

Annual Report Year ending 31st August 2008

The Commons Conservators

The Chislehurst and St Paul's Cray Commons Conservators (known locally by their working title: the Trustees of Chislehurst Commons) were set up by the Metropolitan Commons (Chislehurst and St Paul's Cray) Supplemental Act 1888 to protect and maintain the commons. The conservators are now a registered charity and carry out their work with funds granted by the London Borough of Bromley, generous donations from local residents, small annual grants from government-sponsored bodies and occasional grants from other organisations.

Organisation

The trustees of the charity consist of a board that has 16 members.

Mr Andrew Osmond (Chairman)
Mr Colin Yardley (Vice Chairman)
Mr Ray Philo (Treasurer)
Mr Anthony Bompas Q.C.
Mrs Alexandra Burman
Mr Ray Gittins (Resigned 18th March 2008).
Miss Avril Greatrex (Appointed 6th May 2008)
Mrs Elizabeth Greenwood
Mr John Hayhow (Appointed 5th February 2008)
Mr Peter Hedges
Miss Jan Hendey
Mr Roy Hopper
Mr David Howard
Dr Brian Knights
Miss Marion Mason (Resigned 18th October 2007)
Mr John Samuel (Resigned 28th November 2007).
Mr Tony Wells
Mrs Margaret Yardley

Mr Patrick Phillips serves *ex officio* representing the London Borough of Bromley

Staff

The Board employs three members of staff:

Mr John Goff (Clerk to the Board)

Mr Jonathan Harvie (Head Keeper)

Mark Clanfield (Assistant Keeper) from October 07 to July 08.

Board Structure

The Board has a number of committees:

Natural Environment: Responsible for the implementation of the Commons 10-year Management Plan and also recommends major projects to the Board.

Verge: Responsible for liaising with those whose land adjoins the commons, including the London Borough of Bromley in relation to roads and verges, in order to ensure no encroachment occurs.

Fund Raising: Responsible for raising funds in order to augment the income from other sources.

Staff: Responsible for advising the board on all personnel matters.

Financial Report

Total incoming resources for the year were £109,836, a drop of 10% compared to 2007. The previous year was exceptional in that the Chislehurst Society granted the trustees £18,000 to cover the cost of a new tractor. However, in the current year DEFRA made a grant to the trustees of £11,033 to assist in the cost of several projects including the provision of a reed bed at Prickend Pond. (see below).

General donations fell by 18% to £40,697 returning to a similar level as in 2006-7. Bromley Council continued with their valued support of £46,507.

Expenditure rose by 6% in the year to a total of £105,647, giving a surplus of £4,190. The major cost increase was in salaries representing the employment of an assistant keeper. Expenditure on the Management Plan fell by £7,296 in part due to a reduced use of outside contractors made possible by the additional keeper's employment.

The total assets of the charity grew by 4% over the year to £100,865. Of this total £73,285 is in cash to ensure the continuance of the charity's activities even if the current recession has an adverse effect on income.

Plant and Equipment

Some years ago the board employed four full time keepers. When financial constraints caused Bromley Council to substantially reduce their grant the trustees in turn had to cut costs. This resulted in a staged reduction to only a head keeper being employed on the commons. The need to have available sufficient equipment to permit one person to carry out the work previously done by four became clear.

Last year we were very fortunate to be given a grant by the Chislehurst Society to cover the cost of a new truck. This year the trustees decided to replace the ageing tractor with a new one that also has a number of attachments, such as a lifting bucket. As well as removing the substantial costs of maintaining the old tractor, the new one has meant that more work can be carried out without resorting to outside contractors.

Tree Inspections

The trustees are conscious of their responsibilities to provide as safe an environment as possible for the public who walk on the commons. To this end a programme of tree inspection has been set up. The head keeper and some of the trustees have received training and undertake an inspection regime to try and identify trees that might be dangerous. This is an inexact science and therefore care is taken to ensure that as far as reasonably possible, those trees that are adjacent to roads and well frequented paths receive the greatest attention.

Management Plan

Work continued during the year on the implementation of our 10 year (2004-2014) management plan. A key part of this has been the improvement of the various areas of heather and also the control of holly growth.

Reed Beds

The main source of water to the largest pond on the commons, Prickend Pond, is fed by run off from the adjacent roads and footpaths. There is no fresh supply of water from a spring. In January 2008 a major project was undertaken to form a reed bed at the entrance to the pond.

This consisted of considerable work preparing the ground and then laying reeds purchased from a lagoon in Norfolk. Once the bed is established the reeds should filter out many of the contaminants that inevitably come from the roads. They will also help oxygenate the water which in turn will reduce "blooming" in the summer months.

Apart from some initial excavation the work was carried out by our volunteers and keepers.

Chislehurst Festival

In 2009 the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Chislehurst Society takes place. A number of events are being planned with some taking place on the commons. The trustees are delighted that the commons can continue to play a key part in the life of the local community.

The Big Draw

In September 2007 the Big Draw was held again on the commons. Despite disappointing weather there was an excellent turnout and the organisers kindly donated funds collected on the day to the maintenance of the commons.

Fly-Tipping

This year we have continued to suffer from the scourge of fly-tipping. This can range from old bathroom suites to abandoned cars. A particular nuisance of late has been the dumping of car tyres. This has happened on several occasions and has cost the trustees £1,200 in 2008 since specialist disposal contractors have had to be employed to remove them.

Friends of the Commons

The trustees are fortunate to be supported by a growing group of people who contribute financially to the costs of maintaining the commons or who are active in working in one of our regular volunteer groups. Without the support of these members of the local community the charity could not operate. We are most grateful for all they do.

Friends' Reception

As in previous years the trustees held a reception for the Friends of the Commons to thank them for their support and contributions. As always, the refreshments were provided by the trustees personally, at no cost to the charity. Over 100 people present enjoyed an excellent evening.

Newsletter

The trustees aim to publish a newsletter at least once a year to keep our friends updated on current issues. This provides an excellent form of communication and encourages much needed donations as well as general support for our activities.

Web Site

The trustees have operated a web site for a number of years and this has now been improved and updated. It provides a professional overview of why the commons exist, their history, the work of the trustees and other relevant details.

Greetings Cards

The trustees have published a set of greeting cards featuring photographs of the commons for some time. This year a new set was published. These cards are offered for sale by local shops as well as at the Trustees' office and at local events. Their availability both provides income for the charity and also a way to communicate with more local people.

Encroachment

The act of parliament under which the trustees operate requires them to ensure that no encroachment occurs on the commons. From time to time people with boundaries on the commons move fences or widen access ways that result in an encroachment. The verge committee is responsible for resolving any disputes and ensuring that the surface of the commons that may be disturbed to service utilities etc, are returned to their original state after work is completed.

Risk Management

The Board reviews the risks to which the charity is exposed and has systems in place to mitigate them. Regarding financial risks, the board has a policy of having at least three months' expenditure in reserve to meet its obligations in the event of a substantial loss of income.

The Future

Despite the uncertain economic climate the board of trustees continues to be confident about the future of the commons. Many regular users of the commons have remarked that they are looking better than ever and it appears that more people are enjoying them on a frequent basis.

The board's finances are in good shape and allow for the employment of a second keeper and the regular updating of plant and equipment. The support we receive from the Friends of the Commons as well as from other organisations is invaluable and we are most grateful for all their help.