

WIMBLEDON AND PUTNEY COMMONS CONSERVATORS

CONSERVATORS' MEETING to be held on Monday 13 April 2015 at 5.00pm in the Information Centre, Wimbledon Common, London SW19 5NR

AGENDA

- 04.15.1 Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman**
- 04.15.2 Apologies**
- 04.15.3 Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests in Respect of Items to be Considered at this Meeting**
- 04.15.4 Approval of the Minutes of Meeting held on 9 March**
- 04.15.5 Matters Arising**
- 04.15.6 Chief Executive's Report**
- 04.15.7 Natural History - Report of the meeting held on 18 March**
- 04.15.8 Any Other Business**
- 04.15.9 Date of Next Meeting**

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, MARCH 2015 - DRAFT

Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on Monday 9 March 2015 at 5pm in the Information Centre, Wimbledon Common, London SW19 5NR.

Conservators Present: Mr D Devons (Chairman)
Mrs Jenny Evanson
Mr Derek Frampton
Mr J Horrocks
Mr A Simon (Vice-Chairman)
Dr R Taylor
Professor Robin Touquet

Officers Present: Mr S Lee (Chief Executive)
Ms Paula Graystone (Deputy Clerk & Ranger),
Ms A Evans (PA to Chief Executive)

4 members of the public

03.15.1 Apologies

Sir Ian Andrews

03.15.2 Declarations of Interest

Mr Devons and Mr Simon confirmed they were both trustees of the Wimbledon Windmill Museum Trust. Mr Simon was also an executive member of the Wimbledon Society. Mr Horrocks confirmed he was an executive member of the Putney Society.

03.15.3 Approval of the Minutes of Meeting held on 9 February

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February were approved subject to one minor amendment.

03.15.4 Matters Arising

Ailanthus Tree at Putney Lower Common – The Chief Executive reported that the contractors would be removing the hoarding from around the milestone in order to chemically treat and kill off the Ailanthus saplings. It would be clear within a few weeks if the treatment had been successful and whether the roots had undermined the stability of the milestone. If the treatment was not successful, further treatments may be necessary.

REMPF Memorial – In response to a question, the Chief Executive commented that the proposed works to the REMPF Memorial included re-setting the main plinth, relaying the concrete area, repairs to the paving stones and professional cleaning of the stone and cross. He reported that the War Memorial Trust had agreed to consider an application for funding of at least part of the cost of the work.

Annual Open Meeting – The Chief Executive confirmed that the Kairos Centre had been provisionally booked for the Annual Open Meeting on Wednesday 17 June, subject to a visit to ensure its suitability.

03.15.5 Chief Executive's Report

i. Windmill

The Chief Executive reported that Marcus Beale Associates were now seeking expressions of interest from appropriate companies to tender for works to the Windmill, particularly the tower, and would be going out to tender within the next month.

ii. Book - Wimbledon Common: 100 Years of Change

The Chief Executive reported that quotations had been sought for reprinting the book in full colour. For a print run of 200, it would be necessary to increase the sale price of the book to £6.00 in order to cover costs.

iii. Website Development

The Conservators noted the designs of the new website and it was agreed that it was a considerable improvement on the current website. The Chief Executive confirmed that the site should, hopefully, go live towards the end of April.

iv. Putney Hospital Site

The Chief Executive updated the Conservators on several matters concerning the former Putney Hospital site.

Site works – demolition was now complete and all materials had been broken down to use as sub-base material. Piling work would begin on 23 March and the contractors would be using screw piling, which is less intrusive than traditional hammer piling; the contractors were liaising with local residents. The site's operations compound would be put in place in 8-10 weeks' time and the Chief Executive expected that work would then commence on the main framework for the buildings.

Boundary – XYZ Land Surveyors had pegged out the boundary of the development site in accordance with their original drawing. The main contractor had established reference points from which checks could be made throughout the building programme to ensure compliance with the coordinates.

Woodland Works - Works to the woodland buffer to the west of the site had commenced. Thinning work had taken place and replanting was scheduled to commence on 23 March. The area was also being prepared for wild-flower seeding. The Chief Executive was confident this work would now allow the larger trees to flourish and that the objective of retaining the vegetation screen between the development and the Common would be achieved.

Lighting – Lighting was still an outstanding planning consideration. Proposals were being prepared for low level lighting, to light only the paths, with a couple of wooden columns at the junction of Comondale and Lower Richmond Road. Local residents would be consulted before the proposals were brought back to the Board for its approval prior to submission to Wandsworth Council.

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, MARCH 2015 - DRAFT

Lime Tree - One additional matter had been flagged as a potential issue on Plan 2 "Restoration of Common and Access", approved by the Board at its meeting in January 2015. This concerned the proximity of trees to the hoarding and boundary structures at the north-east end of the woodland. Having now completed the detailed marking out of the boundary it was clear that one additional lime tree would be very vulnerable, since there was a substantial encroachment onto Council land by the roots and the crown. An application had therefore been made to Wandsworth Council for this tree to be felled, but to be replaced by three lime trees in a different location. This was most unfortunate, but the tree would be so affected by root disturbance from the development that it would become a potential liability.

v. Roehampton War Memorial

A formal report on the proposal to list the Roehampton War Memorial had been received, but no recommendation for listing had yet been made. A letter had been sent to English Heritage advising that the Conservators had no comments to make on this report.

The Chief Executive reported that the Wimbledon Memorial was already listed and he reminded Conservators that a proposal to list the REMPf memorial would be made once restoration works had been completed.

PART B GENERAL UPDATE

i. Conservators' Election 2015

The results of the recent election had been announced on 27 February and the successful candidates were:

Shirley Gillbe	4,734 votes
John Cameron	3,999 votes
Nicholas Evans	3,619 votes
Prue Whyte	3,193 votes
Keith Luck	3,010 votes

The Conservators expressed disappointment at the low voting turn-out which, at 16.4%, was some 3% down on the previous election in 2012. The online voting had not been as successful as had been hoped, with only approximately 1,700 voters using this means to vote. Electoral Reform Services would be providing a more detailed analysis shortly and the Returning Officer would be preparing a report for the Board in due course.

Several people had suggested that they had found it difficult to select from such a large number of candidates and one Board member suggested that the Conservators who were re-standing for election should have been indicated as such on the ballot papers.

Concerns were expressed that some people were not aware that the Commons were managed by Conservators. The Chief Executive reported that he had requested Wandsworth Council to consider reinstating the Commons Levy on the Council Tax statements, so that residents living in the Levy-paying area were aware that they

contributed towards the upkeep of the Commons. Wandsworth Council had done this every year until 2013, and Merton Council continued to do this.

ii. Conflict of Interest Policy

The Chief Executive reported that, in accordance with the Charities Act 2011, charity trustees had a legal duty to act only in the best interests of the charity. He explained that a conflict of interest was defined as any situation in which a charity trustee's personal interests or loyalties could, or could be seen to, prevent the trustee from making a decision only in the best interests of the charity. As such, charity trustees must not put themselves in any position where their duties may conflict with any personal interest they may have.

The development of a conflict of interest policy had also been recommended in the recent Governance Review and so, utilising best practice as recommended by the Charity Commission, a draft Conflict of Interest policy had been prepared for the Board's consideration. A leading firm of charity lawyers had been consulted on the document to ensure it met requirements under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, the Commissioners' Clauses and charity law. Conflicts of interest were something that the Charity Commission had produced specific guidance about and were taking action against charities where these conflicts had potentially undermined the decision-making process.

As the Charity Commission guidance suggested that any conflicts of interest should be declared before trustees take up their office, the Chief Executive further recommended that both the Appointed Conservators and the newly-elected Conservators should be asked to complete the Declaration of Interest forms prior to 1 April 2015. For the sake of transparency, the maintenance of a publically available register of Conservators' interests would be published on the WPCC web site.

RESOLVED: Subject to some minor amendments, the Board unanimously approved the Conflict of Interest policy and instructed the Chief Executive to write to all Appointed and newly-Elected Conservators asking them to complete the Declaration of Interest form prior to the new Board taking up its responsibilities on Wednesday 1 April 2015.

iii. Keepers' Incident Report

The Board noted the Keepers' Incident Report. It was agreed that, in future reports, the graph should be made clearer by increasing the scale of the vertical axis and should include the number of incidents on each of the bars.

iv. Events

The Board noted the events taking place on the Commons over the next two months.

It was noted that the Putney Society were organising a litter-picking part on the Putney Heath on Sunday 26 April at 10am, meeting opposite the Green Man. They were keen to become involved in more challenging projects as and when the Commons' volunteer programme was more developed.

03.15.6 Natural History Sub Committee - Report of the meeting held on 18 February

The Chairman of the Natural History Sub-Committee reported that the February meeting had been held with the group of volunteer ecology experts who had been assisting with recording on the Commons. It had been a productive meeting, providing feedback on the Chairman's report and identifying those who would be able to support monitoring during 2015. The Commons User Survey was on-going but it was already clear that communication and access to information were key issues for visitors.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to have the group of ecology experts working more collaboratively, based on the policy and visions of the Commons, rather than as individuals; it was thought that this would happen once the volunteer policy was in place. The Chief Executive commented that the work on The Plain was valuable in setting a baseline for moving forward and developing the vision for the management of The Plain.

The Chief Executive was aware that there had been some concerns expressed about the future arrangements for the meetings of the Natural History Sub-Committee meetings, as well as Board meetings. He explained that it would be up to the new Board to decide on the arrangements for future meetings but he would recommend that the Board move to meeting in alternate months for the remainder of 2015, moving to quarterly meetings from 2016. He also advised that, given the nature of governance issues, the Board meetings should, as recommended in the Governance Review, be confidential.

In the future, the Chief Executive would seek to arrange other methods of communicating with the public; this would include building on the work of e-newsletters and through the new website. He explained that, as at Hampstead Heath, there may be benefit in considering the establishment of some form of stakeholder/user forum. This had been found to provide a valuable means of engaging with the local community on a range of more operational, "on the ground" issues and to disseminate the type of information that the public were interested in, such as conservation work.

The meeting of the Natural History Sub-Committee on 18 March would include a walk through the recently-cleared woodland on Wimbledon Common to consider the effect of the holly clearance on the woodland floor.

03.15.7 Any Other Business

Norstead Place – It was noted that the log butts at Norstead Place that prevented cars parking on the grass had rotted and needed replacing; there had been recent vehicle incursion on the Conservators' land.

Website – The Chief Executive confirmed that the website would include an interactive map which marked walks, picnic areas etc and perhaps also set out the "etiquette" for walking on the golf course.

Conservators – The public present at the meeting expressed their thanks to the outgoing Conservators for all their work and dedication to the Commons.

03.15.8 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 13 April 2015.

The meeting finished at 6.10pm

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators Meeting	March 2015	04.15.6
Subject: Chief Executive Report	Public	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Decision and Information	

PART A MATTERS ARISING

The following provides an update on matters arising from the previous Board meeting.

i. Windmill

Contractors have visited the Windmill to view the site and proposed works and prepare tenders for submission by 13th April 2015.

A full tender report has been requested from Marcus Beale Associates. As soon as the preferred tenderer, their cost and a proposed programme is known these will be circulated to the Board.

Discussion has also taken place at previous meetings about reducing the height of the hedge in front of the Windmill to open up the entrance and make the site more welcoming for visitors. Following a site visit, it was suggested that the proposed reduction of the hedge to 4 foot is likely to look quite incongruous, given its height and width. A better solution is to remove this section of hedge and replace with an appropriate paddock-style fence.

ii. Wimbledon Common: 100 Years of Change

Work is still being undertaken to try and locate the original photographs.

iii. Annual Newsletter

Work has commenced on the preparation of the Annual Newsletter. In addition, a Spring Update has been prepared, copy attached (see Appendix 1) and this has been placed on the web and hard copies made available.

iv. Putney Hospital Site Update

The works to the woodland thinning operations have been completed and preparations for the planting of the transplants and trees on the Common have commenced. The transplanted areas have been protected by a fence to aid their establishment. Although quite robust in nature this is only a temporary fence. Without any protection the plantings are likely to suffer, whether from trampling by dogs or the public.

In accordance with the Conservators' Covenants under the Deed of Easement for the former hospital site, approval has been given to London Power Networks to lay electricity lines across Putney Lower Common to serve the new development.

In accordance with the Board's decision in February 2012 Land Transfer TP1 of land on the north-east of Stag Lane from Wandsworth Borough Council has been transferred to Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators.

With regards the Milestone, having now had an opportunity to remove the hoarding and treat the Ailanthus (Tree of Heaven) suckers, it is apparent that given the extent of the root system the only really effective way of killing these is to temporarily remove the Milestone. Concerns have been raised about the possible damage to the Milestone given its proximity to the entrance of the site and the increasing numbers of vehicles that are servicing the building of the school and apartment blocks. With Durkan's having now taken full control of the site, they will store the Milestone on site and it will be reset as part of the restoration of the Commons work towards the end of the build programme.

v. Roehampton War Memorial

English Heritage have written to confirm that Roehampton War Memorial on Putney Heath has been designated as a Grade II Listed structure for the following principal reasons:

- Historic interest: as an eloquent witness to the tragic impact of world events on the local community, and the sacrifice it made in the First World War;
- Architectural interest: as a handsome memorial cross with Tudor-esque detailing.

PART B GENERAL UPDATE

i. Natural England

Following an inspection of the SAC and SSSI by representatives of Natural England, they have written to confirm that the habitat management work being undertaken across the site is delivering positive outcomes.

The wet and dry heath, acid grasslands and mire habitats are said to be at or very close to favourable conditions. The condition was previously "unfavourable improving", so this is an excellent reflection on the work of the Maintenance Team and work prescriptions being determined by the Wildlife and Conservation Officer.

Of particular note was the work undertaken by staff on the rotational cutting of the heather to introduce a mosaic of habitats, replicating the conditions that would exist if the areas were grazed.

ii. Annual Open Meeting

Having visited the Kairos Centre, it has been decided that it is not the most ideal venue for the Annual Open Meeting. It is a quiet place for religious retreat and, although the room is suitable, it is adjacent to the private quarters for those on retreat and the noise of potentially some 50-70 visitors would not be ideal. We have therefore reserved the Roehampton Cricket Club near the Telegraph Inn. Although a smaller room, it should seat 60 comfortably.

iii. Events

The following events are taking place on the Commons over the next two months:

- | | | |
|------------|---|---|
| 17th April | - | Wild Learning |
| 24th April | - | Wild Learning |
| 25th April | - | Litter Picking Event – Geocaching, Windmill Car Park |
| 25th April | - | Free Police Cycle Marketing and Registration Event
Windmill Car Park |
| 26th April | - | Putney Society Litter Picking Event, Putney Heath |

26th April	-	Wimbledon and Wandale District St George's Day Parade Rushmere
30th April	-	Wimbledon Common Golf Club – Launch of National Golf Month – Details TBC
1st May	-	Wild Learning
1st May	-	HMRC – Sponsored Walk
3rd May	-	Forage London, Wimbledon Common
6th May	-	Good Run Guide Run, Windmill Car Park
9th May	-	Putney Magpies, REMPF
9th May	-	Wimbledon Society Bat Walk
10th May	-	Pralines Sponsored Dog Walk
15th May	-	Wild Learning
16th May	-	Queckett Microscopical Club, Information Centre
16th May	-	Open University Environmental Studies Field Trip - Putney Heath
17th May	-	St Raphael's Hospice Sponsored Dog Walk, Windmill Car Park
22nd May	-	Wild Learning
24th May	-	Run Through10k run, REMPF
30th May	-	Putney Magpies, REMPF

iv. **Governance Review**

The previous Board approved the Governance Review in its entirety, on the basis that it would be for the new Board to implement the changes to the structure for governing the organisation and the arrangement for future Board meetings.

The Review identified the need to move towards quarterly Board meetings with, ideally, two Away Days to focus on the strategic direction of the Board. Initially, the Review identified that the Board move to meetings every two months with a view, as soon as possible, to move to quarterly meetings. It was also proposed that the Board meet later at 6.30pm.

The Review also recommended that the “open/public” parts of the agenda are stopped on the basis that they serve no meaningful purpose. These should be replaced by quarterly or half-yearly public sessions, led by the Chief Executive. The primary aim of these sessions is to keep the public informed about the work being carried on and should actively engage with those present.

There is also a need to implement the wider findings of the 2013 Communications Review, finding different ways to keep the public informed, including:

- **Provision of a new website** - this is currently in the process of being constructed, but is likely to take another four to six weeks to complete. This will provide a means to promote work activities and to also provide a mechanism for visitors to sign up to an e-newsletter. Quarterly newsletters should then be prepared on the template of the Spring Update.
- **Temporary Signage on site** – new Notice Boards do now promote the work activities being undertaken across the site.
- **Information signage** – there is a need to review “gateway signage” placed at strategic sites to ensure that visitors have a better understanding of the Commons, its terrain and general code of conduct.

Recommendation:

That the Board implements the new arrangements for governance of the organisation, moving initially to confidential meetings of the Board every other month, but starting at 6.30pm. That the Chief Executive establishes a framework for leading sessions in which major stakeholders can learn about the work of the organisation, and prepares a Communication Strategy to inform and promote the work of the organisation to the general public, including Levy-payers.

Commons Spring Update



Wimbledon
and Putney
Commons

Wimbledon Common

Putney Heath

Putney Lower Common

April 2015

Welcome to the Commons Spring Update!

Despite the weather being as varied and unpredictable as ever, it is now officially spring and across the Commons flora and fauna are awakening from their winter slumber.



Horse Chestnut and Elder are bursting into leaf, Pussy Willow is well in bud, and the white blossom of Wild Cherry trees is providing both a welcome splash of colour to many areas of the Commons woodland and, importantly, a welcome source of nectar for a host of hungry bees.

And meanwhile, in the Ponds....

The Ponds and Meres are also bursting with life. Throughout March, breeding frogs and the subsequent frog spawn has been recorded in six of the Commons' nine ponds and we expect 2015 to prove to be another good year for our frog population.



Did you know? From a clump of approximately 2,000 eggs, it is estimated that no more than five will manage to reach the necessary age to return to the pond and spawn again in the future. Predators for tadpoles and frogs include a wide range of fish, birds, reptiles and mammals.

Help us protect our Waterfowl!

As in previous years, we are asking dog-walkers to help us protect our wildfowl by keeping their dogs out of the water at Kingsmere, 7 Posts Pond, Bluegate Gravel Pit, Hookhamslade Pond and Queensmere between 1st April and 31st August.

At Queensmere, we are also asking dog-walkers to keep their dogs on a lead. We have had some swans show an interest in the Mere as a nesting site and everyone is keeping fingers crossed they settle.



We are once again asking dog-walkers to help us protect the breeding waterfowl in Seven Post Pond by

**KEEPING DOGS OUT
OF THE WATER**

during the nesting season

**1 APRIL to
31 AUGUST**



All change For Conservators

The triennial election for the five elected Conservators, or Trustees, took place in February 2015.

With an unprecedented 17 candidates standing this year, Levypayers had a tough task choosing their preferred candidates. This may have had a knock-on effect on the disappointing turnout which, at just over 16%, fell from 19% in 2012, despite the introduction of online voting.

The five successful candidates, who took up office on 1st April, were:

John Cameron, Nick Evans, Shirley Gillbe, Keith Luck and Prue Whyte

Bird Sightings

Accompanying the arrival of spring, the opportunities to see and hear birdlife on the Commons has been enormous.

During March, our resident ornithologist, Dave Wills, and his dedicated team of observers have been out and about recording sightings.

Causing great excitement over the last couple of weeks has been the sight of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers along Ladies Mile and the Inner Windmill Road. Last seen on the Commons some 10

years ago, it was thought they had left the area for good so to see them back is very encouraging.

There is an increasing number of raptors being seen, with Common Buzzard sightings now quite common,

along with our already resident Kestrels; a pair of Peregrine Falcons have also been spotted flying high over The Plain.

If you're walking along the Beverley Brook, keep an



Dates for your Diary

Saturday 9th May - Bat Walk organised by the Wimbledon Society. Meet in the Windmill Car Park at 8.15pm, with torch and sturdy shoes!

Wednesday 17th June - Annual Open Meeting - Roehampton Cricket Club, Telegraph Car Park, off Telegraph Road SW15 3TU. Conservators available from 7.15pm. Meeting starts 8pm. Refreshments available.

Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st June - Wimbledon and Putney Commons 2015 BioBlitz with Bat Walks, Moth Spotting, Bird Walks and general wildlife walks (*Timetable of events will be available on our website soon*)

Wednesday 29th July - Pete Guest Memorial Bat walk, led by John Tovey. Meet at the Windmill at 8.45pm. Parking available.

Sunday 13th September - Wimbledon and Putney Commons Stables Open Day - 20th Anniversary Edition! Come and join us for lots of family fun!

eye out for a flash of colour — chances are it might be the Kingfisher recently spotted near Mill Corner.

And finally, with fingers crossed, a Skylark has also been seen on The Plain!

Other sightings this last month have included:

Tawny Owl, Pheasant, Woodcock, Firecrest, Marsh Tit, Reed Bunting, Stonechat and Redwing.



Tree works at Putney Lower Common

Following the successful completion of woodland thinning work on Putney Lower Common, the ground has been prepared ready for new tree planting in the area will be carried out over the next few weeks.

The main dense planting areas will consist of a mixed indigenous transplants, supplemented by plantings of single trees. Species will include Maple, Lime, Oak, Viburnum, Ash, Hawthorn and Dogwood.



In order to protect the saplings, it has been necessary to erect some fencing, but please be assured this is only temporary and will be removed. Without this protection, the saplings close to the open areas of Common are much more likely to get damaged and the plants won't get established.

A new face for Putney Lower Common

After 30 years of working here on the Commons, our man on Putney Lower Common, Peter Gover (pictured on the left), retired on 30th March. Providing a reassuring and dependable presence on the Common for the past decade, Peter was responsible for keeping the area rubbish-free and a pleasant place to visit.

Without doubt, replacing the knowledge and contribution that Peter made to the Commons will be no easy task but, from the 1st April 2015, another one of our long-serving members of staff, Bill

Rowland (pictured right), will be taking on the mantle of Head



Ranger - Putney Lower Common, and will be a more regular presence to ensure that Putney Lower Common is managed to the very highest of standards.

Having been our Senior Mounted Keeper on Wimbledon and Putney Commons for more years than he probably cares to remember, Bill's knowledge and understanding of what makes the Commons tick is second to none. So, if you have any questions or are in need of any assistance while on the Common, Bill will be more than happy to help.

Free Police Cycle Marking and Registration Event

On Saturday 25th April, the Safer Transport Police



Team will be in the Windmill Car Park between 2pm and 4pm and will be providing free cycle security marking and registration. Security marking can deter potential thieves and can assist in cycle identification and recovery if stolen.

Restoration work on Beverley Brook

Entering the Commons at Mill Corner, the Beverley Brook flows for a distance of some 1800 metres before leaving the Commons beneath the Beverley Bridge on the A3 Kingston By-pass.



Past flood-alleviation works has meant that the Brook offers very little opportunity for natural habitats to emerge. To counter this, staff and volunteers from the South East Rivers Trust spent three days in March placing logs in the riverbed to create a watercourse that will allow the Brook to meander, and so create a much improved and diverse range of habitats for fish and invertebrates.



March Volunteers

Litter on the Commons is a constant problem and we are always pleased to welcome volunteers who can help us deal with the issue. This month we'd like to say a particular thank you to a second group of volunteers from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association UK who have again provided a great deal of help in keeping the Commons clear of unwanted rubbish. Thank you!



And finally, a plea from our staff...

Picking up after your dog is not a pleasant task but it is a part of responsible dog ownership and we do appreciate those of you that do so conscientiously.

We just have one request — please don't hang the bag and its contents in a tree. It is not an appropriate way to dispose of it. There are over 70 dog-waste bins on the Common so one is never too far away, and we are always happy to take your suggestions for other sites.



**Minutes of a meeting of the Natural History Sub-Committee held at 3.00pm on
Wednesday 18th March 2015**

Present:

Conservators: Dr Ros Taylor, Chair
Mr Derek Frampton
Mr John Horrocks
Prof Robin Touquet

Officers: Mr Simon Lee Chief Executive
Mr Peter Haldane, Wildlife & Conservation Officer
Ms Angela Evans

1. Conservation Management Activities

Mr Haldane reported on recent conservation activities.

The Plain – Mr Haldane reported that notices asking the public to keep their dogs on lead and to keep to the mown paths on The Plain were put up on 1st March.

Mr Haldane reported that the grass-cutting contractor had been booked to cut, bail and remove the grass from The Plain and sites at Westside Common and the small meadows off Centre Path & Tibbet's Corner at the beginning of August 2015.

The Chairman commented that she had been contacted by one of the monitoring volunteers after the February meeting and he had mentioned concerns that the earlier grass cutting meant that many seed heads did not have time to form. This was noted and thought had been given to this but, on balance, it had been agreed to time the cut to allow the grass to grow to a suitable length to encourage Skylarks. In the event of a cool spring and summer and delayed flowering, the timing of the cut could be reviewed.

The woodland clearance work had finished for the time being, with the remainder of the clearance being carried out towards the end of October 2015. The total area thinned during 2015 was 17 hectares (42 acres).

Following on from the woodland work, the maintenance team had been carrying out coppicing work close to Queensmere and along part of Stag Ride and at the edge of the woodland rides along Robin Hood and the Gravelly Rides.

A meeting had been held with Bill Downey, a volunteer with Butterfly Conservation, to starting a new butterfly transect which would incorporate the areas of recently thinned woodland, Beverley Brook, the Acropolis, Farm Bog, Fishponds Wood and the Pony Field site. At least one volunteer had agreed to take on the transect. The existing transect, walked until recently by a local resident*, would be put on hold until another volunteer could be found.

Frog spawn was found to be present on Bluegate, 7 Post Pond, Scio Pond, Curling Pond, Kingsmere & Millennium Pond and was also present in pools on The Plain. To

avoid desiccation and loss, this frog spawn was being transferred to nearby Hookhamslade Pond by a volunteer.

The tree-thinning work at Putney Lower Common was now complete and replacement tree-planting was scheduled to start on 23rd March. Some concern was expressed that the current dry weather might impact on the success of the planting. The Chief Executive was aware of this risk and was monitoring the situation. If there were any losses, the contractors were responsible for replacement.

2. Review of holly thinning activity and potential monitoring

Prior to the meeting, the Sub-Committee had walked the woodland where the most recent holly-clearing work had been carried out. It was considered to have been a successful operation that now opened up the area to allow the public to walk through. Mr Haldane reported that there had been favourable feedback from Natural England when they visited the site recently, and also from other local wildlife experts.

It was agreed that it was important to monitor the area over the next few years to see what flora and fauna developed; both staff and volunteers should be encouraged to help with this.

3. NHSC Moving Forward

The Chief Executive reported that he had been giving some thought to the future committee structure and this would be put to the new Board for their consideration at a future meeting. He was keen to have a structure for engagement and envisaged the setting up of a stakeholder group that could feed in more information from a grassroots level. These in turn would be fed into by specific interest groups. He proposed that the structure for Committees reporting into the Board would be more governance-focused, rather than operational.

4. Monitoring targets for 2015

It was agreed that the main areas for monitoring in 2015 would be:

1. The Plain
2. Recently cleared woodland
3. Woodland at Putney Lower Common

5. AOB

The Chairman thanked the retiring conservators, Mr Horrocks and Professor Touquet, for all their hard work and support as members of the Sub-Committee.

- Subsequent to this meeting it was reported that Gay Carr, who had recorded the butterfly transect for many years, had passed away after a long illness. On behalf the Board, the Chief Executive and the Wildlife and Conservation Officer, the NHSC wishes to acknowledge her substantive contribution to recording on the Commons.