

Annual Report Year ending 31st August 2010

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.

Governing document and objectives

The 1888 Act sets down the responsibilities of the Board of Conservators. These responsibilities are translated into a working strategy by the 10-year Management Plan, which currently runs from 2004 to 2014.

Location

The Trustees operate from leasehold premises situated at:

The Old Fire Station
Hawkwood Lane
Chislehurst
BR7 5PW

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 David Calver
Mr Ray Gittins
Miss Avril Greatrex
Mrs Elizabeth Greenwood
Mr John Hayhow
Mr Peter Hedges
Mr Roy Hopper
Mr David Howard
Dr Brian Knights

Mr Tom Murray
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)
Mr Peter Edwards (Assistant Keeper)

Board Structure and decision-making

The Board, which meets seven times a year, has a number of committees:

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

Verge: Responsible for liaising with public utilities and 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. Professional fund raisers are not employed.

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

These committees are appointed by the board and report to it. Reports are also received from the clerk and the head keeper. Responsibility for day-to-day management resides with the chairman and vice-chairman of the board, the treasurer, the clerk and head keeper.

Public Benefit Statement

The main aim of the charity is to protect and maintain the commons for public use. All the resources of the charity are used to satisfy these aims. The Commons are open to all members of the public without charge and provide much needed open space for recreation and leisure. The Commons are situated in a predominately suburban setting and are therefore an important amenity for local residents.

If the charity did not exist, the Commons would quickly become unusable in that they would be subject to fly tipping and litter and would overgrow rapidly. There is also strong evidence that encroachment from some adjoining properties would take place with the permanent loss of land.

The Trustees are satisfied that the work of the charity meets the requirements of current legislation relating to public benefit.

Trustees

Trustees are appointed to the board for a period of three years and may be appointed for subsequent three-year periods. Trustees are appointed by the London Borough of Bromley after consultation with local organisations and the Board about skill requirements. The Lord of the Manor of Scadbury, who holds the freehold of the Commons, appoints one trustee. Trustee induction is provided. All trustees are volunteers and receive no emoluments.

Financial Report

Total incoming resources for the year were £100,284, the same level as last year. Donations to the appeal fund increased by 12% to £44,638 which largely replaced the grant received last year from Natural England. The London Borough of Bromley continued their generous support with a grant of £47,310 but have informed us that the current cutbacks in government expenditure will result in our grant being reduced in future years. 2010/11 is the last year of our current 5 year agreement and the board have agreed to accept a reduction of £11,000 in the grant from this year since the council are prepared to fund us at this level for the next 5 years. Continuity of funding is vital to enable the board to plan expenditure and also demonstrate to potential donors that their gift will not simply encourage a further reduction in our grant.

Expenditure rose by 5% in the year to a total of £115,086 giving a deficit of £15,863. Salaries and National Insurance rose by 12%, partly as a result of employing our Assistant Keeper for his first full year. General maintenance costs went up by £5,882. This included part of the costs of the Rush Pond borehole, which will be recovered in next year's accounts and also part of the costs of the new doors to the Old Fire Station.

The total assets of the charity fell by 17% over the year to £74,809. Much of this reduction was due to the depreciation of vehicles, plant and equipment. There were no new plant purchases during the year and a depreciation charge of £9,162 was taken. Our cash balances fell by £6,121 to £66,598.

With the reduction in grant from the Borough of Bromley taking place from April 2011 it will be necessary to try and raise additional funds from the local community. The last appeal took place in 2007 And a new appeal will be launched in the spring of 2011.

Bankers

Barclays Bank PLC
7 High Street
Chislehurst
BR7 5AB

Plant and Equipment

Due to the replacement in recent years of both our truck and tractor there was no need for any equipment purchase during the current year.

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 continues. 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, well frequented paths and adjacent private properties receive the greatest attention.

Rush Pond

Due to its relatively high situation on the commons, Rush Pond frequently loses most of its water through evaporation during the summer months. In recent summers, where there has been less rainfall than the long term average, the situation has become more marked.

The pond is not natural and is the result of gravel extraction during the 19th century. Various potential solutions to this problem have been examined and it was decided that a borehole and pump to bring water to the surface would be the best arrangement. The board is extremely grateful to the Chislehurst Society for agreeing to fund the cost of these works to the tune of about £10,000. The borehole was excavated during the year and the pump has now been fitted and water is being successfully extracted.

Chislehurst Chase

Following on from last year's successful event, the 2010 Chislehurst Chase took place in September. A 10km race for adults was organised to run through St Paul's Cray Common and round Scadbury Park whilst a Fun Run was held for children. Our MP, Bob Neil, started the race and awarded the prizes. There was an excellent turn out of over 300 runners and the all costs were more than covered by entry fees.

It is clear that these two events are popular with local residents and it is pleasing to see the commons used in this way. The board plan to repeat the Chislehurst Chase again in 2011.

Fire Station Doors

The charity rents the Old Fire Station in Hawkwood Lane from the London Borough of Bromley. The doors, which date back 120 years, have been

patched up over a long period and needed replacing. Due to being a listed building in the conservation area, the new doors must be of a similar style and quality to those being replaced. Specially made doors and hinges were ordered during the year and with the help of some generous donations, the new doors have now been fitted.

The Big Draw

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in September the Big Draw was once again held on the commons. This year the theme was "Artists in Common" and there were gazebos set up across the village green and cockpit area each representing a famous artist. This enabled the many children and families present to learn more about particular artists and to draw, paint or sculpt.

Over 1300 people took part and it was most satisfying to see such intense activity and enjoyment taking place

Litter and Fly-Tipping

No annual report of our charity could pass without mentioning the scourge of litter and fly tipping on the Commons. Bromley Council assist us in the removal of major items such as burnt out cars but the majority of the work in keeping the commons tidy is down to our keepers and volunteers. It is very frustrating that so much of our resources has to be given over to this task but we fear that it is a direct consequence of being in a relatively built up area. We continue to hope that future generations are persuaded that litter is an evil that should not be tolerated. We are most grateful to those who assist in litter clearance.

Friends of the Commons

The trustees are fortunate to be supported by a growing group of people, currently numbering nearly 500, 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 have about 20 volunteers who regularly carry out maintenance tasks on the Commons under the supervision of the Head Keeper. Their work roughly equates to us employing a third full time keeper.

Friends' Reception

As in previous years the trustees held a reception for the Friends of the Commons in St Nicholas Church Hall 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.

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. Our staff and volunteers are informed of the risk assessments which have been conducted for the various tasks they undertake. They are not allowed to use any machinery for which they have not been properly trained.

The Board has employer's liability and public liability insurance and trustees' indemnity insurance. The principal risk factors outside the Board's control are accidents to members of the public arising from falling trees or branches and trips due to exposed tree roots. We endeavour to minimise these risks by means of our tree inspection and path improvement programmes.

The Future

Properly maintaining the commons and ensuring no encroachment continues to be a vital task in keeping Chislehurst a very special place in which to live. A decade ago we enjoyed an annual grant from the Borough of Bromley of £65,000. This was reduced in a round of cost cutting to our current grant of £41,000. To compensate for this cut a major fund raising campaign was undertaken which has allowed the board to continue its work and employ a much-needed second keeper.

The current deficit reduction plan has meant a further cut to £31,000. This sum has been guaranteed for the next five years. It is clear that the charity will need to become even more reliant on raising its own funds from local residents in the future but we continue to be optimistic that this can be achieved and that this important local asset can be preserved for future generations.