

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MITCHAM COMMON CONSERVATORS
(A Statutory Corporation constituted by the Metropolitan Commons
(Mitcham) Supplemental Act 1891)
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11th March 2020 AT 6.30PM

Present:

Cllr. N. Draper (Chairman)
Mr. J. Cheetham
Mr. M. Groves
Cllr. A. Pelling
Cllr. C. Williams

In Attendance:

Mr. M. Boyle – Manager of Mitcham Common
Mr. P. Moorhouse - Warden
Mr. D. Napier - Leisure & Culture Greenspaces Manager, Merton
Mr. R. Auld - Investments Adviser
Mr J. Kirby - Friends of Mitcham Common (present for Part 1)
Ms. L. Parry – Minute taker

Absent:

Mr R. Bailey (Vice Chairman)
Cllr. N. Degrad
Ms A. Dines
Ms. A. Fairweather
Cllr. N. Garratt
Cllr. J. Henry
Cllr. S. King
Cllr. R. Makin

1. Apologies for Absence

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Bailey, Ms Dines, Ms Fairweather, Cllr Henry, Cllr King and Cllr Makin.

2. Declarations of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. Minutes (enclosed) of the last Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 10th December 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate account and were duly signed and dated by the Chair and passed to the Manager.

4. **Matters Arising**

Item 6. Portfolio Valuation: An Ethical Investments Subgroup had been set up at the last meeting, to be led by Mr Bailey. As yet there has not been any contact or discussion with Mr Auld.

Item 9. Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust: The meeting scheduled for 8th January was cancelled and a meeting has now been scheduled for 16th March 2020.

Exclusion of Public (See Item 18.1 for explanation)

5. **Investments Portfolio (enclosed)- Report from Mr Auld**

Mr Auld made the following recommendations:

To reduce the holding in Diageo by 300 shares, as in the past it has been prudent to suggest taking some of the profits on those shares that have had a good run, to reduce the risk specific to each individual stock to ensure an adequate spread of risk. Figures out recently have taken an impact on the Coronavirus and with significant exposure to the Far East it is prudent to reduce the portfolio's exposure. The shares have a slightly below average and we can use the funds to increase the portfolio exposure to Fixed Income to bolster income production. The shares look to be up with events, without a bump in the dividend on a share buyback and it is not foreseen that the shares will re-rate in the current environment.

To reduce the holding in Unilever by 295 shares, again a moderate yielding stock that shows little signs of a re-rating..

To reduce the holding in AstraZeneca by 90 shares only. Top slicing a top performing stock. The Shares have experienced some increased volatility of late

To reduce the holding in Relx by 500 shares to reduce the stock specific risk.

Mr Auld said that he had considered the costs associated with the transactions and believed increased income and shift in asset class is a benefit that outweighs the associated costs incurred. The advised transactions are in line with the medium risk profile. For the time being Mr Auld recommended holding on to the cash released from sale of shares rather than re-investing in any other asset at the current time.

RESOLVED: The Conservators formally approved the recommendations made by Mr Auld for sale of shares with thanks for his trusted advice.

6. **Administration and Management Report**

The Manager said that the Report was largely self explanatory for information. It was noted that the Common lost a few trees during the storm of 9th February. Some fell onto the highway, cleared by Council contractors, and a few more are in a dangerous condition and now in need of felling. There was also minor damage to Mill Green , Cranmer Road and near One Island Pond.

Galpins Road Gas Main Repairs: The Manager reported that the Gas Board had asked for a licence to sight a depot on the Common. This ran for four weeks. Re-instatement has now taken place and the quality of the re-instatement work is very high.

7. Income and Expenditure (Until end of February 2020)

The Manager took Conservators through the figures. It was noted that the slight variance under expenditure related to the storm damage, but overall the expenditure figures were on target.

Income figures are higher than expected at the start of the financial year: as previously reported the environmental stewardship funding is ending and last year monies were not received. The budget set a base figure of £7,000 but in the event Conservators received two year's funding of £16,000.

The Manager reminded Conservators that when setting Income figures for Facility Fees and Professional fees it is always difficult to anticipate what will be received during the course of a year.

At the conclusion to discussion the Chair noted the effort and work which goes into maintaining earned income and managing the income and expenditure so expertly and he extended his gratitude to the Manager on behalf of Conservators.

8. Friends of Mitcham Common -To report on recent activities and to raise any relevant matters

Mr Kirby came to the table and delivered a report provided by the Membership Secretary Melanie Nunzet. After some sections the Manager/Chair provided a response.

'As most Conservators are also Friends many of you will have seen my recent emails chasing subs. This exercise has provided some interesting feedback from Friends some of which I thought I would share with you.

- 1) *Simply I feel calling myself a 'Friend' of Mitcham Common is a misnomer as I have real issues regarding the number and age of many felled trees. To simply say it is because 100 years ago this land was largely acid grass is a puerile argument, in my view, as 500 years ago I believe it would have been largely woodland, and had a very different geology. If we are Friends do we have an input into the priorities of the developments planned? What can we do about the motor cycles that regularly power over the Common? Why can dog walkers walk up to 12 dogs off lead? I am sorry to burden you with my moans and please don't respond to them, but I do believe there needs to be a debate at some time.*

The Chair said that it was only possible to work with the Common as it is at present, rather than as it might have been in the past. The Manager said that Acid Grassland is a priority habitat in London and a key conservation focus.

- 2) *I have no idea when I am due a renewal, but I would like to stay a friend of such a vitally important group.*
- 3) *I just wanted you to know that although we seem not to make any response to the various emails that come from you, that we do read them and continue to take an interest in the goings-on on Mitcham Common. Well done to all those who litter pick and generally help to look after what my Great Grandfather (George Parker Bidder QC) made sure was kept in a form that can be enjoyed by future generations. Sadly we don't travel past the common very often and just hope that the monument to him at the edge of the common stays in one bit and not too overgrown! Keep up the good work!*

My question to the Conservators is: are the Friends reaching their full potential? At present, all we do is pick up litter and this isn't allowing us to contribute fully.

We have asked about planting in the past and been refused but I am asking this question again. How about banks of primroses in front of the Bidder Memorial or daffodils/mixed wildflowers along some of the verges? Other Friends' groups, for example, Figges Marsh, do a lot of planting and have good numbers of people turning out to help. Our litter picks attract a handful of volunteers and although we enjoy them and feel we are making a difference we would like to do more. Planting projects would encourage more people to become Friends.

The Chair said that he would be very open and delighted to see Friends being able to do more activities and this would be fully supported by Conservators wherever appropriate. It would be important for any planned projects to be clearly documented, planned and funded appropriately, and agreed by Friends as a whole. An approved plan would then need to be submitted to Conservators for appropriate consideration. During subsequent discussion it was noted that a project for path clearance could be a very valuable activity.

The Manager said that he did not wish to be negative and would also fully support a process of Friends proposing planned activities to Conservators. In the past however there had been efforts made to undertake projects such as tree planting on the golf course but ultimately the Friends had to withdraw due to lack of capacity. There would need to be a core group of 6/7 people who were willing to work together in driving through specific projects.

Mitcham Common is under-used and it is not surprising. For example, at our Big Lunch last year a wheelchair user was unable to attend due to the uneven paths. She could see the gazebo from the path but could not join in which was very sad. We know that tarmac is a "No" but could a discreet flat path not be created somewhere near the Ecology Centre so that our next Big Lunch can be all-inclusive?

The Manager said that this was a very reasonable request. Conways are currently using the overspill carpark and when they have finished they will be re-instating the path and there will be oversight to ensure that it is better than at present.

We are planning a walk and picnic on a Saturday or Sunday in June or July which will include a ceremony around the new bench which the Friends have purchased in memory of Janet Morris. To acknowledge Janet's contribution over many years we ask that on this occasion the Conservators waive the fee to the Friends for the use of the Ecology Centre for a couple of hours as a refreshment and wet weather option.

The Manager explained that there are costs associated with using the Ecology Centre and this is what the fee covers. However, in order to enable the Friends to use the Ecology Centre without charge the costs could be funded via the Environmental Education Trust if the walk contains a suitable educational element. The Chair therefore advised the Friends to make an appropriate submission.

It is a sad situation when I have to go out and clear paths before I can lead a walk so that Friends and others on the walk don't complain to me about inaccessibility. It seems that the Conservators do nothing for us. There is never any suggestion of working together and we feel we are only useful to the Conservators when there is a consultation process and our views are needed, for example, the fish de-stocking poll and the new acid grassland project.

We would welcome a much more collaborative approach.

The Manager said that footpaths have been discussed a lot during recent meetings. There has unfortunately been a loss of funding which has meant that it has not been possible to maintain all the paths that were previously in use. Nevertheless there were still a good range of paths available for use across all parts of the Common.

The Manager and Chair said that they would politely disagree with any assertion that the Conservators were unwilling to work collaboratively with the Friends and

they found this statement disappointing. Likewise, Friends have indicated that they wish to be consulted about key issues such as the fish de-stocking (which was an issue originally raised by The Friends) and views are always sought with a genuine respect for the views and input of the Friends.

The Chair re-iterated that the Conservators have respect and gratitude to the Friends for their care of the Common.

Mr Kirby said that on behalf of the Friends he was very grateful to Conservators recognising that being able to attend the Conservators' meetings was a privilege. The Chair thanked Mr Kirby for his comments and work.

9. Annual Programme of Meetings 2019/2020 – Proposed dates

Spring Inspection: Sunday 7th June 2020

June Board Meeting: Wednesday 10th June 2020

Annual Inspection: Sunday 20th September 2020

September Board Meeting: Wednesday 23rd September 2020

December Board Meeting: Wednesday 2nd December 2020

March Board Meeting: Wednesday 10th March 2021

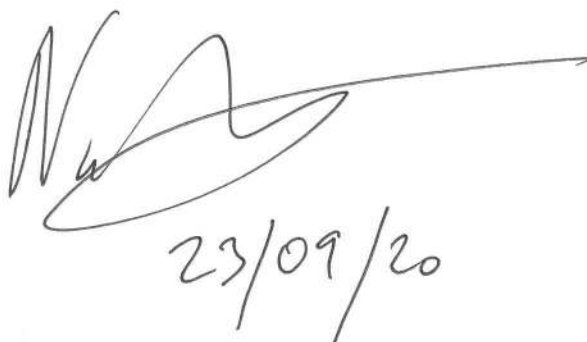
10. Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust

Mr Cheetham said that he remained very sad at the current state of affairs with regard to the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust. At the present time there is a lack of leadership and drive to take forwards the work of the Trust. A meeting is planned for 16th March which Nick Draper will be attending.

11. Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 10th June 2020

12. Any Other Business

None



23/09/20