 percent per year between 1991 and 2022, which until this year, has limited the annual inflationary increase in the levy. Under the 1871 Act, the capacity of the Conservators to raise money by other means is strictly limited. The Act also imposes a statutory limit on borrowing of £5,000. Given the situation, the Conservators took the decision in December 2016 and again in December 2020 to set the levy at the maximum level permitted for the following five-year period.

Despite this resolution, given the recent significant increase in RPI, the Conservators felt it was important to review this decision before setting the levy for 2023/24, which they did at their December 2022 Board meeting. Consideration was given to the current rise in the cost of living and the impact on residents, particularly those who were already struggling financially. The Board had however received reassurance from the local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC that the benefits and reductions to which residents were entitled for the purposes of council tax also applied to the levy. Board members were also however very concerned about the increases experienced in WPCC's capital and operational costs, particularly given the recent surge in inflation, and the impact of such increases on WPCC's operational budget.

In light of this, and given the considerations noted above, the Board's view was that it would be neither prudent nor in the best interests of the charity to propose an increase in the levy for 2023/24 that was below the maximum permitted under the 1990 regulations.

Your letter makes reference to the residents living in the Roehampton Ward and the struggles that they face. We are aware of the challenges facing this community, financial and well-being more generally, and as such have proactively engaged with them to encourage them to become more familiar with the Commons. As such, I am particularly pleased that a resident from the estate has recently joined our Stakeholder Group. We have also met with the founders of both the Regenerate Charity and the Walk and Talk Programme to think about how we could develop a closer relationship with those living in this area. Your involvement with the Commons, including leading the cycle ride as part of our 150th anniversary celebrations, serves as a wonderful example of your ability to strengthen the bond between the community and the Commons and we are very keen to continue initiatives of this nature by working with you and Wandsworth Council.

Regarding the suggestion in your letter, despite the differences in the constitutional and regulatory model in which we operate compared to that of the local authorities, we would welcome the opportunity to work with Wandsworth Council, a leading local authority, to help identify efficiencies and best practices. We note their ability to keep council tax at one of the lowest levels in the country and their commitment to continued improvement that helps deliver this outcome.

You asked in your letter for Conservators to reconsider the proposed inflationary increase in the levy for 2023/24. In accordance with WPCC's constitution regarding revocation of

resolutions, Conservators were invited to request that the levy increase be reconsidered in advance of the 15 February 2023 deadline set out in the 1990 regulations but no proposal for revocation of the resolution setting the 2023/24 levy was received. As such, WPCC's levy for 2023/24 remains as per the formal notification of 25 January 2023 of £35.96 per year (£3.00 per month) for a Band D property. I am sorry that this was not the outcome that you were seeking but hopefully you will understand the basis for the Conservators' decision.

Finally, in your letter, you very kindly offered to meet to discuss WPCC's levy in more depth. As you know, we are contemplating a rebasing of the levy and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to update you on developments in this area and to fully understand your views on this matter.

Thank you very much.

Kind regards,

Diane Neil Mills
Chairman of Wimbledon and Putney Commons



Councillor Simon Hogg
Leader, Wandsworth Council
The Town Hall
High Street
London SW18 2PU

15th February 2023

Dear Councillor Hogg,

Wimbledon & Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC) Levy

The Putney Society, the amenity Society for Putney & Roehampton, noted your recent comments on the proposed 2023 WPCC Levy.

The value of the Commons to the mental and physical health of the Putney and Roehampton residents cannot be overestimated as was seen especially during the pandemic lockdowns. This is particularly true for those who lack resources for more costly recreation. We are therefore concerned that upkeep of the Commons is adequately funded.

The annual review of the Levy limits its increase to RPI and if the Levy is not increased in one particular year, there is no facility for carrying over any potential increase to the next year. In 2004, the then Leader of the Council, wrote to the effect that he would be alarmed if the financial problems of WPCC fed through into higher Levy demands. Following this letter, the Levy was not increased for a period, resulting in a structural deficit that ran for some years. This culminated in a crisis in 2016 when the auditors expressed dismay that the Levy had not been increased, or increased only marginally in the intervening period and were of the view that the entire reserves would be exhausted in between two and five years.

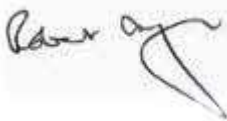
Under the 1871 Act of Parliament that established the Commons the capacity of the Conservators to raise money is strictly limited. They are empowered to raise a Levy to protect the Commons, keeping them open and unenclosed. They are also Trustees under the Charities' Acts and must function in accordance with these Acts. The Conservators must therefore not only be apolitical but must not succumb to political pressure. The Conservators themselves are elected by universal franchise of the Levy payers, are unremunerated, and can claim no expenses whatsoever from WPCC.

The Putney Society covering Putney & Roehampton
Registered Charity 263242

Our members are aware of the cost-of-living crisis and its adverse effects on the citizens of the Borough. However, we understand the effects of the rise in the Levy will be ameliorated on those with low incomes as any benefits and reductions to which residents were entitled for Council Tax purposes are also applied to the Levy.

Finally, although the proposed increase is high in percentage terms, this is on a comparatively low base and, if implemented, we calculate the maximum increase (for a band H property) would be £8.06 a year or 16 pence a week.

In summary, it is the view of the Putney Society that the increase in the Levy, however regrettable, is both appropriate and necessary if we are to enjoy the benefits of having these unique local open spaces.



Robert Arguile
Chair
18 Burstock Road
Putney
London, SW15 2PW

Copy to:
Diane Neil-Mills - WPCC
Stephen Bound - WPCC

Subject: Inner Park Road news update March 2023

COUNCIL TAX AND THE COMMONS CONSERVATORS' LEVY

I've had a few questions about the Council Tax (CT) for the coming year – the first ever to be set by a Labour Council in Wandsworth. (When Labour was last in control, in 1978, we hadn't even had the Poll Tax – for those of you who can remember that – and local finance was raised through the 'rates'!) For example, is it being frozen or is it going up? It's a little complicated.

Council tax is one way that Councils receive funds to spend on local services – others include grants of various descriptions from central government and charges on things like parking permits, fines, parking meters, hire of sports and leisure facilities, planning applications, special events and so on. CT is actually the smallest of these three revenue streams for Wandsworth. Your CT bill is made up of three components:

- the Wandsworth Council precept (roughly half of the CT bill that hits the doorstep);
- the Mayor of London's precept (again roughly half of the CT bill);
- and (for most people in West Hill Ward) the levy raised by the Putney and Wimbledon Commons Conservators (a much smaller amount).

There is a bit of smoke and mirrors involved in the Wandsworth portion. Ultimately it is a single figure but for PR reasons in recent years the Government has artificially divided it into an Adult Social Care Levy, and a General Expenditure levy (which goes towards the rest of the Council's spending). The Government in effect 'caps' the amount by which a Council can raise the Council Tax in normal circumstances – this year, for example, the Social Care levy could be increased by 2% and the general levy by 2.99%. So Councils can raise CT by a total of 4.99%. If they want to go any further they have to hold a local referendum, which no Council has ever done – it would be hugely expensive, would almost certainly result in a 'no' vote and would likely be wildly popular. (Some councils have got themselves into such a financial mess in recent years that the Government is letting them raise CT by much higher amounts – 15% this year in Croydon. Wandsworth is a very long way from being in this category.)

For 2023/24 Wandsworth is increasing its total share of the CT by 2%. This is being portrayed as 'freezing' the general levy while increasing the Adult Social Care levy by 2% but the effect would be exactly the same if say the Council had frozen the Adult Social Care levy and increased the general levy (portrayed incorrectly as the 'Council's part' of the total) by 2%. The previous (Conservative) administration used the same approach (some may say 'trick') in claiming two years ago that it was 'freezing' CT when actually it increased it by 3% (the Adult Social Care cap that year). The Council could have chosen a genuine freeze had it so desired but, like two years ago, it did not. Last year the Council did cut its total share of the CT bill by 1% but it was an election year and so not typical. This being said, the Wandsworth rise this coming year is lower (and from a lower base) than many London Boroughs and other authorities which are increasing by the maximum allowed (4.99%) – and of course general inflation is at a much higher rate.

The Mayor for London is intending to increase his levy (which makes up around half of our Council tax bills) by just under 10% to pay e.g. for free school meals for all London primary age children, the black hole in TfL's budgets and the Mayor's huge PR budget etc.. The Mayor is not affected by the Government's cap on Council tax rises and his precept has been increasing rapidly in recent years.

Finally, for those in the area covered by the Conservators' Levy the Conservators are proposing a 10+% increase in the levy – again they operate outside the capping regime, being able to charge at the rate of inflation. Though high in percentage terms this is a relatively small sum compared to the Council's and Mayor's levies – the increase is around 1p per day per household in CT Band D. All of this money – about £1 million per year – goes into management and enhancement of the Commons. You can read more at <https://www.wpcc.org.uk/about-us/the-commons-levy>. The Conservators have faced increased use of the Commons, especially since COVID, which is pushing up costs, as of course is inflation, and in order to 'catch' from a long period of very low inflation which has eaten into revenue they have decided to raise the levy by the legal maximum, in their determination to protect and enhance this wonderful facility.

COUNCILLOR ROSS GARROD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
(Labour, Longthornton Ward)



London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX

Diane Neil Mills
Chairman
Wimbledon and Putney Commons
Manor Cottage
Windmill Road
Wimbledon Common
London
SW19 5NR

020 8545 3424 (Civic Centre)
ross.garrold@merton.gov.uk

13 February 2023

Dear Diane

WIMBLEDON AND PUTNEY COMMONS: PROPOSED INCREASE IN COMMONS LEVY

I am grateful to you and your Chief Executive, Stephen Bound, for meeting me and Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride and Cllr Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, along with Hannah Doody, Merton's Chief Executive, and Roger Kershaw, Interim Executive Director of Finance, on 8 February, to discuss our concerns about your plans to increase the Commons Levy by 12.4%; and your proposals for a further 25% Levy increase on top of this.

The Commons are a fantastic natural asset and open space enjoyed by people in Merton and across London; they provide an important habitat supporting a wide-range of biodiversity. We are proud to be home to the Commons, and support the work of the Conservators to preserve and enhance the Commons for the benefit of today's residents and future generations.

We shared with you our concerns about your proposals to raise the Commons Levy by the maximum amount, 12.4%. At a time of a Cost of Living Emergency, the Council is having to meet rising energy costs, higher bills and inflation, all while experiencing significant loss of income from fees and charges as a result of the Covid pandemic, and another real-terms cut in government funding.

Through careful financial management, and difficult decisions, we have been able to prepare a balanced budget while still protecting funding for crucial services such as social care, as well as providing support for those who need it most during the Cost of Living Emergency, including a 1% Council Tax discount for council taxpayers in bands A-D. The planned 12.4% Levy increase would have a detrimental impact on the Council's own budget and the services we provide for our residents.

It is particularly troubling that despite our own careful financial management, our own budget plans could be impacted as a result of the Conservators own financial management, including what you recognise is an unsustainable budget deficit.

Such a large increase in the Commons Levy at this time is inappropriate and unacceptable. As we made clear in our meeting, we cannot support such an increase. Nor can we support any proposal to increase the Levy by 25%.

As a billing authority, there are not insignificant administrative costs to the Council in collecting the Levy on the Conservators behalf. This approach no longer feels fit for purpose and we will want to consider with the other boroughs that the Commons fall within, and government, alternative options that would provide greater clarity and certainty for the Conservators, the boroughs, and to residents on the funding being raised.

We call on the Conservators to urgently rethink this proposal, and offer to work with you and the other boroughs to ensure a more sustainable future for the Commons.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross Garrod". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'G' at the end.

Councillor Ross Garrod
Leader of the Council



Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Councillor Ross Garrod
Leader of Merton Council
London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX

020 8545 3424 (Civic Centre)

By email only: ross.garrod@merton.gov.uk

6 March 2023

Dear Councillor Garrod,

Re: Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC)

Thank you very much for your letter dated 13 February 2023 and in particular for the support that you expressed for the work of the Conservators in protecting and enhancing the Commons. As you recognise, the Commons provide an important habitat supporting a wide range of biodiversity, which is important in helping meet Merton's own objectives for biodiversity, climate change and flood risk management as set out in its Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

Your letter sets out your opposition to the proposed inflationary increase in WPCC's levy from £32.14 per year in 2022/23 to £35.96 per year in 2023/24, representing an increase of 32 pence per month for a Band D property. Your letter also expresses your opposition to a potential future one-off rebasing of the levy, which for consultation purposes was estimated to be in the order of £8 per year (or 67 pence per month).

In addressing the concerns set out in your letter, I thought it might be helpful to explain the constitutional and regulatory framework that governs the Commons, which is quite distinct from the framework in which local authorities in England operate.

Under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 that established the Commons, the Conservators have a duty to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise. In addition, the Conservators are trustees of the charity that owns and manages Wimbledon and Putney Commons. Under charity law, the Conservators have a duty to act only in the best interests of the charity. Conservators also have a duty of prudence, which includes a responsibility to protect the charity's assets.

These statutory responsibilities include caring for both the natural and built environments: ensuring that the rare and fragile habitats are protected, the landscape and buildings are properly maintained and protected from irreversible decline and that the path network allows visitors to access the Commons. In

addition, ensuring the Commons are safe and secure for all to use without fear is critical and, as I mentioned at our meeting, the Commons are quite unique in still being patrolled 365 days per year by mounted keepers. The sense of security that characterises the Commons should never be taken for granted.

As you are aware, the 1871 Act established a levy, paid by the local community, as the principal way in which the Commons are to be funded. The 1990 Statutory Instrument that governs the levy allows the Conservators to raise the levy by RPI each year. There is no other provision for any year on year increase in the levy revenue and in particular no adjustment for any increase in the number of households in the levy area. This is very different from the way in which council tax operates for the local authorities in that even without an inflationary increase, the total revenue raised from council tax increases in line with the growth in number of households.

Since 1990, outer London in particular has experienced considerable population growth, which has led to a sustained growth in the number of visitors to the Commons. This increase in usage has had a direct impact on the costs associated with the day to day management of the Commons, particularly in areas such as footpath maintenance, litter collection and disposal, cleaning of amenity facilities and general repair of infrastructure. This was particularly evident during the pandemic when the surge in the numbers of people using the Commons took a heavy toll on the Commons leaving WPCC with several major restoration projects.

At the same time, this growth in visitor numbers has occurred alongside a period of sustained low inflation, averaging 3.2 percent per year between 1991 and 2022, which until this year, has limited the annual inflationary increase in the levy.¹ The combination of these two factors has meant that the levy has increasingly fallen behind the level needed to properly maintain the Commons, with the preventative maintenance and long-term investment suffering in particular. Given the situation, the Conservators took the decision in December 2016 and again in December 2020 to set the levy at the maximum level permitted for the following five-year period.

Despite this resolution, given the recent significant increase in RPI, the Conservators felt it was important to review this decision before setting the levy for 2023/24, which they did at their December 2022 Board meeting. Consideration was given to the current rise in the cost of living and the impact on residents, particularly those who were already struggling financially. Your letter makes clear that this has also been a key consideration for Merton in setting its council tax. The Board had however received reassurance from the local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC (including Merton) that the benefits and reductions to which residents were entitled for the purposes of council tax also applied to the levy. Board members were also however very concerned about the increases experienced in WPCC's capital and operational costs, particularly given the recent surge in inflation, and the impact of such increases on WPCC's operational budget.

Under the 1871 Act, the capacity of the Conservators to raise money by other means is strictly limited. The Act also imposes a statutory limit on borrowing of £5,000. Under charity law, the Conservators have a duty to charge commercial organisations that use the Commons and such charges are reviewed regularly. At the same time, Conservators have a responsibility to ensure that commercial events do not interfere with the ability of visitors to enjoy the Commons or cause an unacceptable level of damage to the Commons and achieving the right balance is a key part of the day to day management of the Commons.

Although WPCC has bolstered its fundraising capacity to support the delivery of capital projects, the operating budget will continue to rely on WPCC's regular income stream, in which the levy is the key

¹ Source: ONS; annual RPI inflation averaged 3.2 percent between 1991 and 2022 versus 7.0 percent between 1950 and 1990.

component. In light of this, and given the considerations noted above, the Board's view was that it would be neither prudent nor in the best interests of the charity to propose an increase in the levy for 2023/24 that was below the maximum permitted under the 1990 regulations of RPI.

As we discussed at our meeting, to address the longer-term deteriorating financial situation, in 2018, the Conservators commenced work on a masterplan to understand the long-term investment requirements of the Commons and a review of the constitution to investigate inter alia an amendment of the levy. In support of this, a public consultation exercise was carried out in late 2022 to solicit feedback on stage 1 of the masterplan and support in principle for an increase in the levy.² The consultation received very strong public support, a reflection of the great affection that is felt by the community for the Commons and a recognition of the importance of properly caring for and maintaining this special open space. The Conservators are continuing the dialogue with the relevant authorities regarding the proposal to rebase the levy but recognise that local support is critical in taking this initiative forward. To confirm public support, a further detailed consultation with all 41,000 households in the levy area, of whom approximately 9,400 are in Merton, would be undertaken before a final decision is taken.

Your letter also addresses your understandable concern regarding the impact of WPCC's levy on Merton's ability to increase council tax to the maximum permitted under legislation because of the ceiling that limits tax increases. Conservators appreciate the potential impact of this particular issue on Merton's finances and are keen to have the matter resolved.

Finally, you asked in your letter for Conservators to reconsider the proposed inflationary increase in the levy for 2023/24. In accordance with WPCC's constitution regarding revocation of resolutions, Conservators were invited to request that this matter be reconsidered but no proposal for revocation of the resolution setting the 2023/24 levy was received. As such, WPCC's levy for 2023/24 remains as per the formal notification of 25 January 2023 of £35.96 per year (£3.00 per month) for a Band D property. I am sorry that this was not the outcome that you were seeking but hopefully you will understand the basis for the Conservators' decision, which includes Merton's reassurance that those in the most need would receive relief from the levy.

I apologise for the length of this letter but the issues that you have raised are important and deserving of a full explanation. If you do have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you very much.

Kind regards,



Diane Neil Mills
Chairman of Wimbledon and Putney Commons

² For consultation purposes, an increase in the order of £8 per year (Band D) was proposed in the consultation, which is deemed to be the minimum necessary to enable WPCC to meet its day to day operating requirements, including those required to support stage 1 of the masterplan. Stage 1 of the masterplan addresses the natural environment (habitat restoration), footpath restoration, provision of bike racks and signage.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	3 April 2023	04.23.7
Subject: Chief Executive Report	Public	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Decision and Information	
<h1>SUMMARY</h1> <p>This report updates the Board on progress relating to non-confidential matters.</p>		

Wildlife Garden

After delays and redesigns, creation of the Wildlife Garden next to the Ranger's Office is finally underway. The project was originally conceived as a memorial to Dave Wills, the Commons bird recorder who died in 2017. A public appeal for the garden raised in the region of £20,000, but COVID and heavy workloads delayed the start of the works. The passing of time meant that costs have increased considerably. In order to achieve the maximum work with the money available, contractors have been employed to undertake the groundworks and the majority of the hard landscaping elements of the projects. The planting, seeding and fencing works will be undertaken by the WPCC Maintenance Team. Despite this, more funding is required to complete the project and the Fundraising Manager will be leading on this over the next few months.

It is anticipated the project will be complete by Christmas 2023.

Public consultation – Crooked Billet deckchairs

The consultation on future licensing of the Crooked Billet pub to place deckchairs on the Common during the summer months closed on 21 March 2023. The consultation consisted of a brief Survey Monkey questionnaire on the WPCC website, which was also available on Freepost postcards made available in dispensers on the Commons.

361 responses were received; 327 of these were submitted online, with the remaining 34 submitted via the Freepost postcards. In summary, 355 respondents (98.3%) were in favour of retaining the deckchairs, with 6 respondents (1.7%) wanting to see them removed. Of those who responded, 344 had used the deckchairs previously, either as a customer or just for relaxation, whilst 64 had never used the deckchairs. The table below shows the responses received. Appendix 1 lists all of the comments received from respondents.

Would you like to see the deckchairs opposite the Crooked Billet pub continue to be placed on the Common for the spring and summer months?	No.	%
Yes, I would like the deckchairs to be a long-term fixture	238	65.9
Yes, but their use should be reviewed every five years	117	32.4
No, I would like to see the deckchairs removed	6	1.7
Have you used the deckchairs opposite the Crooked Billet on Wimbledon Common?		
Yes, as a customer	277	76.7
Yes, but not as a customer/just for relaxing	67	18.6
No, I have never used them	64	17.7

Clearly the survey was not scientific, and it was not intended to be a referendum. However, it does indicate strong general support for the deckchairs.

The Chief Executive met on 13 March 2023 with two residents of the Crooked Billet who, whilst broadly supportive of the licence, raised a number of concerns about the way in which it operates. Correspondence has been received from these residents, as well as from the Chairman of the North West Wimbledon Residents' Association suggesting conditions which they would like to see imposed on the licensee. Whilst the licence already contains some of the conditions requested by the residents, there are a number of issues not covered. For example, the residents are requesting limiting the hours that the deckchairs are made available, reducing the number of months that the deckchairs are permitted to be on the Common and limiting, not only the area in which the deckchairs are permitted, but also the number of deckchairs.

The relevant considerations regarding any agreement for the deckchairs are set out in WPCC's Access Framework: (i) alignment of purpose of the deckchairs with WPCC's charitable purposes; (ii) interference of the deckchairs with other users of the Commons; and (iii) unacceptable levels of damage to the Commons. Most of the issues raised above are in relation to the interference of the deckchairs with other users of the Commons and WPCC will need to satisfy itself that the conditions agreed with the Crooked Billet address these concerns. In addition, under charity law WPCC has a duty to protect the charity's reputation, which in this particular case, includes consideration of the impact of the deckchairs on the local residents.

There is also a commercial element to these decisions and they have a potential impact on WPCC's finances. In accordance with WPCC's policy regarding meetings in public, it is therefore proposed that the Board discusses this matter further during Part A2 of the meeting.

Coronation event

The Commons are holding two events to mark the coronation of King Charles III in May 2023.

On the evening of Sunday 7 May we will join in the "Lighting up the Nation" with walks from the Village and Roehampton, to meet at the Windmill for a celebration with music and light.

This event is free of charge but suggested donations of £10 per person are being suggested.

On the afternoon of Monday 8 May, we will be taking part in the “Big Help Out” Day. A litter pick is being arranged across the Common, an event being supported by the WISH Foundation and the Dons Local Action Group who are bringing along their Womble. The aim is to encourage volunteering and WPCC will be showcasing our volunteering opportunities. We will also be inviting other local volunteer-led organisations to join us to talk to visitors about what they do and what opportunities they have for volunteering.

Other Events

We have several events coming up over the next few months and full details are, or will be, in the Events section of the website:

- **Good Friday 7 April** - Easter Egg Hunt and Easter Colouring Competition
- **22 April pm and 23 April am** – Bird Song Course
- **Sunday 14 May 8am** – Bird Song Walk
- **16/17/18 June** – Weekend of Nature
- **28 June** – Conservators Annual Open Meeting, Community Church, Werter Road, Putney
- **5 July** (TBC) Summer Evening Walk with staff
- **Sunday 10 September** – Wimbledon Common Open Day

Crooked Billet Deckchair Consultation Comments

If the money they pay for this goes to the Conservators to pay for the upkeep of the Common they must be of benefit to all - There also plenty of other places to sit on the Common - even on the hottest day in the shade

Please could there be some deckchair free days? For example, none on Mon-Thurs. We live opposite the green area and a break from the noise occasionally would be nice. Crooked Billet needs to ensure all deckchairs are removed overnight. As a very 'local' resident, please could there ne a zone for deckchair use so that there is some space between the houses and the seating area.

Less dog poo bins/More ordinary rubbish bins

An excellent idea that adds to the amenity of the Commons as well as a source of income.

There should be provision for people to dispose of their cigarette butts. At the end of the summer it's a wonder the grass recovers!

Income is good and deckchairs are easily movable so no reason to object. Thanks, (We are 4 adults)

Number of deckchairs should be reasonable. Deckchairs should be stacked at night.

The historical pleasure of sitting out on the grass at the Crooked Billet in the warmer months has recently been considerably reduced with the introduction of so many deckchairs by the Crooked Billet Pub. It is clear that this is a business exercise by Young's Brewery and little to do with any public good as may be claimed. The proposed licence could set a worrying precedent for further 'opportunities' and would, in any form, be at the expense of those who may wish to enjoy this area of grass for what it is, Common Land for the benefit of all and not least for the children who enjoy it as a safe place to play which is not really possible with the large number of deckchairs there.

It makes a tip to the common and a drink at the Crooked Billet feel like a day in the country. Much appreciated, thank you.

It's a delightful part of my summer, sitting in a deckchair with a beer watching the sun go down.

I have enjoyed using the deckchairs. They give a community feel and are a good place to rest and socialize after a walk in the area.

We like going to the Common and we sometimes use the deckchairs to relax.

The deckchairs are part of Wimbledon summertime.

I assumed that the deckchairs are only for use by the pub customers. There is no signage to advise locals that the chairs can be used and this should be mandatory. The chairs should be limited to one area of the green so the locals who live around the green in Crooked Billet can safely use the area with their children. Most houses have tiny gardens and rely on the green for safe playing. We should know how much money Youngs are contributing for the use of the deckchairs? This adds significantly to the revenue generated as the whole area is packed with people during the summer months. I also think there should be a review every two years rather than five.

It is great that the common near the pub is used in this way. I would love the pubs to take more responsibility for clearing plastic glasses from the trees and bushes near the road which are a consequence of this use

We really enjoy having the deckchairs in the summer, but we hadn't realised they weren't only for customers. Please keep them!

I've been to the billet in summer on those deckchairs and this brings a really nice community atmosphere.

It is such a good space and brings the community together. It is lovely to see families including children and pets enjoying this space.

Lovely idea

It is not clear the deckchairs are for everybody to use. It looks like they are only for the pub customers.

I love them, they add character

The deckchairs are a very useful and welcome amenity which bring a vibrant and social atmosphere to that small corner of the Common.

I wasn't aware that they could be used if you weren't a customer so that's good to know.

Don't let a handful of naysayers and killjoys spoil the enjoyment of the grassy area opposite.

The deckchairs are a fantastic feature of the common and there for all to enjoy. To take them away would be a travesty.

The deckchairs bring the space to life and add vibrancy to this part of the village. I have no problem with the deckchairs, it's a great spot to relax, enjoy the sun and allow dogs (or kids) to run around whilst supporting a local pub. If a licence fee helps the Conservators maintain the space better, then fine, the fee should be similar to LBM street trading licence fees.

if the conservators think this is a good idea I'll support it - they have the expertise

I think it is a nice feature and makes the Village even more cozy

Consideration of a proviso that drinks from the pub should only be served in plastic (or non glass) "glasses"

The deck chairs are a great addition to the common bringing a family friendly meeting place.

Why would you even consider not renewing the licence?

It would be an absolute shame not to have the deck chairs. The crooked billet is a great space to enjoy and relax, especially for families. There should be absolutely no reason why the deck chairs should be removed. The deck chairs absolutely should stay! Thank you

The green opposite the Crooked Billet has become a focal point of Wimbledon Village. It is our favourite summer routine to walk all the way from Putney village with our dog to Wimbledon Village, pick up some food for lunch from the food stalls and have a pint or two on the green (or biscuits in case of the dog) and then walk another 2 miles back home. We buy our pints

from the pub but there are plenty of people bringing their own drinks and the atmosphere is great.

We love the deckchairs, it's so nice and relaxing to go there!

Frequent visitor to that community and a 'native' of Wimbledon - not apparent from my postcode

Great idea. After a long walk. A pint!

Really nice outside space, the pubs are very good about cleaning up. Nice atmosphere

Thought they were for Billet customers only (I'm a Hand man :)

I did not know that they weren't only for customers of the Crooked Billet. I think they very much add to the summer 'vibe' of the Common. Please allow them to stay.

Such an asset - must stay

It was so lovely to have people enjoying the sun in the deckchairs. I think its wonderful!

I do not agree with the Spencer Benches on Putney Common and do not agree with deckchairs on Wimbledon Common. It is annexation of common land and must be resisted. There are many ways of raising money in an area as wealthy as SW London. This encroachment has to stop

Number of chairs should be limited to a sensible number. At present too many.

It is not well advertised that they can be used by non customers. I have lived on the Billet for over 12 months and was not aware of this.

I think the deckchairs are a good idea but some controls need to be included in the new licence agreement. It would be better if the deck chairs were available for a shorter period on Sundays. I always think it must disturb adjacent neighbours given how loud people can be late into the evening. The grass and ground condition can also become very damaged through over use - in the summer the land became a dust bowl. Youngs could also pay for the upkeep of the land to ensure renewal every year.

This is a great spot in Wimbledon and unique - we should definitely protect it

Nice to see outdoor space being used and shared

Great place in the summer. The deckchairs make a big positive difference.

It's a great atmosphere on summer days. Never seen issues, noise etc. People are respectful and clean

We need more outdoor relaxing spaces in Wimbledon that are family friendly.

Unless the deckchairs are causing an issue why should this need to be reviewed every year? It's a valuable community asset. I've used the green as a young adult (no chairs then just sat on the grass) and now as a mature adult (where the use of a deck chair is much appreciated!). Please ensure this tradition is upheld for future generations to enjoy the space.

The deckchairs are very popular in summer and it adds to the community spirit..

Nice for relaxing in on the green in the warm weather and supporting our local pubs, especially The Crooked Billet as it has no outside space.

They are FANTASTIC! Keep them.

I didn't realise the deckchairs were not just for customers

They look so good

It's a while since I visited the Billet but I always assumed the deckchairs were provided by pub and you had to be a paying customer to use them. In the past I have been concerned by litter/glass left in vicinity of these chairs - but unsure what situation is like now. I think most local people (other than nearby residents perhaps) like the fact one can sit outside the pub in good weather.

As a resident in Crooked Billet, I am not suggesting you remove the deckchairs but: - They should be reviewed regularly. - Could they be limited to a particular area on the green? It really is not clear that they can be used by non pub users and it would be nice for locals to have space free from the deckchairs to kick a ball about with our toddler for example or sit on a picnic blanket. Also noticed the green turned into a dust bowl last summer due to lots of arguably overuse in the hot weather. - What is more annoying is the constant shouting of food order numbers by the pub in the summer months. - The rule needs to stay that the deckchairs should be left in a pile in the morning and put out by people using them rather than the putting all the deckchairs out and using barrels with numbers that the pub attempted a couple of years ago. I really do hope the Commons are charging a good sum for the deckchairs being out there. You are a charity and Youngs are a business that provide nice pubs but make a lot of money out of the green. I hope the commons are taking a commercial cut rather than a small token donation. Thank you for running this consultation.

Can be very annoying after 9ish with people having loud gatherings , and as a local finding many plastic glasses on the surrounding area , even tho the pubs tied up

There is not enough deckchairs provided during weekends

I understand that chairs will only be placed opposite the pub, not in any other parts of the Common.

Maybe tables as well ?

Great idea. Lovely to use our outdoor spaces for the community and also help the common.

Whilst I've never used them, it's lovely to see people sitting out on the Common

Perfect way to relax in warmer weather. They should stay!

Thank you Conservators for providing the community service, to allow social interaction in the community and to put this piece of land to good use for those who want to use it. I live in McKay Road and walk my dog past there daily. It is refreshing to see all different communities of locals using that space. I've seen couples, christening parties, school reunions and lots of children happy to be outdoors. I have only witnessed respectful and happy gatherings and that is why I think it is a good idea for the Conservators to continue licensing this space for deck chairs.

It is such a wonderful communal feature

I think they are great and give a lovely atmosphere.

The deck chairs have been a fixture for as long as I can remember and I've lived in Wimbledon area for 34 years, it's a community thing as well

I think this a fantastic service to build community and utilise the common. I often see families using the area and enjoying the common in a way they wouldn't usually.

The deckchairs are a hugely valuable community asset and make that area a pleasure to visit during the warmer months, whether visiting the Crooked Billet or not. There is no detriment to having them and there can be no sensible objection to keeping them for the long term.

Its a personal decision. I don't want to facilitate drinking. I avoid pubs, grew up with alcoholics. I will just avoid this area if the drinking is being done outside.

Think they add to the charm of the green space. Looks like a proper village green.

They are a wonderful addition to the common

It's great that they are available to all but I don't think it is always obvious that non-customers can also use them

Pleasant atmosphere, lovely to be able to sit outside

At present it is lovely to see friends and families using these in the summer months and it allows children to play safely nearby. I have ticked the review box as this always seems the most prudent option.

My only concern with the deckchair use is any litter issues arising as a result. Mostly, I haven't seen this as a large problem but maybe those living in sight of the area have a better view.

My only objection is to the slow spread of such a policy, will eventually become permanent fixtures both to Pubs and Restaurants around the common.

I may do now I know about them!

Keep them!

As long as any damage caused to the land is compensated back to the Commons for remediation then all is good. Maybe also put a limit on how close they can get to nearby homes, so as to not be a nuisance to neighbours

Think they are a brilliant idea

I live on the Crooked Billet and appreciate the deckchairs.

It was not clear that the deckchairs were for public use. I assumed that they were for customers only. If they are for general use I believe that it would be helpful for that to be indicated. Also it's not obvious that this is part of the common; when the deckchairs are out it feels like an extension of the pub and that I am intruding if I try and walk through them.

I love the great atmosphere and unique situation, please keep them

It's great to see the deckchairs being used and fully support them being in place, particularly as it raises money for W&PC. As they are available to non-patrons too, my only concern would

be for groups of people bringing their own booze and food and leave their mess behind. Also, there could be the issue of glass receptacles being used. It wouldn't be fair on the staff to have to 'police' the behaviour of non-patrons using the deckchairs who bring their own consumables. However, if hasn't already been an issue, then fully support for it to continue.

It's important for the nearby neighbours that the pubs manage late-night noise and take full responsibility for cleaning up.

A great addition but perhaps with a curfew of 11pm to reduce the noise to residents.

They have been a very welcome addition!

Having a superb family friendly safe social environment that supports local businesses is essential for them and the locals in the area.

The deckchairs are a charming addition and enjoyed by many of the neighbours and residents of the street.

I think it's great to see outdoor spaces being used more in hospitality in UK and hopefully should continue

I just assumed they were for customers only. Such a lovely idea.

A mandatory condition is that they are responsible for all the mess that is created in that area. The Commons nor Merton must not have to clean up for them

They are a fabulous idea and create a lovely village scene and atmosphere enjoyed by all.

They are a welcome addition and it should continue

Better information to the residents and customers alike. Better demarcation.

They are wonderful to use in the summer

I think providing they remain open to everyone and not just customers.

It's is a lovely place to relax and meet friends in nice weather.

Please ensure that there is no glass allowed there as sometimes bottles get smashed and are dangerous for everyone.

Put them in competitive bid with Hand in Hand, or grant both pubs access

Great temporary addition.

I have never used them as every time I go to the crooked billet they are all sadly taken up by other people. I would use them when visiting the pub for a drink - not just general sitting!

Real asset to the space - add a great buzz and sense of a village to that corner of the common

The deckchairs are a lovely feature that keeps this area vibrant and appealing.

There is limited outdoor seating up on the common and it's nice to have a bit more space.

They are really nice and allow the grass space to be used better. There's plenty of space on the common to picnic on the grass so having an area with chairs is great in summer. It's great to learn that they can also be used without being a customer at the pub.

It's such a nice community feel and would definitely love to see the deck chairs back out! I have grown up in Wimbledon all my life and when I walk past it on a summers afternoon or evening it always brings a smile to my face seeing everyone just switching off with friends and family running around.

They are a lovely asset to the Common and when they were banned it felt like a really sad and money-grabbing move. They make the Common an inclusive, fun and lively place where you can meet all kinds of people. I've sat here as a customer and also with my own picnic. It's so rare to have something like this in London and makes the village really feel like a lovely community especially when the sun is out.

A wonderful option while visiting the 2 pubs

It's a great spot for deck chairs and I really enjoy relaxing there during the spring and summer months

I have used the deck chairs both as a customer of the pub there and just as a visitor to the common and I think it is such a lovely thing to be able to do when the either is nice and helps to bring in revenue to the businesses there too. Win win. Keep doing it :)

I didn't realise it was for use for anyone. Think this is great but some signage would be nice

Committee(s):	Date(s): 3 April 2023	Item no.
Board of Conservators		04.23.8
Subject: Fundraising Update	Public	
Report of: Fundraising Manager	For Information	
Summary		
This report provides a summary of fundraising activity in February and March		

Fundraising for footpaths – Access for All appeal

We are applying to grant funders to enable the restoration of main footpaths and shared cycleways, along with the addition of new bike racks.

The community fundraising appeal, has now raised £15,148 (including gift aid) since launching at the end of November. We are hoping to raise £24,000 towards a major path improvement project. The contributions made by visitors will support our grant applications by providing match funds.

Commemorative Orchard on Putney Lower Common

An orchard was planted in the first week of February as part of the Queen’s Green Canopy – a tree planting initiative launched as part of Her Majesty’s jubilee celebrations.

Donations have helped fund the purchase of 12 trees, their planting and protection and their long-term care with the purchase of a water bowser (watering equipment that attaches to buggy). Donations will also help care for the wider landscape on Putney Lower Common.

A community celebration and thank you supporter event was held on Sunday 5th March. Tree sponsors and donors given sponsorship certificates and a board was installed that details the different varieties of fruit trees and who they are sponsored by.

Successful Rewild London Fund grant application

WPCC submitted an application to the Mayor of London’s Rewild London funding scheme which supports projects in London’s Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).

Our proposal included a request to fund the first stage of restoring Queensmere and we are delighted to share that our bid was successful. WPCC has been awarded a grant of £14,290 towards delivering the survey and design phase of restoring Queensmere, one of the Common’s largest ponds, which is far from reaching its full potential for wildlife. Rewild London Funding will help to design reedbed habitat creation in line with London Environment Strategy targets, ensure the pond and surrounding landscape are more resilient and can support increased biodiversity plus build skills and knowledge for managing the ponds and surrounding habitats.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	3 April 2023	04.23.9
Subject: Land Management Plan		Non-Public
Report of: Conservator, Oliver Bennett, Wildlife and Conservation Forum		For Decision/Information

Summary

Members of the WCF supported the Conservation and Engagement Officer on the drafting of the Land Management Plan.

The WCF has developed an overall summary for the LMP and summaries for each of the chapters that set out the key information and actions that the Board is being asked to agree.

These summaries sit above the full LMP chapters, which the Board can read if of interest.

During this work two issues were identified that it was felt should be raised with the Board:

1. there was a lack of information about the condition of the Commons, which made it difficult to make confident suggestions for its protection and enhancement; and
2. there was a lack of information about the resources available for protecting the Common. For example, we didn't know how much time is available from the maintenance team, what funding is available from government funding schemes (or whether this could be increased), or if volunteering could help to deliver more work.

As a result, it is unclear whether WPC's Vision will be delivered by the current draft of the LMP.

There could be several ways to address these issues over the next few months, including:

1. consultation with the Senior Management Team to clarify what resources are available for land management and whether the suggestions made in the LMP are realistic. This should also explore whether external resources could be increased;
2. gathering additional conservation evidence. Given the scale of site, the fact that condition assessments are largely done by volunteers, and the level of information needed, this is likely to be a longer-term issue that will need to be addressed over the next five years.

Nevertheless, despite these issues, the WCF believes that the LMP is a good document that could proceed to public consultation if the Board felt appropriate.

Recommendation

The Board are asked to:

1. approve the Land Management Plan Summaries
2. consider if they wish to proceed with a public consultation on the Land Management Plan.

Introduction

The Wildlife and Conservation Forum (WCF) has had a major role in supporting the development of the Land Management Plan (LMP).

During its discussions on the LMP, two key points (both related to a lack of information) were raised that it was felt should be passed to the Board to inform its deliberations on the LMP. The points raised do not necessarily reflect the views of all the members of the WCF.

Conservation information gaps

It has been challenging to prepare the LMP due to a lack of evidence about the condition of the different habitats. The LMP contains most of the available evidence and the WCF and Peter have conducted hours of site visits and surveys to fill the evidence gaps where possible.

Nevertheless, we do not have confidence that we have all the information needed to protect and enhance the site. For example, there has been no condition surveys of many of the grassland areas, which are protected by the SSSI, and we do not know the full condition of the heath or ponds.

To address this, actions in the LMP that relate to gathering information have been prioritised. The aim is to ensure that all necessary evidence is gathered by 2027, so the site can be fully protected by 2032.

Resource information gaps

We did not have enough information about the resources available for the LMP. For example:

- we didn't know what internal resources are available for environmental work, such as from the maintenance team or from government grants;
- we didn't know if more external resources could help us to deliver more. For example, many of the actions are deliverable by volunteers - but we didn't know how and when volunteering could be increased.

The WCF didn't discuss in detail how this issue should be addressed.

One way forward might be for the Senior Leadership Team to discuss what current resources are available for land management and whether the suggestions made in the LMP are realistic.

This discussion could also explore whether external resources could be increased such as through increased volunteering and partnerships.

Summaries

The WCF has developed an overall summary for the LMP and summaries for each of the chapters that set out the key information and actions that the Board is being asked to agree (See Appendix 1).

Oliver Bennett MBE
DEFRA-Appointed Conservator

Conserving the Commons:

A land management plan for Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Summary

Wimbledon and Putney Commons are one of the UK's most significant natural landscapes.

They are managed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC). The Conservators are volunteers elected from the local community or appointed by government ministers. They act as trustees of the charity.

This unique governance structure was created in 1871 following a dispute between the local community and the Lord of the Manor, Earl Spencer, who had tried to prevent access to the Commons. A community campaign led to the passing of a law to preserve the Commons for the people. The law placed a small levy on those living close to the Commons to help pay for their upkeep.

Today the Commons enable Londoners to participate in a variety of outdoor recreation and sporting activities, and they play a crucial role in the wellbeing of our community.

Large parts of the Commons were made a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1953, making it one of the finest and oldest protected areas in England. In 2004, large parts were also made a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), in recognition of its internationally important heath and stag beetle population.

All these laws place duties on the Conservators to protect, conserve and restore the unique mixture of woodland, heathland, grassland and wetland habitats, while also helping the community to enjoy them for exercise and recreation.

This plan, the first in our history, describes in detail how the Conservators will preserve this unique landscape for current and future generations.

Environmental status

While the Commons are critically important for nature conservation, some of the habitats are in a poor condition. They have faced major changes over the past 100 years. In the 1900s the Commons were part of a rural landscape, and local people harvested materials and grazed animals on them. Today the Commons are found in an urban landscape, and people now mainly use them for recreation.

This shift has led to a range of impacts, from land drainage, to increased footfall and the expansion of woodland into formerly open habitats.

This had consequences for the wildlife of the Commons. Some species have declined, and some have become extinct such as Natterjack Toad, Adder, Hare, Cotton Grass and Bell Heather.

On the other hand, species associated with woodlands have probably benefited from this change. For example, there are probably many more badgers now found on the Commons.

There are also large parts of the Commons that are managed for recreation – such as the golf course and the playing fields. Small changes to the way these areas are managed could enhance their value to the environment, while also ensuring that their recreational use is protected.

How the Commons were shaped

It is important to understand how the historic activities of people and animals shaped the Commons. Small-scale turf cutting, wood harvesting, animal grazing and sand and gravel extraction, created a range of places for many plants and animals to live.

When these activities ended, the Commons started to revert to scrub and woodland. Without large native vegetation-eating animals present, such as deer and cattle, the woodland that developed became very dense. This led to the loss of some valuable species that live in more open habitats.

In addition, ditches have been dug to drain the land. Over time the ditches damaged or destroyed the wetland habitats. This may have contributed to the decline and loss of wetland species such as Water Voles.

In recent decades WPC, with the help of the local community, have worked hard to preserve the important open habitats and to increase the value of the woodland for nature. We have brought back many of the actions that the local people used to undertake to maintain the biodiversity and character of the Commons, including scrub bashing, woodland management, and pond creation.

Without this sustained effort, many of the special plants and animals that still make the Commons their home would have been lost.

Threats and opportunities

The current threats to the environment of the Commons include pollution, trampling, dog disturbance, changes to land management, lack of funding, isolation from other habitats and drainage. These threats could change and increase in the future. Ongoing funding uncertainties, climate change, further isolation and invasive species may place greater pressure on the Commons.

However, there are also opportunities to make the environment stronger so it is better able to withstand these pressures. These opportunities include:

- increasing demand for volunteering;
- an active and supportive local community;
- new environmental funding opportunities from flood risk reduction, climate action and nature protection;
- the availability of more evidence to enable us to take better decisions; and
- partnership working with local authorities, environmental organisations and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims.

Objective

The overall objective of this plan is to deliver WPCC's vision that the Commons will "be recognised as an exceptional and welcoming natural place for visitors where wildlife thrives." It will contribute to delivering [our 2017-2027 strategy](#), which aims to:

- conserve, enhance and protect the Commons natural aspect and wildlife for present and future generations to enjoy;
- demonstrate sound governance and financial discipline by constantly reviewing operational procedures and all aspects of management;
- seek to balance the enjoyment of the majority of users who come for informal activity and appreciation of the Commons quiet natural aspect with the needs of groups who undertake formal and/or more rigorous recreational activities;
- improve understanding and identity of Wimbledon and Putney Commons and interpret its rich and varied heritage;
- work in partnership with stakeholders to promote and achieve the Vision;
- improve facilities used for organised recreation, sport and events;
- encourage volunteering as a rewarding activity engaging people of all ages and abilities;
- work in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Actions

We will meet this objective through the actions in this plan. Each of the key habitats and areas of the Commons have their own chapters and associated actions.

There are two types of actions. The first are our highest priority. We will deliver these by the end of 2027, barring unforeseen events. We have prioritised actions that:

- focus on the biggest threats to our most sensitive habitats and species, which WPCC has a legal duty to protect;
- can most cost-effectively meet our objective. For example, where volunteers can play a vital role in their delivery;
- seek to deliver multiple benefits to both nature and people. For example, where path improvements will also protect surrounding habitats.

The second are actions that WPCC would like to deliver, but for which we currently have no resource to do the work.

WPCC will try to deliver these actions by the end of 2027 by working with volunteers, partners and funders. Again, we have prioritised actions that can play the biggest role in addressing the threats to nature while delivering the biggest benefits to people.

Please get in touch if you would like to help us with these exciting actions.

Monitoring and evaluation

WPCC will monitor progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review.

A final report will be presented to the Board in 2027 to assess and reflect on delivery against the actions, and to plan for the next five-year period 2028-2031.

Objective: Dry heath

Description

Around 75% of lowland heath has been lost in the UK since 1800. The dry heath on the Common is predominantly found on Putney Heath and exists in a patchwork across the rest of the Commons. It is a key reason for the site's designation as a SSSI. In 2016 heathland (including wet heath) covered 19.99ha (4.35%) of the Commons. It is often found in mosaic or transition with grasslands and occasionally scrub and woodlands

Current status

Natural England assessed the dry heath as in unfavourable recovering condition. A survey commissioned by WPC in 2016 indicated that the key concerns for the heath were low structural and age diversity in the heath vegetation, and low cover of bare ground and gaps in the vegetation. It noted that:

- small parcels of heathland were vulnerable to further degradation or loss to scrub
- some key species such as cross-leaved heath appeared to be declining or had been lost entirely from the site (e.g., bell heather and dwarf gorse).

A quick survey conducted for this plan, indicated that the area of heath has been maintained in roughly the same condition since 2016. Approximately 1.49 hectares of heath identified in 2016 have been lost to scrub. These were mainly small patches of heath that had become isolated from the main areas of heath. This loss has almost been balanced by an expansion of the main area of heath by approximately 1.07 hectares (see map: [Heath](#)).

The age diversity of the heath appears to have improved since 2016, with some scrapes and cutting having been conducted. However, the extent of bare ground is still very low across much of the site. There are dense strands of Purple Moor Grass, which may have expanded in area to the detriment of heath. This may be because of a lack of grazing and cutting, and pollution from dog defecation and the atmosphere.

This indicates that the condition of the heath is not in target condition, however a more detailed survey is required.

Changes in status

We believe that over the past 100 years, the area of heath has probably declined based on historic photos of the site. In more recent years we can say that several species have been lost, possibly due to succession to woodland. However, there is limited detailed information about the historic extent and condition of the heath.

How the feature functions

Heath is a semi-natural habitat in which animals and humans play a crucial role in their maintenance. A range of places for species to live is created through the action of grazing animals and the harvesting of turf and wood.

In the absence of grazing animals and/or management the habitat quickly turns to secondary woodland. This leads to the loss of characteristic heath species.

Current threats

We believe the main threats to the heath are:

- scrub and tree encroachment;
- lack of grazing or cutting;
- uncontrolled fire;

- pollution from dog defecation and the air;
- trampling and widening of paths; and
- habitat fragmentation.

Scrub and tree encroachment and a lack of grazing/cutting are likely to be the biggest current threats.

Future threats

The main future threats to the heath are:

- the loss of funding for appropriate management. For example, if fewer resources were available from environmental land management schemes or changes to the WPCC budget, the actions needed to manage the land may not be available.
- lack of community support for conservation action. Heath requires some actions that conflict with some recreational activities. If the community does not support actions to protect this rare habitat, it will be more challenging to protect it in the long term. These actions could include grazing (which would require temporary electric fencing and for dog owners to take care with their animals).

In the longer-term, climate change could have a range of impacts. For example, longer drought periods could increase fire frequency. However, if the heath is in a good condition, these risks could be lessened.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to protect and enhance the management of the heath:

- increasing demand for volunteer opportunities that could make it easier to deliver habitat management;
- new funding opportunities arising from biodiversity protection, which could help to fund the actions needed to protect the habitat;
- potential biomass subsidies that could help to fund habitat management work;
- growing concern about nature loss, which could help us to get local community support needed to protect the heath and reintroduce lost species;
- a growing body of evidence on how best to manage this habitat to enable us to take better decisions on its protection;
- new partnerships with local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims. For example, there is a particular opportunity to work with Wandsworth and Merton Councils given that the heath falls within their boundaries.

Actions

By 2027 WPCC **will**:

- Support the WCF to conduct a habitat condition assessment based on JNCC monitoring guidelines. This may identify further actions to be delivered.
- Expand the area of heath by approximately 0.4 hectares to bring the extent back to 2016 levels.
- Ring bark Turkey Oak and other non-native trees across the whole area of the heathland identified on the 2016 map.
- Maintain fire breaks and patrols.
- Maintain habitat management activities, such as scrub management and Purple Moor Grass cutting, using volunteer groups, in order to maintain the heath to 2016 levels.
- Carry out a feasibility study for the introduction of grazing on some the Commons heath and grassland sites by 2027.

By 2027 WPCC **will seek to** deliver these actions:

- A heathland management report to determine the most cost-effective approach to bringing the heath into favourable condition by 2032. This should consider issues including land management grants, biomass, volunteering, and grazing.
- Consider proposals from partners and volunteers for the reintroduction of species typical of heath known to have become extinct (such as Adder, Bell Heather and Dodder).

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review. WPCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: Wet heath

Description

Around 75% of lowland heath has been lost in the UK since 1800. Wet heaths form a small component of heathland and are important habitats for several nationally and locally rare species. The wet heath on the Common is predominantly found on Putney Heath. The habitat was mapped for the first time in the 2022 Wildlife and Environmental report. It is a key reason for the site's designation as a SSSI.

Current status

Natural England assessed the wet heath as in unfavourable recovering condition. However, a professional survey commissioned by WPCC in 2016 indicated that its condition could be worsening, and the 2022 survey found that the heath still faces damage from trampling, ditches, invasive tree encroachment, dog defaecation and lack of Purple Moor Grass management.

Changes in status

We believe that over the past 100 years, the area of wet heath has probably declined based on historic photos of the site. In more recent years we can say that several species have been lost, probably in part due to the heath drying out. However, there is limited detailed information about the historic extent and condition of the wet heath.

How the feature functions

Wet heath forms where the soil is waterlogged for all or part of the year, creating the conditions for a range of unusual species. Temporary ponds and pools are an important feature.

Animals and humans play a crucial role in wet heaths. A mosaic of places for rare species to live is created through the action of grazing and the harvesting of turf and wood.

Current threats

We believe the main threats to the wet heath are:

- drainage ditches;
- trampling and widening of paths;
- scrub and tree encroachment;
- lack of grazing;
- fire;
- pollution from dog defecation and the air; and
- habitat fragmentation.

Land drainage is likely to be the most imminent threat. Wet heath cannot function without waterlogged soil, even if all other threats are addressed. Drainage ditches currently run along the paths through the main area of wet heath. These are likely to have damaged the habitat and could contribute to its loss. There are also a significant number of paths across the heath – both formal and informal.

Future threats

The main future threats to the wet heath are:

- the loss of funding for appropriate management. For example, if fewer resources were available from environmental land management schemes or changes to the WPCC budget, the actions needed to manage scrub and graze the land may not be available.

- lack of community support for conservation action. Wet heath requires some actions that may conflict with some recreational activities (although they create new ones). If the community does not support actions to protect this habitat, it will be more challenging to protect it in the long term. These actions could include protecting the waterlogged soils (which can make it harder to walk across the land) and grazing (which would require temporary electric fencing and for dog owners to take care with their animals).

In the longer-term, climate change could have a range of impacts. For example, longer drought periods could increase fire frequency. However, if the wet heath is in a good condition (and retains water for longer) these risks could be lessened.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to protect and enhance the management of the wet heath:

- increasing demand for volunteer opportunities that could make it easier to deliver habitat management;
- new funding opportunities arising from carbon sequestration and biodiversity protection, which could help to fund the actions needed to protect the water table and the habitat;
- potential biomass subsidies that could help to fund habitat management work;
- growing concern about the nature and climate crisis, which could help us to get the local community support needed to protect the wet heath;
- a growing body of evidence on how best to manage this habitat to enable us to take better decisions on its protection;
- new partnerships with local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims. For example, there could be an opportunity to work with Wandsworth Council given that the wet heath falls within its boundary. Wandsworth has an ambitious Biodiversity Strategy, which action to preserve this internationally significant habitat would help to meet.

Actions

By 2027 WPCCC **will**:

- Support the WCF to complete a habitat condition assessment based on JNCC monitoring guidelines.
- Restore paths running across Putney heath in such a way that they do not damage the water table. This will include blocking the ditches and restoring the paths using a 'floating' foundation.
- Maintain habitat management activities, such as scrub management and Purple Moor Grass cutting, using volunteer groups
- Maintain fire breaks and patrols
- Carry out a feasibility study for the introduction of grazing on some the Commons heath and grassland sites by 2027.

By 2027 WPCCC **will seek to** deliver these actions:

- A heathland management report to determine the most cost-effective approach to bringing the heath into favourable condition by 2032. This should consider issues including land management grants, biomass, volunteering, and grazing.
- Consider proposals from partners and volunteers for the reintroduction of species typical of wet heath to have become extinct, such as Cotton Grass.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review. WPCCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: Grasslands

Description

The Commons have a combined area of grassland of approximately 89 hectares in 37 discrete areas. This includes areas of natural and semi-natural grassland, sports fields, amenity grassland, road verges and a golf course. Note that the sports fields and golf course are considered under their own sections.

The Commons are particularly noted for their acid grassland (which was assessed as covering 41.7 Ha in 2016) and along with wet and dry heath this is the primary reason for the designation of a large part of the Commons as a SSSI. Lowland acid grassland is a priority habitat under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan.

It is estimated that the UK has lost 97% of unimproved grassland in less than a century. The grasslands of the Commons represent a significant local resource of this habitat.

Current Status

Natural England recently assessed the acid grassland as in unfavourable recovering condition. Other areas have not been assessed or are outside the SSSI.

Changes in Status

As the areas of grassland have been subject to significant disturbance and change of use over the years it is difficult to be specific. It is likely though that some areas have been diminished through the absence of grazing as well as encroachment by scrub, bramble and secondary woodland as well as increased recreational pressure.

How the feature functions

Historically grasslands were maintained through agricultural practices such as haymaking, grazing and browsing. Some areas of the Commons' grassland are subject to an annual hay cut, other areas are subject to periodic cut and collect. Note that some of the grassland management is part-funded by a DEFRA Countryside Stewardship scheme that runs until 2028.

Current threats

We believe that the main threats to the ecological interest of the grasslands are:

- 1) Pollution from nitrogen from the air and from water run-off.
- 2) Soil enrichment from dog urine and feces.
- 3) Compaction, erosion and disturbance from recreational pressure
- 4) Lack of management, or insensitive management particularly regarding cutting regimes (e.g. failure to cut or graze, or cutting without arisings being removed)

Future threats

- 1) The loss of funding (whether from internal sources or DEFRA) for appropriate management
- 2) More erratic rainfall and warmer summers as a result of climate change
- 3) Increased recreational pressure

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to enhance the management of the grasslands

- 1) Volunteer opportunities (including potentially scything)
- 2) Education
- 3) Flood mitigation, water resilience, and carbon sequestration
- 4) Food source for pollinators
- 5) Increase areas of grassland under DEFRA Countryside Stewardship agreements to bring in more funding

Objective

Our main objectives are to

- 1) To move the acid grassland into good condition by 2027.
- 2) To improve the management of the other areas of grassland, so that they deliver more for people and wildlife.

Actions

By 2027 WPC will:

- Assess the condition of the acid grassland recorded in the 2016 survey, with the aim of developing a management plan to bring all acid grassland into Favourable Condition by 2027.
- To develop a grassland management plan for all other areas of grassland to formalise primary function (biodiversity, recreation etc) and to develop a strategy for each. The strategy will consider issues such as:
 - annual cut and collect.
 - enhancing plant diversity through use of green hay, yellow rattle, and local provenance seeds. This would require some element of survey including an assessment of soil fertility.
 - Consider whether areas currently outside the Countryside Stewardship scheme could be brought within it to increase funding streams.
 - To consider redesigning the cut of the Plain/recreational area to direct pedestrian footfall away from sensitive areas.
 - To consider revised signage/low-impact temporary barriers on the Plain to encourage compliance from the general public with regard to keeping to paths and dogs on leads to create sanctuary areas on (for example) the Plain for wintering buntings, pipits etc.
 - To improve the quality of access (footpaths and horse rides) around and leading to grassland sites. This is especially important on The Plain that has become eroded in many areas because of continuous horse movement around the edge of the site.
 - Although it is not planned to increase the areas of grassland at the expense of other habitats, areas threatened by encroaching scrub and secondary woodland will be identified and mapped.
 - Develop a central log of all grassland management to include timing and extent of cut.
 - Monitoring of areas brought into more active management.
 - Identifying the feasibility of creating new flower-rich areas on intensively managed amenity grassland.
- Carry out a feasibility study for the introduction of grazing on some the Commons grassland sites by 2027.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review. This will involve the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: Woodland Management

Description

Woodland is the largest habitat type across Wimbledon and Putney Commons, covering approximately 290 hectares. The woodland is classified as secondary woodland as it has developed on what was formerly open common land and is therefore comparatively young with very few trees beyond the age of 150 years old. The woodland comprises a mosaic of both native and non-native species, including large trees, smaller trees and shrubs, low level plants and ground-level flora. Despite its relatively young age, the importance of this habitat is recognised in the Commons' designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to the presence of Stag Beetles, which live on dead wood.

Current status

According to the latest SSSI condition assessment, the woodland habitats are classified as Unfavourable Recovering, meaning that they are not yet in Favourable condition but all necessary management measures are in place, which if sustained, should result in the habitat reaching Favourable condition over time.

Changes in status

The woodland on Wimbledon and Putney Commons had for many years been allowed to develop with very little human intervention. As with most other unmanaged secondary woodlands, this resulted in dense growth with lots of tall narrow trees of similar age, which are unable to fully develop their natural structure due to lack of space and light. Lack of light penetrating to the ground and lack of open spaces within the woodland restricted the development of lower layers and ground flora, and lack of deadwood limited species diversity. Management measures over the past two decades have started to improve this situation and will need to be maintained.

How the feature functions

To provide the most suitable conditions for wildlife to thrive, a healthy woodland should contain a full range of structures in balance, including a ground layer, field layer, shrub layer and canopy. From the fallen leaves found in the ground layer to the leaves that grow high up in the canopy, every part of the woodland structure provides habitat and food for an important assemblage of wildlife. As an example, a mature English oak produces approximately 700,000 leaves each year and can produce up to 50,000 acorns from spring through to early autumn, providing a vital food source wildlife. Nearly 500 species of invertebrate are dependent on oaks, together with numerous species of birds and bats. Deadwood is another important feature (both standing and fallen), providing habitat and food for a wide range of fungi and invertebrates - Stag Beetles being an important species for Wimbledon Common. However, if the structure of the woodland is compromised (too dark, too dense, too uniform, insufficient deadwood) then its value to wildlife is reduced.

Current threats

We believe the main threats to the woodland habitats are:

- Sub-optimal woodland structure and diversity
- Lack of standing and fallen deadwood
- Lack of diversity in tree, shrub and floral species
- Presence of invasive non-native species
- Presence of diseases and pests, notably Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)
- Excessive trampling due to visitors leaving the main paths
- Excessive levels of nutrients due to dog urine and faeces

Future threats

Future threats include the following:

- Introduction and spread of new pests and diseases
- Impact of climate change on the assemblages of flora and fauna that are supported by the woodland habitats.

Opportunities

- Increasing demand for volunteer opportunities that could make it easier to deliver habitat management such as coppicing.
- In addition, there is an opportunity to enhance the experience of visitors, by providing improved access and information.
- New funding opportunities arising from flood risk reduction, carbon sequestration and biodiversity protection, which could help to fund the actions needed to protect and enhance the habitat.
- Growing concern about nature loss and climate change, which could help us to get the local community support needed to deliver woodland management work.
- A growing body of evidence on how best to manage this habitat to enable us to take better decisions on its protection.
- New partnerships with local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims.

Objectives

Our main objective is to move the woodland into Favourable Condition. In line with the management plans jointly agreed between WPCC, the Forestry Commission and Natural England, this will be delivered through these actions:

- To create a more varied range of tree age & to ensure good succession
- To maintain & enhance Hazel coppice
- To reduce the dominance of Holly in the understorey
- To increase open areas within woodlands
- To remove invasive non-native species
- To retain non-intervention areas
- To retain veteran trees and dead wood both fallen & standing
- To improve wetland areas and ponds
- To encourage a wider range of native species
- To foster resistance against disease & pests
- To maintain & improve amenity
- To encourage recreation and education on the Commons
- To obtain grants where available

Actions

By 2027, WPCC will:

- Undertake woodland-thinning in heavily-shaded areas, with an emphasis on removal of non-native trees such as Turkey oak, Holm oak, Sycamore and Cherry Laurel
- Create open areas such as glades and scallops: in same areas as for holly thinning (2024-26); Brickfield site (2027); Beverley Brook towpath (2028)
- Create woodland rides in order to increase light at ground level and increase complexity and diversity of woodland edges: upper Robin Hood Ride (2024); Bluegate Ride (2025); Warren Farm Ride (2026); lower Robin Hood Ride (2027); Jerry's Hill (2028)
- Undertake holly thinning: Stage Ride (2024); Queensmere (2025-26); Jerry's Hill (2027); Casswell's Cavern (2028)
- Release veteran trees from competing growth

- Create dead wood habitats, by ring-barking of Turkey oaks and via tree safety work
- Coppice areas of hazel on a 5-7 year rotation to improve woodland structure and encourage ground flora and fauna: Warren Farm ride 50% (2024); Upper Gravelly Ride (2025); Lower Gravelly Ride (2026); Warren Farm ride 50% (2027); Robin Hood Ride (2028)
- Manage successional scrub growth to maintain structural diversity: Upper Gravelly Ride (2024); Lower Gravelly Ride (2025); 7 Post Pond wood (2026); Scio Pond wood (2027); upper Robin Hood Ride (2028)
- Maintain dense woodland cover as protection around selected areas of important wildlife habitat
- As part of ride management, take opportunities where possible to create small ephemeral pools to provide additional wildlife habitats
- Control Oak Processionary Moth
- Create new woodland trails: Queensmere (2024); Robin Hood Ride (2026); Putney Heath (2028)

By 2027 WPCCC **will seek to** deliver the following actions if additional external resources can be obtained such as through volunteers, partnerships, fundraising and/or grants:

- Plant new trees to increase species and age diversity and resilience in the face of pests and disease
- Plant wildflowers to increase species diversity and abundance

Monitoring and evaluation

More broadly, the Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through an annual review, in liaison with the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPCCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2032.

Objective: Ponds

Description

There are 9 ponds on the Commons, although there are also small bog pools at Farm bog as well as ephemeral water bodies on the wet heath, which are dealt with under the Valley Mires and Wet Heath sections.

Ponds are an important component of most terrestrial ecosystems. However significant numbers have been lost over the past century and the Commons is no exception.

The ponds host the majority of the dragonfly fauna of the Commons as well as large populations of common frogs, common toads and smooth newts. They also host breeding waterfowl as well as provide feeding areas for bats.

The ponds on the Commons are very varied reflecting a number of different origins that include stream damming (Queensmere and Ravine) and gravel extraction (7 Post Pond, Bluegate and Kingsmere)

8 of the ponds are within the boundary of the SSSI, although the only pond to be mentioned in the designation is Bluegate, where the presence of Floating Club-rush (*Eleogiton fluitans*) and *Spagnum subsecundum* is mentioned.

Current Status

Although 8 of the 9 ponds are within the SSSI there have been no detailed condition assessments either by Natural England or others. There have been occasional recent water quality assessments using simple kits. These have suggested that the water quality in most of the Commons' ponds is good.

Changes in Status

The number of ponds on the Commons has undoubtedly reduced over the past 100 years. It is difficult to be specific about other changes. However, as the surrounding area has changed from a largely rural landscape to urban London the changes may be significant in terms of issues such as dog disturbance, invasive species introduction and water quality.

How the feature functions

The ponds, which vary in size significantly, each has their own unique history and origin. Although they are ecologically important in their own right it is their place in the wider ecosystem, whether woodland, heath or grassland, that makes them so important. Ponds, where they form naturally, can be short-lived features. Man made ponds would historically have experienced a number of periodic interventions to keep them open, without which they might disappear.

Current threats

We believe that the main threats to the ecological interest of the ponds are:

- 1) Lack of detailed evidence and information about each site, making it challenging to address the suspected threats the ponds have.
- 2) Entry of dogs into ponds which a) increases turbidity and damages emergent vegetation b) creates disturbance, particularly of breeding waterfowl, and c) introduces neonicotinoid pesticides, which are routinely used in flea treatments, into water. For heavily used sites dog entry is now considered the main threat to the integrity of ponds.
- 3) Invasive non-native plant species
- 4) Non-native fish, in particular carp.
- 5) Lack of management, or insensitive management
- 6) Lack of emergent and fringing vegetation (especially Queensmere and Kingsmere)
- 7) Potential pollution from surrounding areas (e.g. road run-off to 7 Post Pond and Kingsmere)

Future threats

- 1) The loss of funding for appropriate management
- 2) More erratic rainfall and warmer summers as a result of climate change
- 3) Increased recreational/dog pressure
- 4) New invasive species introduction

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to enhance the management of the ponds

- 1) Increasing demand for volunteer opportunities that could make it easier to deliver habitat management.
- 2) New funding opportunities arising from flood risk reduction and biodiversity protection, which could help to fund the actions needed to protect existing ponds and construct new ponds. For example, storing more water in the valley mire systems could reduce flood risk in Roehampton and Barnes, which might be a project for which we could receive grants.
- 3) Growing concern about nature loss, which could help us to get the local community support needed to protect the ponds (such as from dog disturbance).
- 4) A growing body of evidence on how best to manage this habitat to enable us to take better decisions on its protection.
- 5) New partnerships with local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims.

Objective

Our main objective is to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the Commons' ponds, improve their recreational value and protect the SSSI-cited plants at Bluegate.

Actions

By 2027 WPCC **will**:

- Conduct a comprehensive survey of the 9 established permanent ponds to establish ecological interest, hydrology, water quality, threats and opportunities.
- Develop a management plan for each of the ponds to address the issues identified. This will may lead to additional actions, including:
 - wildlife protection areas to help prevent disturbance, such as using dead hedging;
 - dog management policy changes (such as agreeing 'sacrifice' ponds or sections of ponds that dogs are permitted to enter);
 - control of invasive non-native plants where appropriate. How, how often, how much, where will be decided as part of survey process.

By 2027 WPCC **will seek to deliver** the following actions if additional external resources can be obtained such as through volunteers, partnerships, fundraising and/or grants:

- Improve public access to ponds and provide educational information about each site.;
- Investigate the feasibility of re-establishing 'ghost ponds' such as Silent Pools and Grantham Pond;
- investigate the feasibility of creating 16 new ponds on the Commons;

- Consider reintroducing species such as the Water Vole and Great-Crested Newt;
- Consider interception wetlands for water inflows to intercept silt and pollution (in particular there could be an opportunity at Kingsmere to create a reed bed at water inlets dependent on a survey)
- remove inappropriate non-native fish including carp

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review, using JNCC guidelines for condition assessment. This will involve the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: River Management

Description

The Beverley Brook rises in Worcester Park and travels north for 14.3km until it finally reaches the Thames just past Putney Lower Common. Its catchment covers an area of 64km². While 66% of the catchment is largely urban and suburban, the brook also travels through many important greenspaces including Wimbledon Common, Richmond Park, Barnes Common and Putney Lower Common. The Land Management Plan addresses the sections flowing through Wimbledon Common (approx. 2km) and Putney Lower Common (approx. 400m).

Current status

For the purposes of the Water Framework Directive¹, the Beverley Brook is classified as a Heavily Modified Waterbody, having been substantially changed in character by human physical modifications. The target is therefore for the Beverley Brook to reach Good Ecological *Potential* (GEP) as opposed to Good Ecological *Status* (GES). Beverley Brook is currently considered to be of Moderate Ecological Potential, with phosphate concentrations and fish populations classed as Poor and Bad respectively. The data also highlights that invertebrates and macrophytes (aquatic plants) are both classified as below Good status.

For context, it should be noted that according to an assessment of the state of English rivers carried out by the Environment Agency and Natural England in 2019, only 14% of rivers were considered to be of Good Ecological Status, which illustrates that this is a national problem.

Changes in status

Beverley Brook has been heavily modified since at least the late 19th century, and has been subject to deepening, widening, straightening, heightening of the banks, and enclosure with wooden toe boards and, in certain sections, with concrete. The result has been a waterway that is too straight, too wide, too deep, and too uniform to sustain essential natural processes.

The origin of the name of the river suggests that beavers may have once been present, and historical records confirm that water voles once lived along the banks. There are no historical records of fish populations but it can be safely assumed that these have diminished considerably over time.

To help address these challenges, a restoration project was carried out along the Wimbledon Common section of the Beverley Brook that involved WPC and South East Rivers Trust (SERT), funded by Viridor Credits and the Environment Agency. The objective was to restore natural processes which, in the words of SERT, would enable the river to 'self-heal'. In practice this work involved: the removal of 2,000 metres of toe-boarding, tree works along the surrounding area of the brook, the installation of 60 pieces of large woody material into the river, the creation of 43 woody berms, and planting of marginal vegetation. It is worth noting that (even more ambitious) restoration work has also been completed in a section of the river flowing through Richmond Park.

How the feature functions

¹ The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) is a legislative framework designed to protect and improve the quality of all water resources within the UK and European Union. Since the UK left the European Union, the WFD has been retained in UK law, but the regulations may be subject to change in the future.

The type of river is largely determined by the geology of the area through which a river travels and therefore each different type of substrate (clay, sandstone, chalk or limestone) will have a direct influence on the water and the flora and fauna which each river is able to support.

In addition, the range of natural habitats that are found in rivers is also greatly influenced by fluvial processes, which involve the physical interaction of flowing water and the effects this has on the natural channels of a river. If unconstrained, a river forms a dynamic system that is continuously adjusting and re-shaping the habitats along its length in relation to the ongoing flow of water and sediment that is deposited along its course.

These habitats include the flowing main channel, aquatic, semi-aquatic and terrestrial environments. Features may include backwaters that are away from the main flow of the river and provide an important refuge for many different types of flora and fauna. Riparian woodland provides a valuable interface between terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, and woody debris in all shapes and sizes can improve water quality and benefit wildlife such as invertebrates and fish.

Current threats

Existing threats to Beverley Brook include:

- Ongoing impact of excessive shading from trees in unrestored sections, which restricts growth of aquatic and bankside vegetation
- Ongoing impact of uniform, low-energy flow in unrestored sections, which restricts development of natural features such as riffles and pools, and results in high levels of sediment deposition
- Damage to bankside vegetation due to large numbers of dogs entering the river at multiple points along its length, and pollution from dog faeces, urine and tick and worming treatments
- Presence of invasive non-native plant species including Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed
- Presence of oak processionary moth (OPM) in trees along the bank
- Pollution due to surface water run-off, and (possibly) from illegal discharges from residential and business properties with mis-connected drainage systems
- Litter flowing downstream, which can easily get caught up in the berms and other material in the river, and consequent plastic pollution.

Future threats

Potential future threats include:

- Increases in pollution from surface water run-off and illegal discharges as urban development within the catchment intensifies.
- Increases in the "flashy" nature of the flow if urban development within the catchment intensifies and run-off into the river increases.
- Increases in the "flashy" nature of the flow if run-off into the river increases due to climate change.

Opportunities

- The key opportunity is to work with partners such as Wandsworth Council, Barnes Common and SERT to extend the restoration works so far completed to cover the remaining 700m of the Wimbledon Common section, the entire Putney Lower Common section and beyond into other landowners areas. This would help provide the conditions necessary to enable the river to begin to restore the natural processes that are characteristic of a healthy river.

- There is an opportunity to partner with other organisations such as SERT to increase volunteer involvement in water quality testing, litter clearance, and monitoring
- A potential future opportunity would be to reintroduce lost species such as water vole and beaver. Beavers in particular are ecosystem engineers, and would have a substantial impact on the structure, function and overall health of the habitat, although the feasibility of an introduction in such an urban area is not known.

Objectives

The objective is for the Beverley Brook within the Commons to reach Good Ecological Potential.

Actions

By 2027 WPCC **will**:

- Continue volunteer litter picking every 3 weeks
- Continue to manage Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and OPM
- Create dog exclusion zones, using dead-hedging, along lengths of the riverbanks to reduce dog erosion.

By 2027 WPCC **will seek to** deliver these actions:

- Fund an ecological survey of the river to help guide decision making about actions to move the river into Good Ecological Condition and to provide a baseline for ongoing monitoring.
- Deliver extensive restoration on the remaining 700m of the Wimbledon Common section and the entire 400m Putney Lower Common section, such as by placing large woody debris into the channel and planting marginal vegetation. This could be in partnership with adjacent landowners such as Barnes Common and Wandsworth Council.
- Conduct further bankside tree thinning along previously restored sections of the river.
- Create designated dog entry points.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review, in liaison with the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: Valley Mires

Description

Valley mires and bogs are jointly referred to as peatlands, since they are dominated by living peat-forming plants. Peatlands provide a range of important functions including climate change mitigation, flood risk management and support for biodiversity. Habitats such as these are now rare and vulnerable in the UK – 94% have been lost in the last century due to factors such as drainage, development and inappropriate management.

There are three valley mire systems on the Commons: Farm mire, which includes Farm Bog and Fern Bog; Stag mire, which includes Stag Bog; and Ravine mire, which includes Ravine Bog. (Despite their name, Farm Bog, Fern Bog, Stag Bog and Ravine Bog are in fact all valley mires, since they are stream-fed.) There is also a stream to the north of the windmill, Glen Albyn, which has similar hydrology to the other mire sites and is therefore likely to have been a valley mire in the past. The largest and most intact site, Farm Bog, is one of the key reasons for the Commons' designation as an SSSI.

Current status

The Wildlife & Conservation Forum assessed the state of the valley mire sites in 2021:

- Farm mire (excl. Farm Bog): Part Destroyed
- Farm Bog: Unfavourable Declining
- Stag mire: Part Destroyed
- Ravine mire: Part Destroyed
- Glen Albyn: Part Destroyed

Changes in status

The extent and condition of the valley mire systems have been impacted significantly over the past 100 years, due to actions taken during the first half of the 20th century and subsequent lack of management. The damaging actions included digging of ditches, and straightening, deepening and diversion of streams, which have resulted in drying of the wetlands and consequent loss of rare wetland plant species. Cessation of grazing has also resulted in scrub encroachment and reduction in the extent of open habitat.

How the feature functions

Valley mires are wetland habitats that occur in depressions, such as river valleys and lake basins. They receive a constant flow of ground water and are poorly drained, so are saturated with water at least seasonally. These habitats support a range of plants and animals: most notable are the various types of Sphagnum moss which are the principal peat-forming species. Traditionally these areas would have been grazed, thus helping to keep them free from trees and scrub: this function is now performed by people as part of the habitat management actions.

Current threats

We believe the main threats to the valley mire systems are:

- Drainage ditches
- Straightened, deepened and diverted streams
- Scrub and tree encroachment
- Dominance of purple moor grass at the expense of less competitive plants
- Trampling
- Pollution from dog defecation and the air, and potentially from the golf course
- Fire

Land drainage is the most imminent threat as valley mires cannot function without waterlogged soil, even if all other threats are addressed. Drainage ditches currently run through and adjacent to each of the valley mire systems. These have certainly damaged the habitat and could ultimately lead to their loss.

Future threats

The main future threats to the valley mires are:

- The loss of funding for appropriate management. For example, if fewer resources were available from environmental land management schemes or changes to the WPC budget, the actions needed may not be possible.
- Similarly, loss of volunteer support for management activities would be a significant issue, since much of the current management (i.e., of Farm Bog) is provided by volunteers.
- Lack of community support for conservation action. If the community does not support actions to protect this rare habitat, it will be more challenging to protect it in the long term. These actions include protecting and increasing the extent of waterlogged soils, which can make it harder to walk across the land. However, given the fragility of these sites and their relatively remote location, it is hoped that it will be possible to avoid conflicts with recreational activity.

In the longer-term, climate change could have a range of impacts, particularly drying out during longer drought periods. However, if the valley mires are in good condition (and retain water for longer) these risks could be lessened.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to protect and enhance the management of the valley mires:

- Increasing demand for volunteer opportunities that could make it easier to deliver habitat management.
- New funding opportunities arising from flood risk reduction, carbon sequestration and biodiversity protection, which could help to fund the actions needed to protect the water table and the habitat. For example, storing more water in the valley mire systems could reduce flood risk in Roehampton and Barnes, which might be a project for which we could receive grants.
- Growing concern about nature loss and climate change, which could help us to get the local community support needed to protect the valley mires.
- A growing body of evidence on how best to manage this habitat to enable us to take better decisions on its protection.
- New partnerships with local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims. For example, DEFRA published the England Peat Action Plan in May 2021 that set out targets for the restoration of peatlands. The South East Rivers Trust (SERT) is another potential partner, with experience of wetland restoration.

Objectives

- *Farm Bog* - move into Unfavourable Recovering condition by 2027.
- *Remainder of Farm Mire, Stag Mire, Ravine Mire, Glen Albyn and associated bogs:* Our objective is to protect these sites from further damage (for example by additional drainage or trampling) and to agree a plan for how they will be moved to recovering condition by 2032.

Actions

By 2027 WPCC **will**:

- Conduct the following work at Farm Bog with London Wildlife Trust volunteers:
 - Restore the site extent to at least 0.61 hectares and control invasive trees (birch, willow, sycamore) and scrub
 - Selectively coppice willows along the stream on a 3 year cycle
 - Prevent trampling by construction and maintenance of dead hedges
 - Maintain habitat diversity by sod cutting of Molinia to create new bog pools and exposing areas of bare peat
 - Test water pollution levels
 - Reintroduce Cross-leaved Heath and introduce male Veilwort if a suitable donor population can be found
 - Create new dams based on the advice of a hydrologist
- remove invasive duck weed from Ravine Pond by 2027.
- commission a professional hydrological survey
- agree a plan for moving all valley mire and bog systems into recovering condition by 2032.

By 2027 WPCC **will seek to** deliver the following actions if additional external resources can be obtained such as through volunteers, partnerships, fundraising and/or grants:

- Restore the valley mire systems so that natural geomorphological processes as far as possible allow the restoration of characteristic and sustainable habitats.
- Reintroduce species known to have become extinct, such as Water Voles or characteristic plants.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review, using JNCC guidelines for condition assessment. This will involve the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: Putney Lower Common

Description

Putney Lower Common (PLC) comprises around 20 hectares of grassland, woodland, a short section of Beverley Brook and sporting facilities. While the area is not covered by the same protected area designations as the main body of the Commons, it is still a valued and important green space for the community and it is home to a number of important species.

The area north of Lower Richmond Road consists predominately of semi-improved neutral grassland and the area south of Lower Richmond Road is primarily amenity grassland. A small amount (approximately 1ha) of native and non-native broadleaved woodland is found in the northwest of the site and scattered trees and scrub are found throughout the site. A small orchard was planted in 2022.

Current Status

We do not have up-to-date evidence of the current environmental status.

We suspect that some areas of the grassland are likely to be developing a good diversity of plants due to meadow management work. Hedgehogs and Stag Beetles are known to be found at the site.

Changes in Status

The habitats, when last assessed in 2016, were thought to be species-poor. We do not know the extent to which this has improved. However, the 2016 survey identified six plant species of conservation concern on PLC: Scots Pine; Sickle Medic; Meadow crane's-bill; Bluebell; Burnet Rose and Creeping Willow. It is not known whether these species survive today.

The 2016 survey also identified several invasive non-native species including various cotoneasters, Tree-of-Heaven, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Cherry Laurel and Snowberry. It is not known the extent to which these have been expanded or diminished over the past 7 years.

However, we suspect that there have been improvements to the condition of the habitats in some places, given recent work to tackle non-native invasive species (such as Tree-of-Heaven), meadow creation work and through improved grassland management through cut-and-collect of some areas.

An assessment is required to determine if there has been a change in status.

How the feature functions

The functioning of the grassland is largely because of human activities such as mowing. Woodland areas function in the same way described in the woodland objective.

Current threats

Given the need for an up-to-date survey, it is not possible to confidently list the threats. Based on the 2016 survey, these could include:

- 1) Over-management of the amenity grassland areas.
- 2) Under-management of nature grassland areas, with related low species diversity.
- 3) Lack of management of the woodland, which may limit structural diversity and limit deadwood habitats.
- 4) Invasive species.
- 5) Lack of evidence to guide decision making.

Future threats

- 1) The loss of funding for appropriate management.

- 2) More erratic rainfall and warmer summers because of climate change, which may exacerbate flooding and drought.
- 3) New invasive species.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to enhance the management of PLC:

- 1) To potentially take some areas out of amenity grassland management to create new wildflower meadows. This may lower the costs of managing the area, while delivering biodiversity benefits. Grants may be available to support this, and volunteers may be able to help deliver the management work.
- 2) The area is next to Barnes Common, which is an important area for acid grassland and a local nature reserve. Through ongoing management of the grassland on PLC, this could lead to an important expansion of this threatened habitat in London.
- 3) Accessing grant schemes to help manage the woodland, hedgerows and meadow areas.
- 4) New partnerships with Barnes Common, local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims (such as climate change and biodiversity).
- 5) To improve the amenity value through a nature trail and signage.
- 6) To plant native hedgerows next to Lower Richmond Road in order to provide screening from traffic to improve the amenity value and public safety, while also providing additional habitat for hedgehogs.

Objective

Our main objective is to enhance the biodiversity value of Putney Lower Common, while also enhancing the amenity value of the site.

Actions

By 2027 WPCC **will**:

- Conduct a condition assessment to inform future management actions.
- Remove Tree-of-Heaven.
- Conduct cut and collect meadow management on Main Field, Oasis Academy and Fairground meadows, and ensure wide uncut margins are maintained on all other areas of grassland on site.
- Leave habitat piles in the woodland for Hedgehogs to use as shelter.
- Retain deadwood in the woodland to provide Stag Beetle habitat.

By 2027 WPCC **will seek to deliver** the following actions if additional external resources can be obtained such as through volunteers, partnerships, fundraising and/or grants:

- The restoration of the PLC section of Beverley Brook
- Plant mixed native hedgerow along sections of the cemetery wall and alongside the edges of the main roads traversing the Common.
- Slightly increase the size of the Commons' orchard by up to nine trees.
- Plant seed (or spread green hay collected from the Plain) on grassland sites.
- Create two ponds.
- Create marked education trail on site.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review, using JNCC guidelines and other information for condition assessments. This will involve the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPCCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: REMPF

Description

The Richard Evans Memorial Playing Fields (REMPH) comprise 27 hectares of playing fields and related infrastructure, with surrounding woodland along Stag Lane, ditches, and a war memorial.

Current Status

All the grassland of the playing fields is managed solely for sports or for amenity reasons. The fields themselves are drained directly into the Beverley Brook, are mown frequently, seeded with grasses and treated with chemicals. This provides an excellent playing surface for the sports clubs that use the area, although there is a need to enhance the drainage of the pitches.

The grassland delivers little for biodiversity, and due to the direct drainage into the Brook, the pitches may contribute to the risk of local flooding and cause pollution from run-off.

Stag Lane is bounded on one side by a line of English Oaks with understory and by a metal fence on the other. The trees provide good habitat, although the dense undergrowth likely limits the use of the path by local people. The path is in a poor condition.

The Memorial Ring comprises Oak trees, with a meadow, surrounded by a hedge. The status of these are as follows:

- Meadow – uncertain quality, although thought to be species poor.
- Oak trees – appear to be in good health, unknown species, probably English Oak.
- Hedge – species poor, tall and thin in places. It may be suffering from both over-cutting and over-shading.

The woodland edge surrounding the pitches is straight against the edge of the pitches in most places, with little diversity.

The two ditches are of uncertain status. In one ditch a smelly discharge of unknown origin was noticed in early 2023, which perhaps might be traced to a miss-connected sewer or other ongoing pollution. The other ditch provides a main drainage channel from some of the pitches into the Brook and is suspected to be of low biodiversity interest.

Changes in Status

This area is outside of the SSSI, and the baseline for their status is therefore the 2016 NVC survey. This did not assess the condition of the ditches.

There appears to have been no change in status since 2016.

How the feature functions

Given the man-made nature of the area, the functioning is largely because of human activities such as mowing and draining the pitches. Woodland areas function in the same way described in the woodland objective.

Current threats

We believe that the main threats are:

- 1) Over-management of the amenity grassland area, with related low species diversity.
- 2) Potential pollution being caused to the Brook due to run-off from the pitches or from yet unknown pollution sources.
- 3) Potential flood risk contribution from the pitches.
- 4) Inadequate drainage of the pitches to ensure they remain suitable for sport.
- 5) Lack of management of the surrounding woodland, which is limiting structural diversity.
- 6) Poor hedgerow management.

- 7) Low species diversity in the Memorial Ring meadow.
- 8) Lack of path maintenance of Stag Lane, with poor sight lines.

Future threats

- 1) The loss of funding for appropriate management of the pitches and surrounding area.
- 2) More erratic rainfall and warmer summers as a result of climate change, which may exacerbate flooding and drought.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities to enhance the management of REMPH:

- 1) To take areas out of amenity grassland management to create new wildflower meadows. This may lower the costs of managing the pitches, while delivering biodiversity benefits. Grants may be available to support this, and volunteers and REMPH staff may be able to help deliver the management work.
- 2) The pitches are in a strategically important area between Richmond Park and the Commons, so improving their management for nature will help species distribution in the wider landscape. This location has been identified by the national B-Lines scheme, which is seeking to create a network of flower-rich areas that enable pollinators to move around the landscape. REMPH is within a B-Line designated area, and the creation of meadows here is likely to be highly beneficial.
- 3) Flood risk management funding grants to install a new sustainable drainage system to retain water from the pitches on the site where possible, rather than draining directly into the Brook, while delivering better drainage and a potential source of irrigation water in summer.
- 4) Accessing grant schemes to help manage the woodland, hedge and meadow areas.
- 5) New partnerships with local authorities, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver our shared aims (such as to reduce flood risk).
- 6) To improve the amenity value of Stag Lane, which is bounded on one side by an industrial fence, with the support of the local community.

Objective

Our main objective is to maintain and enhance both the recreational and biodiversity value of the REMPH area.

Actions

By 2027 WPC **will**:

- Identify areas across the pitches that will be transformed into flower-rich meadows and change the management regime accordingly. This will be done in such a way that significant negative impacts on the pitches are avoided, while seeking to deliver the greatest extent of new meadow areas possible.
- Improve sightlines along Stag Lane;
- Introduce annual cut and collect of Memorial Ring meadow;
- Introduce a three-year cutting cycle for the hedge; and
- Conduct water testing of the ditches to assess pollution levels.

By 2027 WPC **will seek to deliver** the following actions if additional external resources can be obtained such as through volunteers, partnerships, fundraising and/or grants:

- A sustainable drainage project to plan and deliver improved drainage of the pitches while reducing flood and pollution risk of the Brook;
- Restore Stag Lane path;
- Plant a native hedge and orchard along Stag Lane;

- Meadow creation, such as soil treatment if necessary and/or spreading green hay harvested from the Plain onto new meadow areas to introduce new plant species;
- Conduct restoration on the Memorial Ring hedge;
- Bring newly created wildflower-rich grasslands and the surrounding woodland into the existing grant management schemes.
- Deliver new signage about the area's history and interest.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review, using JNCC guidelines and other information for condition assessments. This will involve the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: The Wimbledon Common Golf Course

Description

There is a long tradition of the playing of golf on Wimbledon Common stretching back to the 19th century. The golf course forms an important part of the physical and cultural landscape of the Commons.

The golf course largely consists of amenity grassland (greens, tees and parts of fairways), with surrounding short acid grassland and heath with fringing scrub and woodland.

The areas of acid grassland and heath are one of the main reasons for the Commons SSSI designation.

Current Status

A SSSI condition assessment was carried out by Natural England in 2014 on a unit of the Common that included part of the golf course. Although the whole unit was classified as Unfavourable Recovering it was observed that the areas of the golf course were suffering from high footfall, and possibly damage from fertiliser use and rolling. Natural England also stated “management or use of the areas of acid grassland really needs to become less intensive to improve its condition”.

Changes in Status

Anecdotally, heather and acid grassland areas may have deteriorated on the course since 2016. It is currently not clear to what extent these changes are due to the management activities of the course, in terms of cutting area, cutting frequency or chemical treatment. In addition, maps would suggest that scrub and secondary woodland, including non-native trees, have encroached significantly onto the areas of rough making the grassland surrounding the course much narrower than would have been the case in 1953 when the SSSI was designated.

How the feature functions

Acid grasslands would historically have been grazed or cut for hay, mostly on a yearly cycle. They should not receive any chemical inputs.

Amenity grassland is intensively managed to provide a suitable surface for golf. This includes chemical treatments, irrigation, frequent mowing and reseeding.

Current threats

We believe that the main threats to the ecological interest of the golf course are:

- 1) Accidental damage to the surrounding SSSI by golf course management activities, such as through application of chemicals or mowing. Note too the potential impact chemicals may have on the surrounding ponds and valley mires.
- 2) A lack of information about the management of the course and the surrounding acid grassland.
- 3) Lack of or inappropriate management of the surrounding acid grassland and heath, which may have contributed to the local extinction of Bell Heather and perhaps other species on the Commons.
- 4) Compaction and erosion due to pedestrian footfall exacerbated by excessive water run-off.

Future threats

Climate change may result in increased erosion from fairways, given their heavy mowing and light sandy soil. Given the lack of a clearly agreed plan regarding the course's management, there is a risk that management could extend accidentally into the SSSI.

Opportunities

- 1) Sustainability accreditation - The golf industry is increasingly endorsing sustainability and enhanced environmental management. To this end accreditation schemes are being developed. There are also industry partnerships with conservation organisations such as the RSPB. Any move in this direction would enhance the green credentials and reputation of the golf course and the Commons as a whole.
- 2) Flood risk management grant funding - The golf course represents a significant hard surface that may contribute to excess run-off in times of heavy rainfall and contribute to local flood risk. Changes to the management of the rough and semi-rough could reduce the risk of local flash-flooding. This could also increase the Commons resilience to drought, by storing more water in the soils.
- 3) Sustainability changes may deliver financial benefits to the course, in terms of reduced costs from mowing, chemicals and irrigation.

Objective

Our main objective is to agree a golf course management plan that ensures that the acid grassland and heathland identified in 2016 on the course is being managed in line with advice from Natural England.

Our secondary objective is to work with the course to achieve additional environmental enhancements where possible, perhaps through sustainability accreditation or a flood risk management project.

Actions

By 2027, WPCC will:

- Work with the course to mark out clearly delineated areas of tees, greens, fairways, semi-rough, rough and the surrounding habitats. This will:
 - assess the condition of the acid grassland and heath identified in 2016;
 - agree a management plan with the course and Natural England for each of these areas; and
 - describe a management regime for areas surrounding the course that WPCC is responsible for.

By 2027, WPCC will seek to:

- Support the course to obtain green accreditation, should it so wish.
- Manage the woodland edge around the golf course in line with the Commons' overall woodland management objectives to help develop a woodland edge that will increase the species diversity and the habitat structure of the Commons woodland.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review, using JNCC guidelines for condition assessment. This will involve the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. WPCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Objective: Artificial Mounds

Description

There are three large, artificial mounds located on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath, which resulted from the dumping of materials from road improvements carried out along the A3 and Roehampton Lane during the 1960s. Two of these mounds are located close to one another and lay immediately south of the junction between the A3 and Roehampton Lane and the third mound, known locally as the Acropolis, is in the area adjacent to the lower section of Robin Hood Ride and close to the Beverley Brook.

Current status

The artificial mounds on the Commons are not currently assessed by Natural England and therefore an official condition assessment for these specific areas of land is not available. Nor are they specifically addressed in the NVC study completed in 2016, but would most likely be included under the general category of scrub habitat.

Changes in status

The habitat was created during the 1960s, and in addition to landscaping this work included the planting of extensive areas of Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*). Since then a mosaic of scrub habitats have developed, comprising a mix of mainly low-growing vegetation, and have become an important area for wildlife in their own right.

How the feature functions

Although artificial in origin, the mounds now represent a good example of scrub habitat, providing a wide range of benefits for invertebrates, mammals, and birds including nectar, seeds, fruits, shelter and nest sites.

The mounds on Putney Heath are currently one of the best areas on the Commons to spot birds such as whitethroat, blackcap, chiffchaff and garden warbler, as well as occasional greenfinch, chaffinch and brambling. As a result of the presence of a good coverage of teasel, the Putney Heath mounds are also home to the Commons' resident goldfinch population.

Well-structured scrub also provides a wide range of opportunities for many invertebrate species as well as the provision of good feeding, denning and a refuge for mammals such as rabbit, fox, badger, deer (on the Commons these would most likely be Muntjac) and a variety of smaller mammals.

Current threats

We believe the main threats to the scrub habitat of the mounds are:

- Continued spread of non-native Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*)
- Presence of the invasive non-native species Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)

However, it should be noted that there is no detailed knowledge currently of the ecology of the mounds and of the flora and fauna present, and so additional threats may in fact exist. A survey and monitoring exercise will be needed to better understand the natural value of these areas and the threats that they may face.

Future threats

Specific future threats are not yet known but may be identified as a result of survey and monitoring. As with all habitats, climate change could have a range of impacts in the longer-term, including changes to the assemblages of flora and fauna.

Opportunities

The key opportunity for the mounds is to conduct a survey in order to provide a body of evidence on how best to manage this habitat to enable us to take better decisions on its protection. This survey could be undertaken by a combination of staff and volunteer resources.

Objective

Our objective is to maintain these scrub areas primarily for nature through:

1. Conducting a more detailed survey of the mounds to ensure that we have a better evidence basis for management;
2. Reduction of Turkey oak;
3. Eradication of Japanese knotweed.

Actions

By 2027 WPCCC will:

- conduct a habitat condition assessment. This may identify further actions to be delivered;
- Ring bark Turkey Oak and other non-native trees (Years 1 and 2 – small mound adjacent to A3, Year 3 – Large Putney Heath mound, Year 4 – Acropolis);
- Remove Japanese Knotweed.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Conservators will check progress against the actions in this plan through a yearly review. WPCCC will prepare a final report for presentation to the Board in 2027.

Conservators Board Meeting: Monday 3 April 2023

Conservation Report

Queensmere Swans

Sadly, the pen swan on Queensmere passed away on 19 February. The cause of death is not clear but she had no injuries so we do know it wasn't as a result of an attack. She was an elderly swan and it is possible that this was as a result of natural causes through old age. Avian flu cannot be ruled out but as far as we are aware there were no obvious signs that she was ill.

The Swan Sanctuary are aware and staff were monitoring the remaining cob for any signs of distress however, he left the Mere and a young swan had taken up residence. It was not clear where this youngster had come from but its plumage indicated it was hatched last year. Two weeks later the resident cob returned and the youngster was removed by the Swan Sanctuary – this was for his own safety to prevent any injury from the older cob.

Woodland thinning on Putney Heath - Ring Barking and Knopper Galls

A healthy woodland should contain the full range of structures in balance which would provide a ground layer, field layer, shrub layer and canopy. By providing openings within the woodland canopy and therefore allowing light to penetrate to the woodland floor, the provision of open space provides the opportunity for the growth of nectar bearing shrubs and flowering plants which are so vital for the development of invertebrate variety and biomass.

As much of the Commons' woodland has developed through a process of natural succession, the result has been the establishment of large areas of even-aged trees that are tightly spaced together, and which therefore prevent the growth of new trees and the creation of a well-developed woodland structure. In order to create a more diverse age structure within the Commons woodland, there is a need for tree thinning to be carried out in the more heavily shaded areas from time to time.

One way to achieve this is through the reduction of the invasive non-native trees species. These include Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*).

Turkey oak is a hardy, fast growing species of oak that was first introduced to the British Isles in 1735. Since then, it has aggressively colonized many parts of the countryside leading to the displacement of native flora.

It is far less valuable to British wildlife than our native English oak (*Quercus robur*) and it is often considered to be a pest because:

- it is so fast growing
- it will hybridise with the English oak
- it is host to the knopper gall wasp (*Andricus quercuscalicis*)

The knopper gall wasp is a recent introduction to the British Isles, first arriving in the 1960s and now found throughout England, Wales and Scotland.

As part of its life-cycle, the knopper gall wasp migrates from its host tree, the Turkey oak, to English oak, where it lays eggs on the buds of the developing acorns leading to the formation of a sticky formation (gall) which can damage the acorns of the English oak and impact on its ability to reproduce successfully. According to Imperial College London, knopper galls can

destroy about 50% of the annual acorn crop but in some years, up to 100% of the crop can be lost to these wasps.

Ring Barking

To help manage areas of the Commons which have suffered from the colonisation of a high number of Turkey oak, the Commons' Maintenance Team have carried out "ring barking", rather than felling, on selected trees in the woodland behind Curling Pond and the woodland adjacent to the top of Jerry's Hill.

Ring barking, which may sometimes be referred to as "girdling", is the removal of a complete band of bark from around a trunk or branch of a tree. It is a traditional method that has been used for centuries as a means of clearing woodland and is often actively encouraged by wildlife conservationists.

Rather than our team going in and felling trees, potentially leaving a scarred area of woodland, this method creates a reservoir of dead standing trees which will disintegrate over time. It is a natural process similar to a tree dying slowly of disease and it creates a rich and diverse habitat for a wide range of insects and fungi, as well as woodpeckers and other woodland birds. In particular, dead wood is invaluable for the increasingly rare stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) – the presence of Stag beetles on the Commons is a primary reason for our designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).



Woodland work on Putney Lower Common

Towards the end of 2022, another slightly smaller piece of woodland work was carried out on Putney Lower Common. This project combined the thinning of a small area of woodland that had become heavily shaded by a dense canopy of sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) trees, and the scarifying and protection of the ground by erecting a temporary enclosure of chestnut paling. It is anticipated that over the course of 2023, we will see this popular area of the Commons become established as a healthy woodland glade from what was previously a very poor area of woodland.

Heathland Restoration

Heathland restoration forms an ongoing part of the Commons' programme of habitat management. Over the past few months, volunteer scrub bashing sessions have continued on Putney Heath where various groups have focused on the area of heathland that is adjacent to Jubilee Path and on two areas of heathland that are close to Roehampton Ride and Ladies Mile.

Tree safety works - Friars Avenue

Tree safety work is one of the most important ongoing tasks that is carried out by the Commons Maintenance Team. In such a large and busy open space as the Commons, the risks associated with failing trees needs to be addressed as soon as possible although certain well used areas will be considered of higher importance than others.

While much of the tree safety work that is carried out on the Commons aims to prolong the health and lifespan of trees, unfortunately, it is not always possible to retain trees that have succumbed to disease or reached a very old age. Where a dangerous tree presents a risk to human life, if there is no way of removing the risk or separating it from potential human contact, unfortunately retaining the tree on site is not an option.

This is exactly the reason why the recent tree work was carried out along Friar's Avenue, resulting in the felling of a number of heavily pollarded Lombardy poplars (*Populus nigra 'italica'*) along the boundary of the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields and the heavily used Friar's Avenue.

Lombardy poplars are notorious for internal basal decay and having tried to prolong the lifespan of the poplars back in 2019 through another programme of tree safety work, unfortunately by 2023 there was nothing further that could be done for these trees apart from to make them safe and leave them on site as fallen dead wood habitats. With cars permanently parked along the whole length of Friar's Avenue and sports taking place during much of the week and weekend, the only option for maintaining public safety in this area of the Commons was to fell all the failing poplars.



Volunteering Update

As always, over the past few months, volunteers have continued to help protect and enhance the Commons landscape. From scrub bashing to litter picking, the Commons would certainly not be as well looked after as they are today without the thousands of hours of care and attention that our volunteers devote to looking after this very special location.

Over the past few months, just some of the important tasks that have been carried out by volunteers on the Commons have included:

Scrub bashing on the heathland: This very popular activity is carried out throughout the year with volunteers meeting on two Sunday mornings each month. Over the past few



months, volunteers have concentrated on three main areas, all of which have been located on Putney Heath.

Mid-week volunteer group: Meeting every three weeks on a Wednesday morning, this group undertake a wide range of tasks throughout the year. Over the past few months, all activities have taken place on Wimbledon Common with Bluegate Gravel Pit and the Centre Path meadow receiving some much need care and attention.

Beverley Brook Volunteer litter pickers:

This volunteer group meet every three weeks on a Wednesday morning where they are involved in clearing litter from the Beverley Brook on Wimbledon Common. All the equipment needed for this activity is provided by the Commons including waders, gloves and litter picking sticks. We are the only organisation to hold regular litter picking events along this section of the Beverley Brook and a great deal of thanks is owed to all the volunteers who help us keep the Brook clear of rubbish.

