

**Public Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on
Monday 14 October 2024 at 4.30pm at the Information Centre, Manor Cottage,
London SW19 5NR**

Conservators: Mauro Mattiuzzo (MM)
Oliver Bennett (OB)
David Brown
Sue Bucknall (SB)
Michael Johnston (MJ)
William Liu (WL)
Peter Shortt (PS)

Officers: Colin Cooper, Chief Executive (CE)
Angela Evans-Hill, EA to Chief Executive and Communications Officer
Lynnie Farrant, Fundraising Manager
Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer (C&EO)
Philip Warner, Management Accountant

Members of the public: One member of the public attended.

PART A(1) PUBLIC

10.24.1 Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence

Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk & Ranger

10.24.2 Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting

None

10.23.3 WPCB Board Meetings

i. Resolutions of the Board Meeting 22 July 2024

The Resolutions of the meeting held on 22 July 2024 were approved.

ii. Minutes of the Part A(1) Board Meeting of 22 July 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2024 were approved.

10.24.4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising on this part of the Agenda

10.23.5 Board and Committee Matters

There are no Board and Committee Matters for this part of the Agenda

10.24.6 Chief Executive's Report

The Board received and noted the Chief Executive's report.

The following items were raised:

Keepers – The Keepers were now up to full strength with the latest recruit starting on 30 September 2024. His background was also in the Household Cavalry. There was currently a backlog of annual leave which Keepers were catching up with.

There had been issues over the summer with illegal incursions in nearby open spaces which had led to the locking of three of the Commons four car parks. The Keepers spent a lot of time monitoring the situation in Ham and Kingston. The most recent incursion was at the Charrington Bowl in Tolworth but the group had since moved on and there had been no further reports. WPCCC was part of a network of local authorities mailing list which was able to give local intelligence. Although the current soft ground of the Commons was not attractive to such incursions, the REMPF car park remained a high risk area.

WPCCC had received several reports about a lady who frequents Nurses Walk off Parkside near the Village. She either sits surrounded by bags, or is walking up and down the path, moving her bags as she goes. Staff have spoken to the Merton Rough Sleeper team and they do not believe she is homeless as she is always clean and tidy. Staff have approached her to see if we can help but this does seem to cause her some distress and results in her raising her voice and backing away. The Merton team have experienced similar behaviour. The Merton team have spoken to the police as she was seen urinating in the road and they had hoped the police could take her in so that she could be given some help. This has not yet happened so she is still in the area and having moved from the horseride (where she was spooking the horses) and from the War Memorial area (where she was upsetting local residents) she is now tucked away in a small area of woodland just off Parkside.

To bring the horses up to a full complement, Keepers have been looking at a military working horse called Galway. She is an ex Royal Horse Artillery officers charger. 16 years old and perfectly sound. Keepers have been able to negotiate her purchase for a very reasonable price.

Maintenance - The Maintenance Team had been busy with their regular maintenance work, including tree safety. Quite a few Silver Birches in particular had failed – with the probable cause being last year's flooding. Work had continued around Roehampton Church School on Putney Heath with clearance of trees that are impacting the building.

The team continued to supply the Ashburton Estates' Community Gardeners in Roehampton with our waste manure and composted woodchip to help with their community gardening projects opposite Putney Heath Rd.

REMPF – The football and rugby seasons were now underway. A Vertidrainer had been purchased which would help improve pitch condition.

There has unfortunately been some vandalism damage to the club house veranda – they kicked down the handrails and uprights - which the team has repaired. There was also damage to the doors of the public toilets and new CCTV cameras have now been installed at the rear of the building.

Community Engagement and Events

Open Day

Despite the thunderstorms and torrential rain that occurred in the early hours of the morning, the weather on the Open Day dawned sunny and dry and fortunately stayed that way all day. The day was a huge success in respect of PR for the Commons with some lovely feedback from visitors. There has been an initial full team de-brief with some suggestions for next year, and the smaller organising team would be considering these in more details in due course.

2. PLC walk

The Chief Executive, along with the Conservation and Engagement Officer and the Maintenance Manager met a group of residents to talk about work and future arrangements for staffing at Putney Lower Common. Nine people joined the walk. The current proposals would likely result on more staff hours spent on PLC than previously. A local Stakeholder Group was being set up which would meet with the CE twice a year.

The CE and Chairman had reached out to the Putney Society and had offered attendance at their meetings if that would be helpful for them. SB advised that she and the CE had met with two members of the Putney Society to discuss how the two organisations might work together to further enhance community engagement locally.

10.24.7 Conservation Update

The Board received and noted the Conservation and Engagement Officer's Report. The following points were noted:

Heathland Management – over the last three months, 17 groups of volunteers had been involved in scrub-bashing on the heath. All the sessions were followed up by the Commons' Maintenance Team to ensure that small tree stumps were made safe and all cut materials on open sites were chipped. The Conservation team have also carried out additional tree thinning work on three heathland sites.

Grassland Management – The cut and collect work on nine areas of the Commons had been carried out by a contractor. The Maintenance team had also carried out cut and collect work on 14 smaller sites where access for the contractor was too difficult, along with 7 areas of rough along the fairways on the golf course.

Putney Lower Common – Most of the work at PLC had been general management work such as watering the orchard, cleaning out bird boxes, mowing and treatment of Japanese Knotweed.

The two wildlife cameras set up near the compound had identified 17 different species, including hedgehogs. One would shortly be moved to an area on Wimbledon Common.

Nesting Boxes - During October, 31 bird nesting boxes had been inspected and cleaned - 27 of the nests had been occupied during the year (one nest box was occupied by a family of wood mice) and four showed no sign of nest building.

During October and November 2024, an additional 55 bird nesting boxes were being installed around various locations on the Commons. The reason behind the dramatic increase in the number is partly to increase the number of much needed breeding and roosting space for cavity-nesting species but also to provide nature-based solutions for the control of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) rather than spraying. There have been several studies carried out in the UK and Europe that have shown the impact that natural and native predators have on controlling OPM. Great tits (and to a slightly lesser degree, Blue tits) have been noted to predate OPM at all life stages, with Great tit chicks consuming up to 800 caterpillars per fortnight. Blue tits tend to only predate on the first two larval stages.

London in Bloom 2024 – both Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common were presented with a Gold Award at this year's London in Bloom awards, with Wimbledon Common winning the London Common/Open Space of the year 2024. The Board congratulated the team. The wins would be publicised on the noticeboards and social media.

Meetings/Engagement – Highlighted were attendance at the National Heathland Conference in September in Dorset. The conference including subjects such as re-wilding, urban heath challenges, condition monitoring and a visit to Purbeck Heaths (NNR).

Meeting with Sam Facey from the London Water Vole Recovery Programme. The aim of this meeting was to view the two sections of the Beverley Brook and evaluate whether these sites would be suitable for a future water vole release programme. If the sites are not currently at the stage where a release programme would be viable, advice will be provided about how this situation could be changed in the future.

Meeting with Jamie Simpson (October) Black poplar trees for PLC – Jamie Simpson is an arboriculturist specialising in the management of veteran trees and leads the Black Poplar Species Action Plan, part of the Richmond BAP. In October 2024, Jamie visited Putney Lower Common with PH to look at potential locations where Black poplar trees, propagated from a nursery within Barnes Common, could be planted on Putney Lower Common.

DB asked about funding from the Environment Agency as many other areas of the Beverley Brook had received funding. In addition, Cannizaro Park had received funding from Merton Council to help with flooding issues. MJ asked if any funding would be forthcoming to help with habitat creation for voles. The CE advised that two local releases had been funded by crowdfunding and this could be looked at for the Commons. PH commented that grants could come through the Beverley Brook Partnership so being part of that group would alert WPCC to any opportunities. MJ also asked whether the success in the London in Bloom competition could help in unlocking funding.

OB commented that some of the projects mentioned are contained in the Land Management Plan so all are captured within that document. The next step would be to work out the mechanisms for delivering the LMP and the challenges that involved. The Chairman suggested a Board workshop in February 2025 to brainstorm the LMP. This was agreed. The EA to CE would arrange a date.

ACTION: EA to CE

A new noticeboard outside the Dog & Fox in the Village was available for WPCC to put posters up. The Board had been funded by the Wimbledon Village Business Association and the EA to the CE would make contact with them to arrange for posters to be added.

ACTION: EA to CE

10.24.8 Fundraising Update

The Board received and noted the Fundraising Manager's Report.

An impromptu campaign was set up to mark World Ranger's Day on 31 July 2024. Supporters were contacted via direct mail, supplemented by posters on the Commons and social media. Over the one-week campaign more than £3,000 was raised, which will be used to purchase woodland management equipment.

A specialist contractor has been appointed to begin the Queensmere restoration and rewilding project in the New Year, with completion scheduled for Spring 2025. Rewild London had requested a site before the work began as part of their project monitoring. This would take place on 23 October 2024.

A Queensmere Restoration Appeal is being launched with press articles, emails to Friends and supporters and information on website to raise the remaining funds that are required. An article in Time & Leisure would launch the Appeal in November.

Requests for benches at Queensmere are currently being processed. Six suitable spots had been identified and being offered to those on the waiting list. Other discussions are ongoing regarding sponsorship of the viewing platform, dog posts etc.

Jack Rowland and Peter Haldane had identified suitable new locations for benches, particularly on Putney Lower Common and Rushmere, and these options are currently being matched to those on the waiting list.

The FM was thanked for her work on the memorial benches.

10.24.9 Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons Report

SB gave a verbal update.

SB thanked the core organising group for their hard work in organising events.

Several events had taken place over summer, including a visit to the Houses of Parliament and the new Wimbledon MP joined the group. A small fee of £10 per person had been charged.

The Friends had provided two walks as part of the Roehampton Community Weeks, including a walk showcasing the history of the Alton Estate. A second walk took in the grand houses of Roehampton.

The Friends had been instrumental in providing some 30 volunteers for the Open Day. The EA to the CE expressed her thanks to all those who had helped.

A Friends' Bird walk had been held on 14 September.

On Friday 20 September an afternoon tea was held to mark the Friends 5th Anniversary at the London Scottish Golf Club. The event invited non-Friends to give them a taste of the Commons and what Friends membership involved. A fundraising auction was held and the final income was in the region of £1,000. Several new members signed up after the event.

On 19 October, a further fundraising event for Queensmere was being held in Christ Church Hall, West Wimbledon. An evening of "Magic and Illusion", a talk with supper and drinks. Jeroboam in Wimbledon Village had kindly provided the drinks for the event.

There were currently 621 memberships, which equated to just over 1,005 members. A Direct Debit system was being introduced. EA to the CE advised that the Beta Test page had now been produce and she would send this to the Committee for testing.

Some further walks were being arranged before Christmas.

Income raised over the five years totalled over £200,000. The Board congratulated the Friends on this success.

10.24.10 WPCC Forum/Group Meetings

The Board noted the minutes of the Wildlife and Conservation Forum meeting held on 16 July 2024.

10.24.11 Public Questions on Matters Considered in Part A(1) of this Meeting

There were no questions.