



CONSERVATORS' PUBLIC MEETING
to be held on
Monday 8 April 2023 at 4.30pm
in the Information Centre, Ranger's Office,
Manor Cottage, London SW19 5NR

AGENDA

PART A(1) PUBLIC

- 04.24.1 Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence**
- 04.24.2 Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting**
- 04.24.3 Election of Chairman** **Verbal**
- 04.23.4 Consideration of Appointment of Vice Chairman** **Verbal**
- 04.23.5 Board and Committee Matters** **Page 1**
1. Board Procedures
2. Committee Membership
- 04.23.6 WPCB Board Meetings**
- i. Resolutions of the Board Meeting 12 & 19 February 2024 **Page 6**
ii. Minutes of the Part A(1) Board Meeting of 12 February 2024 **Page 8**
- 04.24.7 Matters Arising**
There are no matters arising
- 04.24.8 Chief Executive's Report** **Page 16**
- 04.24.9 Conservation Update** **Page 19**
- 04.24.10 Fundraising Update** **Page 28**
- 04.24.11 Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons Report** **Verbal**
- 04.24.12 WPCB Forum/Group Meetings**
- To note the minutes of the Wildlife and Conservation Forum held on 9 January 2024 **Page 30**
- 12.23.13 Public Questions on Matters Considered in Part A(1) of this Meeting**
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CONSERVATORS' CONFIDENTIAL MEETING
to be held on
Monday 8 April 2024 at 4.30pm
in the Information Centre, Ranger's Office,
Manor Cottage, London SW19 5NR

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.

04.24.14 Declarations

- i. Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests in Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting
- ii. Updates to the previously submitted Declarations of Interest Form

04.24.15 WPCB Board Meetings

- i. Minutes of the Board meeting held on 12 February 2024
- ii. Minutes of the Board meeting held on 19 February 2024
- iii. Minutes of the Board meeting held on 27 February 2024

04.24.16 Matters Arising

04.24.17 Committee Matters

04.24.18 Chief Executive's Report – Confidential

04.24.19 Constitutional Matters

- i. Levy Rebasing
- ii. Other Constitutional Matters

04.24.20 Licences and Leases

04.24.21 Access

04.24.22 Putney Lower Common

04.24.23 Financial

Management Reports and Accounts:

- i. January 2024
- ii. February 2024
- iii. Bank Mandate

04.24.24 Audit and Risk

- i. Top Ten Risks
This is a standing agenda item but will not be considered at this meeting as the Risk Register will be considered by Conservators at an induction session.
- ii. Audit Timetable

04.24.25 Business Plan

04.24.26 Fundraising Update

This is a standing agenda item but as there are no confidential matters for consideration, all fundraising items are included in the public report.

04.24.27 Committee and Forums Draft Minutes/Notes

To receive minutes/notes of the:

- i. Constitution Committee of 27 February 2024

04.24.28 Items for Inclusion in a Media Release by the Board

04.24.29 Items for Future Consideration

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators	8 April 2024	04.24.5
Subject: Board and Committee Matters	Public	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Decision	
<h1>SUMMARY</h1>		
<p>This report sets out the current background and procedures for Board and Committee meetings.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Board are asked to decide how they wish to proceed with Part B meetings 2. The Board are asked to decide membership of the four Committees and the Wildlife and Conservation Forum. 3. The Board are asked to consider if any changes are required to the current meetings calendar. 		

1. Board Meetings

Board meetings generally held on the second Monday of a month. The exception is June when the meeting is held on the first Monday to ensure sufficient time to finalise and publish the annual accounts and Trustees Report. The dates for the remainder of 2024 are:

3 June
8 July
14 October
9 December


There are Part B Board meetings (which Conservators only attend) scheduled for:

15 April
10 June
15 July
21 October
16 December

The Board will need to decide if they wish to continue with Part B Board as separate meetings or at all.

2 Public Meetings

During campaigning in the 2021 Conservators Triennial election, a candidate stated that the Conservators were subject to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and that WPCC should therefore be holding its meetings in public.


Therefore since October 2021, a public meeting is held in which any matters not covering any confidential issues are discussed.

3 Location/Time

Board meetings are currently held in the Information Centre opposite the Ranger's Office.

The public part of the meeting (Part A) begins at 4.30pm and usually takes around 45minutes/1 hour. The confidential part of the meeting (Part A2) follows after a short break.

3 Board Papers

Board papers are usually uploaded onto the Conservators' portal by the Wednesday prior to the meeting. Papers are provided in a pdf format. There are three bundles – the public papers which are in one and the agenda has links to the relevant report. The Confidential papers come in two bundles – one of reports and a separate bundle of the appendices (for ease of access). The Agenda has links to the relevant reports, and the Appendices bundle has an index with similar links.

4 Minutes – preparation and circulation

The EA to CE/CO prepares first draft of the minutes which are then passed to CE and Chairman for their comments prior to being circulated to the whole Board for comment.

Any amendments/comments should be returned by the date provided to the Chairman and EA to CE/CO and the final draft is circulated to the Board for approval in the papers for the next meeting. Any further amendments can be suggested to the Chairman/EA to CE/CO prior to the meeting. No further amendments will normally be taken at the meeting.

The EA to CE/CO endeavours to prepare the Resolutions of the meeting and the draft public minutes by the Friday following the meeting, and the confidential minutes by the following Friday. Please note that day to day operational matters often prevent this timetable from being met.

5 Committee Structure

Committee Chairs

Committee Chairs are elected at the first meeting of each Committee following this Board meeting. The selection will then be approved by the Board at the next Board meeting.

There are currently four Committees and two Forums:

Committees:

Finance and Investment – three Conservators and three Officers

On behalf of the Board it is the responsibility of the Finance and Investment Committee (FIC) to be responsible for scrutinising, overseeing all financial and investment aspects of WPCCC so as to ensure short and long term viability of WPCCC and reporting back to the Board on all matters where decisions are required unless specifically delegated by the Board.

Audit and Risk – Three Conservators, two Officers, one co-optee

On behalf of the Board of Conservators, it is the responsibility of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) independently to:

- monitor the integrity of the annual financial statements of WPCC, reviewing significant financial reporting issues and judgements contained in them;
- ensure effective policies and procedures and compliance systems for managing risk are in place and to review their effectiveness;
- make recommendations to the Board of Conservators in all matters in relation to the external auditor;
- ensure effective procedures and safeguards are in place to monitor the prevention of fraud and corruption;
- prepare and publish an annual report of the work of the ARC.

Constitution - Four Conservators, two Officers and two co-optees

On behalf of the Board, it is the responsibility of the Committee to review, identify, consider and recommend to the Board amendments to WPCC's constitutional framework that will enhance WPCC's ability to achieve its fundamental purpose of preserving, protecting and enhancing the Commons for the purposes of exercise and recreation as established by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 and the way in which any such amendments could be effected.

Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons – Three Conservators and two Officers

The purpose of the Friends is to build on the opportunity to capitalise and goodwill of the local community by engaging them in celebration of the Commons and fundraising, particularly to help fund larger projects or events that might not be able to be met through the general conservancy fund.

Forums:

Wildlife and Conservation – Three Conservators and one Officer, several volunteers

The Forum in its current form was developed to ensure monitoring of the Commons' flora and fauna and therefore the majority of its membership is made up of volunteers. Historically this Forum is chaired by the DEFRA appointed Conservator.

Given the importance of conservation related projects and the wildlife on the Commons, the CE is currently giving thought to how this might be better represented in the Committee/Forum structure. A paper will be brought to a future meeting.

Stakeholder - chaired by the CE and senior staff and stakeholder representatives

This Forum is chaired by the CE and is made up of representatives of the many different user groups on the Commons. This forum allows WPCC staff to keep them updated on matters relating to the Commons and also gives the members an opportunity to raise matters of concern to them. Conservators do not generally attend but may be invited to discuss a specific issue.

6 Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference will need to be reviewed by each Committee at their first meeting following this Board meeting. These will then come back to the following Board meeting for approval

7. Meeting Dates

The calendar of meeting dates for Board, Committees, other Conservator events and some of the larger general events is attached (App 1). The Board are asked to consider if any changes are required to dates/times.

MEETINGS and EVENTS 2024

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Monday	1 BH			1 BH								
Tuesday	2			2			2 10.00am FIC			1		
Wednesday	3			3 new Elected Conservators take office	1		3			2		
Thursday	4	1		4	2		4			3		
Friday	5	2	1	5	3		5			4	1	
Saturday	6	3	2	6	4	1	6			5	2	
Sunday	7	4	3	7	5	2	7		1	6	3	1
Monday	8	5	4	8 4.30pm Board Meeting	6 BH	3 4.30pm Board Meeting	8 4.30pm Board Meeting		2	7	4	2
Tuesday	9 5pm Wildlife & C'vation	6 Winter Talk	5	9	7 10.00am FIC	4	9		3	8 5pm Wildlife & C'vation	5 10.00am FIC	3
Wednesday	10	7	6 Election date	10	8	5	10		4	9	6 GOM	4
Thursday	11	8	7	11	9	6	11		5	10	7	5
Friday	12	9	8	12	10	7	12		6	11	8	6 Christmas Reception
Saturday	13	10	9	13	11	8	13		7	12	9	7 Carols at the Windmill TBC
Sunday	14	11	10	14	12	9	14		8	13 Open Day	10	8
Monday	15	12 4.30pm Board Meeting	11	15 4:30pm Part B Board Meeting	13	10 4:30pm Part B Board Meeting	15 4:30pm Part B Board Meeting		9	14 4.30pm Board Meeting	11	9 4.30pm Board Meeting
Tuesday	16	13	12 5pm Wildlife & C'vation	16	14 5pm Wildlife & C'vation	11 2.30 pm Constitution Committee	16 5pm Wildlife & C'vation		10 10.00am FIC	15	12 5pm Wildlife & C'vation	10
Wednesday	17	14	13 8.30am Stakeholder	17	15	12	17		11	16	13	11 8.30am Stakeholder
Thursday	18 3.30pm Friends Committee	15	14	18	16	13	18		12	17	14	12
Friday	19	16	15	19	17	14	19		13	18	15	13
Saturday	20	17	16	20	18	15	20		14	19	16	14
Sunday	21	18	17	21	19 Bird Walk TBC	16	21		15	20 Bird Walk TBC	17	15
Monday	22	19 4:30pm Part B Board Meeting	18	22	20	17	22		16	21 4:30pm Part B Board Meeting	18	16 4:30pm Part B Board Meeting
Tuesday	23 10.00am FIC	20	19 3pm ARC	23	21 TBC 10am Joint ARC/FIC and 12 noon ARC	18	23		17 2.30 pm Constitution Committee	22 3pm ARC	19 2.30 pm Constitution Committee	17
Wednesday	24	21	20	24	22	19 8.30am Stakeholder	24 7.00pm Conservators Walk TBC		18 8.30am Stakeholder	23	20	18
Thursday	25	22	21 10.00am FIC	25 3.30pm Friends Committee	23	20	25		19	24	21	19
Friday	26	23	22	26	24	21 BioBlitz TBC	26		20	25	22	20
Saturday	27	24	23	27 Bird Song Course?	25	22 BioBlitz TBC	27		21	26 Halloween Pumpkin Hunt TBC	23	21
Sunday	28	25	24	28 Bird Song Course?	26	23 BioBlitz TBC	28		22	27 Bird Walk TBC	24	22
Monday	29	26	25	29	27 BH	24	29		26 BH	28	25	23
Tuesday	30	27 2.30 pm Constitution Committee	26	30	28	25	30 3pm ARC		24	29	26	24
Wednesday	31	28	27		29	26 AOM	31 3.30pm Friends Committee		25	30	27	25 BH
Thursday		29	28		30	27			26	31 3.30pm Friends Committee	28	26 BH
Friday			29 BH Easter Egg Hunt TBC		31	28			27		29	27
Saturday			30			29			28		30	28
Sunday			31			30			29			29
Monday									30			30
Tuesday												31



Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Resolution agreed at the Board Meeting held on Monday 12 February 2024 and continued on Monday 19 February 2024

Part A1 Public 12 February 2024

02.24.6 Levy 2024/2025

RESOLUTION

In consideration of:

- a) the Conservators' duty under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 ('the 1871 Act') to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise;
- b) the Conservators' duties as trustees of the charity to act only in the best interests of the charity and to safeguard the charity's assets;
- c) the inherent responsibility therefore of the Conservators to care for both the natural and built environments, to ensure that the landscape and buildings are properly maintained and visitors are able to access the Commons and to do so safely;
- d) the current condition assessment by Natural England of WPCC's SSSI habitats of unfavourable/recovering, which recognises that the necessary management measures are in place but that additional resources are required to restore WPCC's unique habitats;
- e) the policy agreed by the Board at its meeting on 14 December 2020 to set WPCC's levy at the maximum sum available for a further five year period from 2022/23 to 2026/27 and having noted:
 - i. the increases experienced in WPCC's expenses as a result of continued high visitor numbers to the Commons, the impact of inflation on WPCC's costs and the impact of such increases on WPCC's operational budget; and
 - ii. the potential impact of any increase in WPCC's levy on levy-payers, particularly those most in need and the protection afforded by the benefits reduction and exemption schemes operated by the three local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC (ie, Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth) for the purposes of both council tax and WPCC's levy;
- f) WPCC's powers under the 1990 Regulations to issue a 'special levy' for the purpose of providing for the items of expenditure set out in the 1990 Regulations and the responsibility of the Conservators to use best endeavours to issue the 'special levy' with respect to a financial year before 15 February in the year preceding the financial year;
- g) the high level of support amongst levy-paying households for an increase in the levy that was indicated in the recent formal consultation and the Board's decision of 4 December 2023 to continue to pursue a levy increase in line with the proposal in the consultation document noting that the Secretary of State is responsible for any amendment to the 1990 Regulations;

The Board RESOLVES to

- i. set the aggregate levy for the financial year 2024/25 at £1,622,642, the maximum allowed under the 1990 Regulations, representing an increase of 8.8608% from 2023/24 and potentially generating an additional £132,076 to support the work of the charity;

- ii. note that in accordance with the 1990 Regulations, each of the three local authorities have notified WPCC of their respective Council Tax Bases (CTB) for the 2024/25 financial year; the total CTB for the levy area totalling 41,447 and representing a marginal increase of less than 0.01% from 2023/24;
- iii. note that on the basis of the proposed increase in the aggregate levy and the CTB as reported by the three local authorities, the per household levy for a Band D property for the 2024/25 financial year would be £39.15 per year, representing an increase of 8.9% from 2023/24;
- iv. note that over the same time period, the number of physical properties in the levy area has increased from 41,670 (2023/24) to 41,826 (2024/25), representing an increase of 0.4%;
- v. note that the discounts, exemptions and benefits to which levy-payers are entitled remains largely unchanged from 2023/24 as a share of the total number of physical properties of 17%, ranging from 36% for Band A properties to 4% for Band H properties;
- vi. note WPCC's responsibility under the 1990 Regulations to use best endeavours to notify the three local authorities of WPCC's levy before 15 February in the year preceding the financial year;
- vii. note that WPCC's 'special levy' is included in the quantum subject to the ceiling under the Localism Act 2011 and that the local authorities do therefore need to take into consideration WPCC's levy in the setting of their council tax given the requirement to hold a referendum if the total increase were to increase beyond the ceiling set by DLUHC.

Part A2 Confidential

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

Present (at both meetings)

Conservators: Mrs Diane Neil Mills, Chairman

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

Officers:

Colin Cooper, Chief Executive (CE)
 Ms Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk and Ranger
 Mrs Angela Evans-Hill, EA to Chief Executive and Communications Officer
 Mr Philip Warner, Management Accountant

Apologies:

Mr Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer
 Mrs Maggie May, Fundraising Manager

**Draft Public Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on
Monday 12 February 2024 at 4.30pm at the Information Centre, Manor Cottage,
London SW19 5NR**

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

Officers: Colin Cooper, Chief Executive (CE)
Angela Evans-Hill, EA to Chief Executive/Communications
Officer (EA to CE/CO)
Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk and Ranger (DCR) (for part of the
meeting)

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

PART A(1) PUBLIC

02.24.1 Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence

Apologies: Philip Warner, Management Accountant (MA)
Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer (C&EO)
Maggie May, Fundraising Manager (FM)

The Chairman remarked that this would be the final meeting of the current Board and marked six years service for those Conservators who would be standing down. She would like to note her thanks to those who had served – David Hince, Peter Hirsch and Nigel Ware. The Chairman also thanked Sue Bucknall and Michael Johnston for their first three-year term and was delighted they were re-standing. The other two appointed Conservators would be staying on - Oliver Bennett who had just been re-appointed for a further three-year term and the Board offered their congratulations. Peter Shortt would be staying until May 2024 to help with the transition to the new Board.

Peter Hirsch thanked the Diane Neil Mills for her superb Chairmanship and her significant contribution to leaving the Commons, from a governance perspective, in far better shape than when the Board took over.

This was an opportunity for the Board to look back on their achievements, including the strengthening of governance issues and resolving the conflict that allowed the Board to focus on the management of the Commons, such as putting in place long-term planning frameworks, moving the investment portfolio, amendment of the constitution and local community engagement.

The Board also wished to note their thanks to the local community, including the local MPs as their support was very important, also the volunteers, external committee members and the civic societies that all support the Commons.

Finally, the Board wished to recognise the fundamental role of the staff and thank them for their work in the day-to-day operational management of the Commons. The comments left as

part of the recent consultation were an endorsement of the sense of gratitude felt by the local community.

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

DNM was a member of the Thames Hare and Hounds. The Board agreed that this did not preclude DNM from any discussions at the meeting.

02.24.3 WPCC Board Meetings

The Resolutions and the Minutes of the Minutes of the Part A(1) Board Meeting of 11 December 2023 were approved.

02.24.4 Matters Arising

Crooked Billet – The CE confirmed that the only issue not yet resolved was the matter of a note on each chair advising that the chairs, and the pub’s toilets, were available for anyone to use. This would be followed up when the deckchairs come back into use.

Open Day 2023 – Details of income and expenditure. It was noted that the Open Day income/expenditure had been provided in the confidential part of the meeting.

02.24.5 Committee Matters

No matters to report.

02.24.6 Levy 2024/25

The Board received and noted the Chairman’s report on the levy for 2024/2025.

The Chairman summarised the Conservators’ constitutional power to charge a levy. The legislation permitted the Conservators to increase the levy up to a maximum of RPI each year. The RPI figure for the year to September 2022 was 8.8608%. This increases the maximum levy from £1,490,566 in 2023/24 to £1,622,642 in 2024/25, potentially generating an additional £132,076 to support the work of the charity.

A resolution was originally passed in 2017, renewed in December 2020, to increase the levy to the maximum permitted for a five-year period. Given the rate of inflation in September 2023 was a significant 8.9% and the impact this might have on levy-payers, the Conservators were asked to review the proposed increase for the 2024/25 financial year taking into consideration the factors set out in the Chairman’s paper.

- i. the current rise in the cost of living and the impact on residents, particularly those who are struggling financially, and the concern shown by the leaders of both LB Merton and LB Wandsworth as well as the MP for Putney of the impact of any increase in WPCC’s levy on residents;
- ii. the protection afforded by the benefits and reduction schemes operated by the three local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC (ie, Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth) for the purposes of both council tax and WPCC’s levy;
- iii. the Conservators’ duty under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 (‘the 1871 Act’) to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise;
- iv. the Conservators’ duties as trustees of the charity to act only in the best interests of the charity and to safeguard the charity’s assets;

- v. the responsibility therefore of the Conservators to care for both the natural and built environments to ensure that the landscape and buildings are properly maintained and protected from irreversible decline and visitors are able to access the Commons without fear;
- vi. the current condition assessment of WPCC's SSSI sites of unfavourable/recovering, which recognises that the necessary management measures are in place but that additional resources are required to restore WPCC's unique habitats;
- vii. the forecast budget deficit in 2023/24 and the expectation that there will be a further budget deficit in 2024/25 despite a recognition that continuing budget deficits are not sustainable;
- viii. WPCC's responsibilities as an employer and the impact that inflation is having on our staff;
- ix. the high level of support amongst levy-paying households for an increase in the levy that was indicated in the recent formal consultation and the Board's decision of 4 December 2023 to continue to pursue a levy increase in line with the proposal in the consultation document noting that the Secretary of State is responsible for any amendment to the 1990 Regulations.

Following discussion, and having taken these considerations into account, the Board considered 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 and therefore approved the recommendation to increase the levy to the maximum permitted amount for the year 2024/2025.

The Board noted that:

- Each of the three local authorities had notified WPCC of their Council Tax Base (CTB) for the 2024/25 financial year, totalling 41,447 and representing a marginal decrease from 2023/24 (less than 0.01%).
- The discounts, exemptions and benefits to which levy-payers were entitled remained largely unchanged from 2023/24 as a share of the total number of physical properties of 17%, ranging from 36% for Band A properties to 4% for Band H properties.
- The number of physical properties in the levy area had increased from 41,670 (2023/24) to 41,826 (2024/25), representing an increase of 0.4%.

Given the above, the per household levy for a Band D property for the 2024/25 financial year would be £39.15, representing an increase of 8.9% from 2023/24.

RESOLUTION

In consideration of:

- a) the Conservators' duty under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 ('the 1871 Act') to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise;
- b) the Conservators' duties as trustees of the charity to act only in the best interests of the charity and to safeguard the charity's assets;
- c) the inherent responsibility therefore of the Conservators to care for both the natural and built environments, to ensure that the landscape and buildings are properly maintained and visitors are able to access the Commons and to do so safely;
- d) the current condition assessment by Natural England of WPCC's SSSI habitats of unfavourable/recovering, which recognises that the necessary management measures are in place but that additional resources are required to restore WPCC's unique habitats;

- e) the policy agreed by the Board at its meeting on 14 December 2020 to set WPCC's levy at the maximum sum available for a further five-year period from 2022/23 to 2026/27 and having noted:
 - i. the increases experienced in WPCC's expenses as a result of continued high visitor numbers to the Commons, the impact of inflation on WPCC's costs and the impact of such increases on WPCC's operational budget; and
 - ii. the potential impact of any increase in WPCC's levy on levy-payers, particularly those most in need and the protection afforded by the benefits reduction and exemption schemes operated by the three local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC (ie, Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth) for the purposes of both council tax and WPCC's levy;
- f) WPCC's powers under the 1990 Regulations to issue a 'special levy' for the purpose of providing for the items of expenditure set out in the 1990 Regulations and the responsibility of the Conservators to use best endeavours to issue the 'special levy' with respect to a financial year before 15 February in the year preceding the financial year;
- g) the high level of support amongst levy-paying households for an increase in the levy that was indicated in the recent formal consultation and the Board's decision of 4 December 2023 to continue to pursue a levy increase in line with the proposal in the consultation document noting that the Secretary of State is responsible for any amendment to the 1990 Regulations;

The Board RESOLVED to

- i. set the aggregate levy for the financial year 2024/25 at £1,622,642, the maximum allowed under the 1990 Regulations, representing an increase of 8.8608% from 2023/24 and potentially generating an additional £132,076 to support the work of the charity;
- ii. note that in accordance with the 1990 Regulations, each of the three local authorities had notified WPCC of their respective Council Tax Bases (CTB) for the 2024/25 financial year; the total CTB for the levy area totalling 41,447 and representing a marginal increase of less than 0.01% from 2023/24;
- iii. note that on the basis of the proposed increase in the aggregate levy and the CTB as reported by the three local authorities, the per household levy for a Band D property for the 2024/25 financial year would be £39.15 per year, representing an increase of 8.9% from 2023/24;
- iv. note that over the same time period, the number of physical properties in the levy area has increased from 41,670 (2023/24) to 41,826 (2024/25), representing an increase of 0.4%;
- v. note that the discounts, exemptions and benefits to which levy-payers are entitled remains largely unchanged from 2023/24 as a share of the total number of physical properties of 17%, ranging from 36% for Band A properties to 4% for Band H properties;
- vi. note WPCC's responsibility under the 1990 Regulations to use best endeavours to notify the three local authorities of WPCC's levy before 15 February in the year preceding the financial year;
- vii. note that WPCC's 'special levy' is included in the quantum subject to the ceiling under the Localism Act 2011 and that the local authorities do therefore need to take into consideration WPCC's levy in the setting of their council tax given the requirement to hold a referendum if the total increase were to increase beyond the ceiling set by DLUHC.

02.24.7 Chief Executive's Report

The Board received and noted the Chief Executive's report. The CE highlighted the following:

Keepers Update

The main issues they had been dealing with relate to dogs, cycling and golfing incidents. There had been a number of incidents of vandalism on the golf course, as well as an increase in the number of people walking in that area given how wet the rest of the Common currently was. The team was working with the golf club's groundsmen on these issues.

Maintenance Update

The main projects that the maintenance team had been involved in since the Christmas/New Year period had revolved around the ride thinning and woodland restoration works along sections of Warren Farm Ride.

With a number of named storms and weather warnings being issued recently, staff had been busy carrying out post storm tree inspections and clearing up any damaged trees. This is in addition to the ongoing commitment to regular tree safety works across the site, which had included works to high use paths and horse rides, main road edges and residential boundaries.

Regular maintenance work around waste management, upkeep of ditches and culverts after heavy rain and storms, resurfacing and pothole repairs to various roads and carparks and managing cover of the regular and extensive maintenance and patrol needs of Putney Lower Common whilst Bill Rowland is absent.

Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields Update

The Playing Fields had also suffered as a result of the recent storms with all the pitches saturated and many had large areas of standing water. The groundsmen spent a lot of time pumping the water off the pitches but as a result of all this effort, a full weekend of fixtures was able to be held the following weekend - one of a very few grounds in the area that had been able to host matches.

Winter Talk 2024 – A very successful Winter Talk had been held on Tuesday 6 February 2024. The guest speaker was Dr Mark Spencer, an internationally respected botanist. His talk highlighted the importance of both the Commons and Richmond Park as a haven for many of these threatened species. OB asked if it would be possible to see the slides that Dr Spencer had used. The EA to CE would ask Dr Spencer if they could be shared. The Board thanked the EA to the CE for organising such an interesting talk.

Our Roehampton – The EA to CE/CO was now regularly attending meetings of the Our Roehampton organisation and also the Roehampton Women's Network. The latter were keen to have her speak at one of their coffee morning meetings about the history of the Commons, and she was working with them to arrange a walk starting at the Alton Estate. An article would also be provided for the Roehampton Voice newsletter.

Wimbledon Society Newsletter – An article was being prepared for the next Wimbledon Society Newsletter which would provide an update on the results of the levy Consultation and a general update on the conservation work on the Commons. The Society was also including their own article on various elections taking place, including WPCC's, so our article will refer back to that rather than repeating the information.

Easter Egg Hunt – The Commons’ annual Easter Egg Hunt would be taking place on Friday 29 March 2024 from 10.30am to 3.30pm. Following a meeting with the Windmill Trustees, they had agreed to run the Easter Egg Hunt on the Sunday as part of their opening weekend.

The CE reported that the Windmill Trustees had agreed to a suggestion that the fence panels be taken down between the Windmill courtyard and garden, so opening up that area.

02.24.8 Fundraising Update

The Board received and noted the Fundraising Manager’s report.

Putney Lower Common Projects - In 2022, WPCC launched two fundraising appeals to repair the green footbridge and to plant an orchard on Putney Lower Common. It was stated that any additional donations would be restricted to projects that would improve Putney Lower Common. WPCC was now delivering improvements to the site to enhance access and manage conservation. New wildflower bulbs had been planted and wildflower seed would be sown to improve grassland diversity and habitat for pollinators. New bird boxes were also being installed in the woodlands ahead of bird nesting season. Future plans include improving paths, installing trail cameras to monitor wildlife (hedgehogs), removal of invasive non-native species including Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*).

The CE confirmed that staff would work with the SW15 Hedgehogs organisation to ensure the cameras were situated in the right location. It was suggested that in future, cameras with a live feed would be installed.

With regard to the Tree of Heaven, the CE had made contact with the Council regarding the removal of the mother plant which was situated in the adjacent cemetery.

Wimbledon High Fundraising - Wimbledon High Girls Schools had chosen to fundraise for WPCC this year. Proceeds from their ‘Enterprise’ fair will be donated to the charity. Following a presentation at the school by the Fundraising Manager of various projects that they could help fund, pupils chose to fundraise for a new defibrillator. Staff would be attending the Enterprise Fair in March.

Reception for Friends Benefactors - To show appreciation to the Friends’ Benefactors and thank them for their generosity, a Spring Drinks Reception was organised for 14 March 2024. All Conservators were welcome to attend.

General donations (December – January) – A total of £2,731 has been received in general donations thanks to donations made during the carols event in December, book donations and donations made via the car park machine and website (not including Friends’ subscriptions).

02.24.9 Conservation Update

The Board received and noted the Conservation and Engagement Officer’s report.

The CE highlighted the following points:

Heathland

One of the ongoing threats to the Commons’ heathland is through scrub and tree encroachment which, if left unmanaged, would result in the loss of heathland vegetation and the loss of the wildlife that depends on these areas for their ongoing survival.

Although invasive scrub is tackled by various groups of volunteers throughout the year, during October, November and December 2023, larger trees had been thinned in four areas of the Commons heathland.

These areas had included:

- Heathland near Tibbet's Corner. (Putney Heath)
- Heathland near Kingsmere. (Putney Heath)
- Heathland near to the junction of Ladies Mile and Inner Park Ride (Putney Heath)
- Heathland south of Hookhamslade Pond (Wimbledon Common).

An area of gorse has been left in place as it provides habitat for Dartford Warblers.

Woodland

Over the past few months, the most significant operations that had been carried out in the Commons woodland had included:

- Holly thinning

An area adjacent to Queensmere Fairway has been cleared of holly this year – with 10% left to provide habitat. Future work to keep the holly at bay could be carried out by volunteers.

- Ride management (Warren Farm Ride)

An area up to ten metres away from the edge of the ride had been cleared and coppiced, with large native trees left untouched other than safety work. This work will create a ride that is approximately 1.5 metres wider than the height of the surrounding trees, dramatically reducing heavy shading along this section of woodland and allow an increased level of light reach the woodland floor.

This will lead to a long interface between the dense woodland edge and other open nectar sources that are important for invertebrates and other wildlife to thrive.

Where large native trees had been found along the ride, these had been largely untouched unless trees safety work has been required.

Grassland Management

To help protect and enhance these areas of grassland and heathland, over the past few months the coverage of invasive scrub along the edge of four of the course fairways had been reduced.

Pond Management

Staff had been working on the floating nesting raft for Queensmere and nesting tubes for Kingsmere.

SB asked about the swans on Queensmere. It was reported that the cob had returned with a new mate.

OB expressed his thanks for the work that had been completed. He reported that an insect expert had been carrying out some monitoring work on the site and he believed that the Commons could be deemed internationally important for some of the insects found here. This is mainly due to the habitat management work that is being carried out which is benefiting them.

02.24.10 Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons Report

SB gave a verbal update on the Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons.

Membership update:

Benefactors – 62
Household – 382
Individual – 263

Income this year was approximately £35,000.

A walk had been held to thank those who had donated to the new paths, and an opportunity was taken to look at the holly clearance work that was taking place.

Work was still underway on events and this would be completed once the new Board was in office. However, there was a proposed walk around Queensmere to talk about the new project, a quiz night and a bird walk.

02.24.11 2024 Calendar of Meetings

No changes to report.

02.24.12 WPCC Forum/Group Meetings

No matters to report.

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

There were no questions.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	8 April 2024	08.24.8
Subject: Chief Executive's Report	Public	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Decision and Information	
<h1>SUMMARY</h1>		
Draft Recommendation:		
That the Board receive and note the report.		

Keepers' Update

The Keeper Team has been running with one team member short since September 2023 but they have maintained a good presence on the Common due to flexibility within the team. They have rarely dropped below our minimum requirements of three Keepers on duty each day.

The vacant position has now been offered to one of the candidates who came for interview and a response is awaited.

The year started off with a few rough sleepers which was surprising due to the wet weather conditions. The weather has caused a lot of dog walkers to head to the drier parts of the Common, mainly the golf course, and this has resulted in some damage with dogs running on the greens – in some instances being encouraged to do so by their owners/walkers throwing balls for them.

We had a strange incident with a gentleman removing several flags from the Greens which he then hid. He went on to destroy one of our election banners and ripped signs off the noticeboards. This started at the London Scottish 1st Tee, continued to Queensmere then across the Common to Brook Cottage Bridge. The Keepers were in pursuit but as he could hear their approach in the buggies, he disappeared into the undergrowth and hid from them.

The horses are going well, with the newest member of the team, BC, settling in very well. One of his previous owners visited the stables and was delighted to meet up with him.

Scumpy sustained some injuries, including a puncture wound near his stifle and a cut to his rear fetlock, in an attack by a French Bull Dog that lasted some 10 minutes. Fortunately we were able to treat the wounds and he is now healed. The dog's owner was distraught and commented that she kept horses and the dog had never reacted in this way before. She has been advised that the dog must be kept on a lead whilst walking on the Commons.

We have had various school and nursery groups visit the stables, and also a visit from the granddaughter of Lt. Col. Whitehead, a previous Clerk and Ranger.

The Keepers are now in the summer routine – with sign-offs getting later through the summer months. They are very much looking forward to operating at full strength again.

Maintenance Update

The Maintenance Team have finished off the woodland ride restoration works to sections of Warren Farm, Stag Ride and an extension to the holly clearance near the Queensmere Pond.

Work has been carried out with the Bomford (tractor-mounted cutter) controlling highway and riverside bramble and other vegetative encroachment, as well as bramble control of within the woodland glades and open grasslands.

There has been ongoing management of the golf fairway woodland edges and acid grassland habitats, as well as work to the boundary edges of other sports and recreational spaces across the wider commons.

Tree safety operations continue with completion of work recommended by the external tree safety inspection process, TFL requests and internal planned and unplanned tree safety management.

The maintenance team have also been integral to the preparation of, and work during, the Rosslyn Park Rugby Schools 7's festival, having been charged with erecting all the rugby posts amongst other tasks and also their removal at the end of the week.

Drainage work has been carried out in many forms over the winter months, with daily emptying of silt traps and ensuring ditches and culverts are flowing, to the installation of large overflow pipes at the Primrose Valley ditch, to combat and control the huge quantities of rainwater flowing down to the Queensmere from the heathland plateau catchment area.

Swan platforms have been built, dressed, and launched onto the Queensmere and bird boxes have been installed across the site, as well as producing cut alder saplings from the pond edge to help the Farm Bog volunteers create dead hedges on that site.

Crossroad Meadow scrapes were also created as part of a wildflower meadow creation project with local schools.

Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields Update

The wettest February on record has been taking its toll on the Playing Fields.

The underground chambers had to be pumped out on an almost daily basis, and on some days several times a day. The worst was on Tuesday 12th March 2024 when the team pumped out over 15,000 litres of water from the two chambers. The chambers collect water from the Playing Fields and the water is manually discharged into the Beverley Brook.

The major event of the Playing Fields calendar, the "Rosslyn Park National Schools Sevens" tournament, took place from 18 to 21 March 2024. Build up for this event started on 9 March 2024, moving football goals which were not in use on the Extension field and after the Sunday morning matches on the front field, so as to clear the way so that the rugby posts could be erected by the maintenance team at the start of the week.

With the ground being very soft and wet, discussions with the event organisers and contractors took place to make sure they understood they had to avoid driving around the

fields and causing unnecessary damage. Everyone took this on board and respected our wishes. Having lost a big part of the Tuesday to the heavy rain, we were playing catch up right up to the finish on Sunday afternoon when everything was completed in readiness for the start Monday morning.

Despite the weather, the event was a huge success and this is in no small part to the work of the groundsmen and the Maintenance Team. The rain came from time to time but didn't spoil the event. Several vehicles needed assistance to get out of the splash field as they were unable to depart under their own steam. We received very good feedback and compliments during the event with regards to the pitches and how well they played throughout the week.

Over the course of the five days, 2,276 matches were played, an increase on the previous year and it is still "The world's largest school rugby tournament".

Finally, all the rugby posts came down and another hectic week to convert all the pitches back for football. We have fixtures scheduled for the Easter weekend, weather permitting.

General

Merlin the Owl - Staff were devastated to find that our Tawny Owl, Merlin, had disappeared from his aviary in the stable yard. Having investigated his disappearance we know that he could not have escaped and there is no evidence that he has been attacked by a fox, or any other predator. We can only presume that he had been stolen. The police were advised but did not carry out an investigation citing "lack of evidence".

Merlin has lived in captivity since he was a chick and is now almost 30 years old. It would not be possible for him to survive in the wild.

Despite a lot of publicity, including ITV London News, there was no news at all.

CCTV has since been installed outside the office and stable yard, with the system working well.

Swans – The swans on Queensmere have also had a desperate month of bad luck. The cob was injured during, what the Swan Sanctuary believe, to be an attempt to fly out of the pond. His wing was broken and has since had to be amputated. He will live out his life with their flock at Shepperton.

Community Engagement and Events

Our Roehampton/Roehampton Women's Network – The EA to the CE has attended meetings of both the "Our Roehampton" and the Roehampton Women's Network. Whilst the discussions are not always relevant to the Commons, it is a good way of engaging with the Roehampton community. It is hoped to organise several walks with the groups over coming months to encourage them to use the Commons more.

Easter Egg Hunt – The Commons' annual Easter Egg Hunt took place on Friday 29 March and Sunday 31 March. The first day was managed by the EA to the CE and volunteers, with the Sunday being managed by the Windmill Trustees. Both days were a huge success with approximately 500 children taking part, and raising over £600 that will be shared between WPCC and the Windmill Trustees

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	8 April 2024	04.24.9
Subject: Conservation Report		Public
Report of: Conservation and Engagement Officer		For Decision/Information
<h2>SUMMARY</h2>		
The Board is asked to receive the report giving an update on conservation matters on the Commons.		

Heathland Management

During February and March 2024, heathland management on the Commons has focused on one area of heathland that is located close to Ladies Mile on Putney Heath.



While this area will require further visits after the annual bird nesting season (1 March to 31 July), volunteers have made good progress thinning young silver birch, holly, holm oak and Turkey oak from the edge of the heathland and the nearby woodland.

When completed, this work will help to provide a transitional habitat between the open heathland and a dense area of woodland that will support heathland flora as well as a reduced coverage of semi mature silver birch.

All cut materials have been left on site and incorporated into a dead hedge which provides potential shelter and habitats for wildlife and helps to reduce the amount of follow up work that is required from WPC staff.



Volunteer 'scrub bashers' photographed on 25.02.24

Woodland Management

During the past two months, woodland management on the Commons has included ride management work along one section of Stag Ride, hazel coppicing at a location near Warren Farm Ride and open space management at the Brickfield Cottage site which is close to Robin Hood Ride.

Ride management (Stag Ride)

During February 2024, woodland ride management was carried out along a small section of Stag Ride. This work involved coppicing selected trees that were located up to ten metres away from the edge of the ride. The aim of the work has been to create a ride that is approximately 1.5 metres wider than the height of the surrounding trees. This will dramatically reduce heavy shading along this section of woodland and allow an increased level of light to reach the woodland floor. This will lead to a long interface between the dense woodland edge and other open nectar sources that are important for invertebrates and other wildlife to thrive.

Where large native trees have been found along the edge of the ride, these have been largely untouched unless tree safety work has been required. In all areas of the Commons where woodland rides have been similarly managed, a programme of cutting is carried out on a rotational basis to ensure the ongoing presence of a range of age classes of shrubs that will provide an ongoing source of nectar, fruit, seeds, cover and nesting areas on the site.

As a result of mechanical issues, the Commons' digger is currently out of service but as soon as it is repaired, work will continue along Stag Ride to create various deadwood habitats with the large pieces of wood that are currently spread across the work area.



Stag Ride – ride management February 2024

Hazel coppicing (woodland near Warren Farm Ride)



Hazel coppice near Warren Farm Ride

Coppicing is an ancient woodland management technique in which the wood from a tree is harvested by cutting a suitable tree near ground level. The best time to carry out this activity is during the colder months of the year when the tree is in a dormant state.

During February 2024, volunteers carried out hazel coppicing over the course of two morning sessions. By spring/summer, it is anticipated that new shoots will have emerged, and these will be left uncut for a period of between 5-7 years.

All coppiced materials have been piled up on site and further hazel coppicing will be carried out towards the end of this year. Coppiced woodland helps to provide a variety of structure in a woodland setting which is of great benefit to sun loving invertebrates and other wildlife.

Open space management: Brickfield site

Although trees arguably form the most important part of a woodland, according to the Forestry Commission, open spaces within a woodland 'are one of the most important mechanisms for enhancing the biodiversity of the woodland and these spaces have a particular value for birds and invertebrates'.

The Brickfield site which is located along the edge of Robin Hood Ride is managed on a rotational basis where bramble and aspen suckers are cut back to provide a more open and warmer setting which is vital for wildlife to thrive.

During February 2024, volunteers helped to cut back invasive vegetation at the Brickfield site and all materials have been used to construct a dead hedge at one end of the site.



Volunteers at the Brickfield site during February 2024

Grassland Management

The Wimbledon Common Golf Course:

The Wimbledon Common Golf Course (WCGC) is a standard 18-hole course which is comprised of improved grassland (tees and greens), fairways, short acid grassland (semi rough and rough), woodland edge, scrub and remnant heath.

Along with the areas of heathland that are located around the edge of the golf course, the areas of acid grassland which form the semi-rough and rough provide an important reason for the Commons SSS and SAC designations.

To help protect and enhance these areas of grassland and heathland, over the past few months we have reduced the coverage of invasive scrub along six of the WCGC fairways. Please note: all the names and fairway numbers that are referenced below relate to the course names that are used by the London Scottish Golf Club.

- Fairway number 10: Caesars Camp (November 2023)
- Fairway number 5: Queensmere (January 2024)
- Fairway number 7: Paradise (January 2024)
- Fairway number 17: Heather (January 2024)
- Fairway number 4: Running Deer (February 2024)
- Fairway number 2: Big Ravine (March 2024)



Wimbledon Common Fairway restoration November 2023 to March 2024

Running Deer Fairway



Pre thinning (above)



After the completion of thinning (above)

Crossroads Meadow:

Crossroads meadow (also known as Telegraph Meadow) is a small area of grassland which is located close to Telegraph Road on Putney Heath.

This area of grassland has been managed by WPCC through an annual programme of cut and collect where arisings are removed from the grassland. This is done to remove nutrients and organic matter which helps to promote wildflowers that are unable to compete with the more virile nutrient hungry grasses.

To help further enhance this area of the commons, during March 2024, we carried out a wildflower planting event with children and teachers from Wimbledon High School and Granard Primary School which is in Roehampton. Approximately 40 children attended this event and between the two schools, money was raised to pay for the wild flower seeds and bulbs and three bird boxes were also purchased and positioned along the edge of the nearby woodland.

The wildflower seed and bulbs were sourced from a UK seed supplier that is on the wildlife charity Plantlife's list of recommended UK suppliers of wildflower seed, plug plants and wildflower turf. All precautions had therefore been taken to ensure that all seed and bulbs that were planted on the Commons were UK sourced.



Prior to the planting event, seed beds were created on the grassland site by the Commons' Maintenance Team.

Bird Nest Boxes:

During the beginning of February 2024, 12 nest boxes were positioned around Putney Lower Common. 11 of the nest boxes were Schwegler 1B boxes with various hole sizes and one box is designed to attract wrens. For the 11 Schwegler 1B nest boxes a range of different entrance hole sizes (32mm, 26mm and Oval) have been used on site to attract the widest range of species possible. According to the manufacturers of the nest boxes, the range of

species could include: great, blue, marsh, coal and crested tit, redstart, nuthatch, collared and pied flycatcher, wryneck, tree and house sparrow and possibly wren.

A further three Schwegler 1B nest boxes have been positioned around the edge of a small meadow on Putney Heath.



Bird nest box located on Putney Lower Common

Evening winter talk: Dr Mark Spencer “Wimbledon and Richmond -A refuge for London’s gems”.

This year’s annual winter talk was held at the London Scottish Golf Club and was provided by Dr Mark Spencer. As a result of this talk, a meeting was held with Dr Mark Spencer and Peter Haldane to discuss the possibility of re-introducing Cope bindweed (*Fallopia dumetorum*) to the Commons.

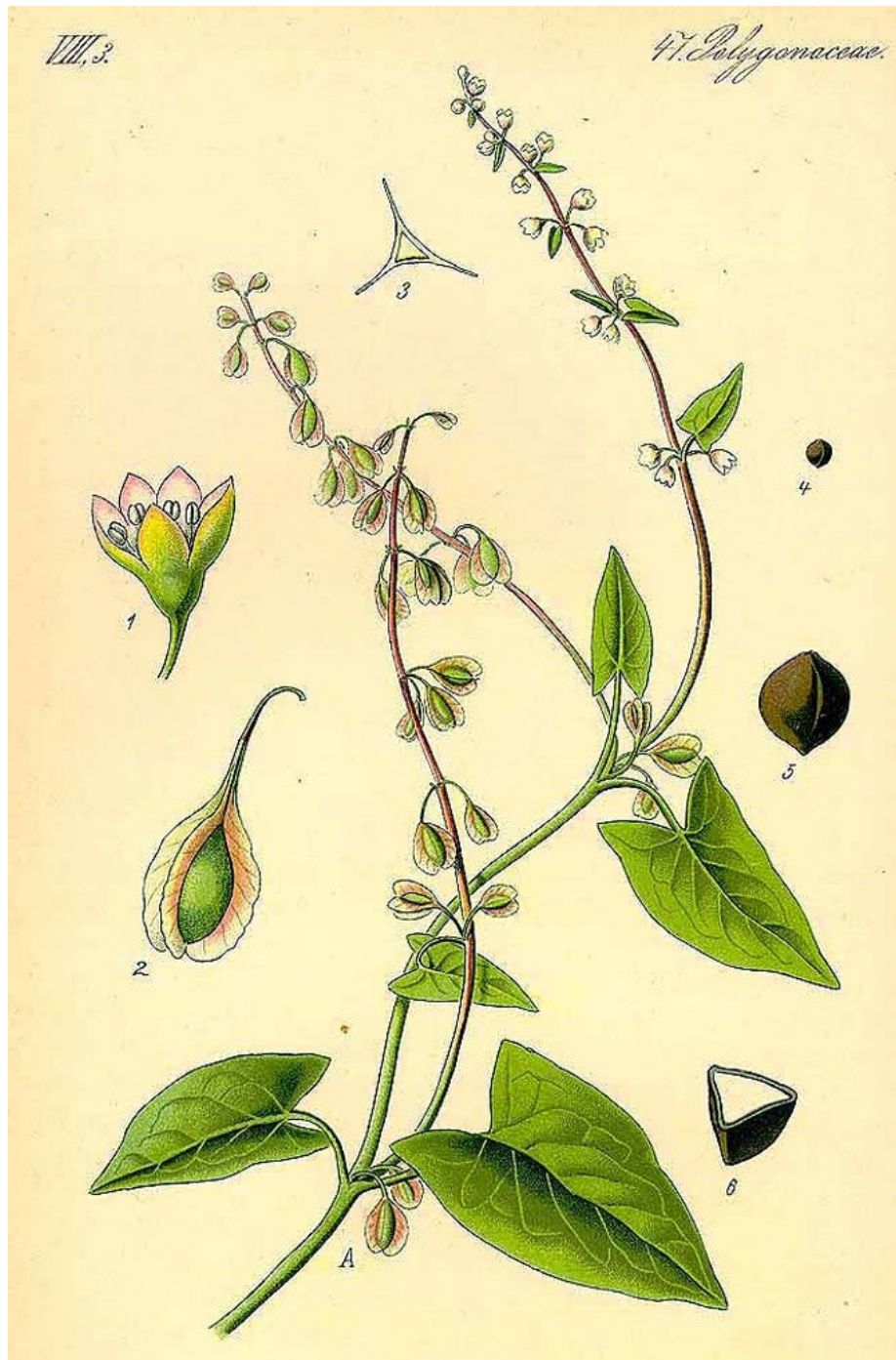
Cope bindweed is a nationally rare, Red Data List species.

According to the London Biodiversity Action Plan, the following information is provided about this plant.

“A climbing annual of hedges and woodland margins on drained soils, occurring within a single locality on the southern edge of the Royal Wimbledon Golf Course. The plant is erratic in its appearance and benefits from the disturbance associated with tree felling and thinning. Nationally, Cope-bindweed has always been locally distributed and now appears to be in decline, possibly through habitat neglect. The London population occurs partly within a

Borough SINC (the golf course), although plants can appear on the roadside itself and potentially in private gardens”.

Following the meeting between Dr Mark Spencer and Peter Haldane, Mark Spencer has been provided with permission from the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club to visit their course during the summer to check for any remaining Copse bindweed that may still be on site and he is currently compiling the historic information on the species in Wimbledon in preparation for a Natural England permission form.



Copse bindweed – image provided by Dr Mark Spencer.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	8 April 2024	04.24.11
Subject: Fundraising Update		Public
Report of: Fundraising Manager		For Information
<h2>Summary</h2>		
This report provides a summary of fundraising activity in February and March 2024.		

Wimbledon High Fundraising

Wimbledon High Girls Schools have been fundraising for WPCCC, helping fund two activities.

Fundraising for first aid equipment

The first is raising funds via their 'Enterprise Fair' as part of a scheme called 'Putting Young Minds to Work'. The Fundraising Manager attended the school to present three projects they could fundraise for, and they chose to support the purchase of a new defibrillator and first aid equipment. On 18th March 2024, we attended the fair to listen to the children's presentations and see the fair in action. On the day, £1,008.87 was raised and has been donated to the Commons.

Meadow planting project

The second activity is a meadow planting project in partnership with Wimbledon High School and Granard Primary School. Wimbledon High School fundraised £1,058 which helped to buy wildflower seeds, a variety of native bulbs, equipment and bird boxes. A total of 36 children were then invited to join the Commons staff team to help sow the seeds and plant the bulbs on Wednesday 20th March 2024 in an area known as Crossroads Meadow along Telegraph Road. Feedback from both schools was positive and we are looking forward to seeing the area grow.

Rewilding Queensmere

WPCCC has been awarded £130,000 from the Mayor of London's *Rewild London Fund* to take forward a transformative project to rewild Queensmere pond.

Last year, WPCCC was awarded a grant of £14,290 by the Rewild London Fund to carry out a feasibility study into improving the ecological value of Queensmere. This project is now coming to an end with final reports due on 12th April 2024. The findings and recommendations from a first stage report enabled WPCCC to apply for a larger grant to deliver some of the proposals in November 2023 and were delighted to hear in February 2024, that our application was successful.

WPCC officers are now working on finalising the designs so that work can take place from September 2024 onwards and will be complete by April 2025. The first activity that will be delivered is the installation of fixed point photography posts at each of the Commons ponds.

The Big Give

WPCC is taking part in this year's Green Match Fund, a match funding campaign run by the Big Give. It takes place between 18th and 25th April 2024. During this campaign week, all donations made via our campaign page will be doubled. Our fundraising target is £5,000, to be doubled to £10,000

On the launch day, a guided walk around Putney Heath is being organised for the Friends, led by Peter Haldane (WPCC's Conservation & Engagement Officer). During the week, posters will be on site and the Windmill tearooms have offered to have fliers on their tables. We will also be asking members of the Friends if they can volunteer to help promote the campaign and fundraise.

General donations (received February 2024 and March 2024)

Online - £1,352.50 (including Gift Aid)

Friends subscriptions - £4,771.25 (including Gift Aid)

Car Park machine - £665 (54 visitors made donations)

Wildlife and Conservation Forum meeting dated 9 January 2024

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Oliver Bennett - conservator (OB)
Sue Bucknall – conservator (SB)
Colin Cooper – staff (CC)
Andy Davies – volunteer (AD)
Les Evans-Hill - volunteer (LEH)
Peter Haldane – staff (PH)
Andrew Harding – volunteer (AH)
Adrian Podmore – volunteer (AP)
Simon Riley - volunteer (SR)
Ros Taylor – volunteer (RT)
Henry Wilson – volunteer (HW) – by phone

1. Apologies were received from Angela Evans-Hill (AEH), Michael Johnston and Nick Tew (NT). NT has had to resign from the Forum as he is moving to California on a two-year post doctorate. The Forum expressed thanks for Nick’s contribution to the Forum and wished him well for the future.
2. The minutes of the Forum meeting of 24 October 2023 were agreed. SR noted that the only amendment of the draft minutes related to fact that PH had liaised with a contractor to try to arrange for the Plain cut and collect to be in early September rather than early August.
3. Update on land management plan (LMP). The LMP has been signed-off by the Board of Conservators with a few amendments. **Action Point - PH to circulate amendments.**

AP expressed some concern that the LMP was too long (at over 500 pages) to be a document that people would engage with.

SR suggested that it was pulled apart with more relevant aspects “repackaged” to make a working document against which progress could be properly measured.

CC indicated that this would not be possible and stated that the LMP is now final.

OB suggested that we could make a web version available (rather than just a PDF) with various links directing users to different facets of the plan. CC agreed that a communications strategy needed to be considered. **Action Point – discuss at next meeting.**

AP felt that the LMP had been written in advance of budgetary considerations, meaning that priorities, delivery targets and funding were absent.

CC made it clear that that the LMP had been written and delivered as requested by the Board.

SB emphasized that the LMP had been an excellent document for her to read to gain knowledge and that it would be key reading for future Board members.

SB added that she thought biodiversity issues had definitely been moving up the Board agenda recently.

OB mentioned that the Commons' business plan might require changing in light of the LMP. CC stated that he hoped to be able to persuade the Board to increase funding/resources in this area.

AH asked why biodiversity was not at the top of the Board's agenda given the site's status as a SAC and SSSI. CC reminded the Forum that Board was constrained by the Act that incorporated the Charity that maintains the Commons – with biodiversity/conservation being only one of the obligations. It was often difficult to achieve a positive ecological bias in light of this.

SB mentioned that new conservators would be elected soon and suggested that they be invited to future Forum meetings. CC made it clear that influencing Conservators was the best way of influencing priorities.

AP also reminded the Forum that the LMP included the need for significant mapping and monitoring of habitats (both base-line and post work) and that an in-house ecologist was needed on the WC staff to fulfil this. CC indicated that he is hoping to budget for such a role however he also wondered whether the Forum members would be able to perform some of this monitoring.

CC added that he wanted to ramp up the volunteering opportunities on the Commons. This would tick a number of boxes – including community engagement, public health, delivery of biodiversity benefits. PH mentioned he had estimated that approximately 8000 volunteer hours had been undertaken in 2023 so volunteer activity on the Commons was already significant.

HW added that he was surprised how many people approached him to ask about volunteering opportunities when he was carrying out his beetle surveys. It was recognised that whilst advantageous volunteering still absorbed significant resources including supervision time, administration and tools and equipment.

4. Biosecurity Policy. The Board has adopted a new policy with regard to non-native invasive species (NNIS) **Action Point - PH to circulate the document. DONE.** Forum members will be invited to add species to the list. OB/RT both stated that the relevant species did require some monitoring. CC mentioned that there was a wish to improve the mapping capabilities etc. of the Commons and that this would help the management of NNIS. This will also be very relevant to implementation of the LMP. OB suggested that invasives

could be another special project. **Action Point – add to list for future consideration.**

5. Wetlands Project Update – see item 7 below
6. Monitoring Report. **Action Point - OB agreed to circulate a draft contents page for 2023 shortly with a suggestion of contributors.** Note that a new section will be incorporated for beetles – HW confirmed he would be very happy to draft this. OB suggested that contributors also added comments about suggested conservation management opportunities/issues. OB asked that contributions should be forwarded to him by 31/3/2024. RT stated that ideally, she would like to see some work done to aggregate historic botanical data as there are various datasets around (eg GIGL/SBS/LNHS). **Action Point – add to list for future consideration.**
7. Fundraising update. Queensmere Restoration – Rewilding London have funded a feasibility study. WC has also applied for future funding – **Action Point - PH to circulate feasibility study (by posting on Volunteer Portal of WPCCC website).** Peatland/Wetland restoration – funding may be available soon via Nature for Climate Initiative (funding round 2024 to 2025). In future PH to circulate fundraising updates in advance of Forum meetings as part of his conservation update. It was recognized that it was important to keep AH briefed more in respect of any progress on the Peatland restoration initiative given his leadership of conservation work with London Wildlife Trust at Farm Bog.
8. Conservation and general update from PH. **Action Point - PH to circulate his notes on the period November 2023 to January 2024 to Forum members. DONE.** In future it was agreed that PH will circulate his notes in advance of future meetings so they can be discussed at the next meeting. PH noted that this was historically the arrangement and was unclear why this had changed.
9. Recorder and Monitoring Updates
 - a) HW gave an update on his summer beetle surveys. For 2023 189 species had been positively identified, although some specimens are still to be examined. All records are posted to iRecord. HW noted that one very rare (*Teredus cylindricus*) and some very local saproxylic beetles had been recorded although numbers of species had been low. There is a scoring system for site importance for saproxylic species and currently WC would appear to have a high score although to be statistically significant more data is required. HW's instinct is that WC may well turn out to be as important for this group as Richmond Park despite the absence of large veteran trees. OB felt that there may well be funding opportunities given the apparent richness of assemblage. **Action Point – add to list for future consideration.**

- b) It was agreed that in future recorder and monitoring contributors would be asked to provide a brief summary in advance of meetings. Important issues/findings or concerns can then be discussed at the meetings.

10. Future Events - Weekend of Nature. This has been provisionally booked for the weekend of 21-23 June 2024. **Action Point - AEH/PH/CC to consider further.**

AOB

- a) SR stated that it was proposed that in future larger documents are posted on the volunteer portal of the WPCC website to avoid the emailing of large files.
- b) OB mentioned that might be useful to put together a list of potential projects. **Action Point – see listing at foot of the minutes.** CC also mentioned that he currently has to go through a rather complex procedure to get approval from the Board for even small projects a situation he is seeking to change.
- c) CC mentioned that he would like the Forum to engage more with Board as well as with wider community including at the September Open Day. It was felt that this would be a good opportunity to make the case for biodiversity being given a higher priority. **Action Point – ALL – to consider at next meeting**
- d) SR asked whether the site walk round with Natural England had taken place yet. This had been mentioned previously as part of the LMP drafting. PH confirmed that this had not taken place yet.
- e) Date of next meeting 12 March 2024.

Future Dates

Forum meetings

12 March 2024
14 May 2024
16 July 2024
3 September 2024
12 November 2024

Other

Winter talk – 6 February 2024

Bird Song Course – 27/28 April 2024
Birdsong Walk – 19 May 2024
Weekend of Nature – 21/23 June 2024 – TBC
Butterfly & dragonfly walk – July/August 2024 - TBC
Open Day – 8 September 2024
Bird Walk – 15 September 2024

Projects/Ideas Listing

Purchase of bug traps for purpose of more extensive invertebrate surveys

Possibility of live camera feed on active swallow nests

Consideration of invasive non-native species, including mapping

Work to update and combine flora datasets

Surveys of saproxylic invertebrate fauna

Spring/Summer walks for Board