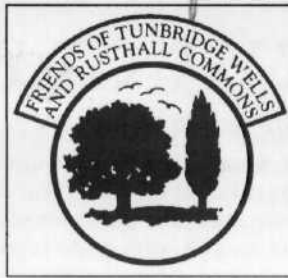


COMMON



GROUND

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS
AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Issue 19, Spring 1999

OUR CHANGING WORLD

Chairman's Report by David Wakefield

Three very important developments now loom on our horizon

1 The Council's proposed enhancements to the Tunbridge Wells Common and its surrounding areas

2 2000+ Local Plan Review

3 The government's traffic strategy 'Breaking the Logjam'

We have set out elsewhere in Common Ground the details of 'Proposed Enhancements to the Tunbridge Wells Common' in the shape of a summary of the proposals being made, and in each case a possible response from the Friends. Members might like to consider whether they wish to join in the debate. They can best do this by reading the document itself (I hold a copy) and then making a written submission through myself to the Council.

The update of the local plan '2000+ Local Plan Review' is also terribly important to us, residents in the Town, since for the first time we have to accept our portion of the burden of accommodating the 4.5 million new homes which planners say have to be created if we are to cater for:

- young people who wish to leave home much earlier than heretofore
- divorced couples who wish to live on their own now that they have separated from their partners
- older people, who are now expected to live much longer and so will have to be catered for (my nightly prayer is that I shall be spared too long a life)

It is very hard to get a figure from the Council of the actual number of new units which Tunbridge Wells will have to plan for (to some extent it depends on the success of other authorities passing on this poisoned chalice down the line), but it appears to be in the region of 2,700 units, though this, I hasten to add, is not a figure that can be relied upon.

Every effort is being made to put the new developments on 'brownfield' sites, such as the old goods yard behind Upper Grosvenor Road and possibly on the site of the Kent & Sussex Hospital (strongly rumoured to move from the town to a new site), but some

'greenfield' land will have to be sacrificed around the edges of the town if we are to allow for these new homes.

What does this mean for the Commons?

Every new household will mean at least one more car, possibly two more cars and therefore the environment must suffer and we will see the effects on the Common.

The actual document itself '2000+ Local Plan' is too long to summarise here in Common Ground, but I hold a copy and you are welcome to borrow it, if you so wish.

Finally, the government's long-awaited transport strategy document has at last appeared and has been generally welcomed by those groups who up to now have been very critical. I refer to Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. The new approach starts with the premise that transport strategy is for all of us in all our methods of getting about, and therefore begins with the pedestrian, then cyclists, then public transport and then the car driver (in that order!). It

seems to say that traffic reduction is much more important than traffic management, and it sets out ways in which traffic reduction can be brought about in our town.

In essence, councils like our own are being asked to look at the possibility that more journeys might be made by public transport and fewer by car, through making the former easier (more frequent and cheaper public transport) and the latter less attractive (through charging for entry into towns and charging for company car parking spaces in the centre of towns).

We are at the start of a long process of consultation over what is acceptable to us, the dwellers in this town.

I hold a copy of the Department of the Environment's 'Breaking the Logjam', which you are welcome to borrow and comment upon. It is difficult to get dialogue with our members, and without dialogue, I cannot be sure that what your committee and I feel are your views, really are your views.

I think that we all agree these are momentous decisions which we are being called upon to make. If we wish to influence matters, we must speak clearly and loudly into the ears of the decision-makers.

Are you comfortable in your own mind that your views are being heard?

To end on a positive note: I am far happier now that a more rational attitude prevails in the Town Hall. Our views as citizens are being sought and are being listened to. Changes are only being made where it is quite clear that benefits will result. Past mistakes are being cleared away; not all at once, since there is some loss of face involved, especially at County Hall, but things are slowly getting better.

Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on

Wednesday 17 March 1999

in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall. 1930hrs for 2000hrs.

Refreshments will consist of hot soup and spiced wine.

Warden's Report

Pros and cons of a wet season *by Steve Budden*

The year turns once again and already the evenings are starting to lengthen although, of course, there may still be a sting in winter's tail (if you'll excuse the pun). The wet, mild weather has caused difficulties in getting on with our work programme but has of course been good news for many of the creatures that stay on and share our winter with us. The main beneficiaries have been the frogs and newts

frogs and newts benefit

who have two new breeding sites, one on Rusthall common and one on Tunbridge Wells'. The Rusthall site is at the marlpits where the smaller pond has been completely re-lined with clay and the same treatment has been carried out at Bracken Cottage on Tunbridge Wells'; both of these are now full. Hopefully both these ponds can settle down and become as productive sites for wildlife as the others on the Commons are.

The slopes above Happy Valley on the Beacon Hotel side have been re-coppiced to improve the view and enhance the scrubby habitat developing there. Across the main road on the path between Rusthall Elms and the High Street, sycamore scrub which was taking over the area and is of comparatively little benefit to wildlife, has been taken out and chipped onto the path. The woodland between the Bumps and the Langton Road has been supplemented with the planting of 150 trees (cherry, rowan and hawthorn) to reduce traffic noise and improve the habitat. The planting was carried out by the volunteers on a rather soggy Sunday in early January. Still to come on Rusthall Common this winter will be the coppicing or removal of many of the leaning and dangerous trees adjacent to Rusthall Road.

On Tunbridge Wells Common, the removal of sycamore scrub has also been carried out around the whole length of the Racecourse and the drainage ditches have been cleaned out. The south side of the Terrace Walk has been cleared. This has allowed more light onto the patch to the benefit of the butterflies and generally created a more diverse habitat.

On a more mundane note, the wider path acts as a more efficient firebreak. The volunteers have been at work on Tunbridge Wells Common as well, with gorse coppiced and scrub removed from the grassland near Highbury and a rather backbreaking birch pulling session undertaken on the heathland restoration area off the racecourse. They have also carried out further coppicing of gorse near the Royal Victoria Grove and have enlarged the original heather stand in the same area by stripping some of the grass around the stand and spreading seeds from the existing plants.

The day to day life of the Common goes on with its usual disasters and triumphs. We still cannot convince some members of TWBC Highways Department that the Common is not simply a convenient place for them to store materials, as anyone walking near Thackeray's recently will have noticed. On the other hand, the difference that the introduction of dog bag dispensers has made around the area of Fir Tree car park has been very pleasing. The problem of litter has been

litter problem reduced

much reduced over the last few years, mostly by the stalwart efforts of Doug, our litter picker. On the other hand, the problem of mindless graffiti on bins, seats, rocks and even trees still continues. But then I don't suppose we will ever solve all of these problems, and if against all odds we did ever solve them, I am quite sure that a new set would rise to take their place.

Advance information of next winter's volunteer dates:

Sunday September 5th
Sunday October 3rd
Sunday November 7th
Sunday December 5th
Sunday January 2nd
Sunday February 6th
Sunday March 5th

Presenter visits Bedgebury



Gardening expert Alan Titchmarsh braved the rain to lead 100 people on a special tour of the Bedgebury national Pinetum recently.

The green-fingered television presenter first visited Bedgebury as a student and now acts as one of the centre's advisors.

His visit celebrates a year in which the Forestry Commission's collection of rare conifers becomes the largest of its kind in the world. Mr Titchmarsh said: "This spring the Commission's collection of cone-bearing plants will reach 2,000 different varieties. People will find some wonderful ideas here for every garden in the land. Conifers are so much more than people think in shape, form and colour. They can give structure and interest all year round."

Bedgebury is used as a resource by scientists from around the world looking for anything from new perfumes to new medicines. The collection has made a remarkable recovery since it was devastated by storms in 1990.

The Pinetum is home to five national plant collections of juniper, yew, red cedars, Leyland cypress and Lawson cypress varieties. Many of the trees are endangered or extinct in their natural habitats and one day it is hoped to return some species to the wild.

Mr Titchmarsh said: "At Bedgebury there are junipers and yews which would be excellent additions to any garden. There are also plants and trees from far-flung places which are wonderful to just come and look at. And while the Commission keeps building and improving its collection, we gardeners will always have an Aladdin's cave of extraordinary plants waiting for us in Kent."



GUIDED WALK

with Dr Ian Beavis on Saturday
19th June 1999

Morning: 10.30am
from Thackeray's House

Afternoon: 2.00pm
from Toad Rock

Litter Pick

This year the litter pick will be held on

18th April

Start time 10.00 am.

at Fir Tree car park as usual
or the Brahm's Pub (for those who want
to concentrate on the Rusthall end of
the Common).

ENHANCEMENTS TO THE COMMONS

The draft document sets out five key issues regarding the Commons, and makes proposals for each of these. They are set out below, and our possible response is also given

Signage

PROPOSAL -removal of unnecessary signs on Commons roads.

RESPONSE -we welcome the removal of any signs. If Major York's Road was restricted to 30mph (as we have advocated) a lot of the signs there could go.

Pedestrian Access

PROPOSAL -two/three pedestrian crossings from the Town onto the Common

RESPONSE -we welcome all proposals for making the Commons more accessible. We think that it is essential that more and safer crossings should be created in order that pedestrians are able to use the Common, whether they be passing through on their journey to the rail station, or whether they are using the Commons for recreation.

Traffic Management

PROPOSAL -creating of a mini-roundabout at the top of Major York's Road: closure of Free Tree Road at one end.

RESPONSE -we have some doubts about this, since the effects on traffic on neighbouring roads do not appear to have been studied. Also, whilst we are broadly in favour of closure of part of Fir Tree Road, once again the end to be closed has still to be decided upon, and also how best to make this work.

Cycle Facilities

PROPOSAL -that a cycle lane should be placed on the uphill side of Major York's Road, parking of cars being banned. Also, two cycle routes (Route 18 out to Groombridge and thence on to Gatwick, and Route 21 from the Commons to the Pantiles, and thence to Pembury Road) would be created. Lastly, car parking on Castle Road/Mount Edgcombe Road would be banned and cycle ways introduced in their place.

RESPONSE -we broadly welcome all enhancements to the use of cycles on Commons roads, but are concerned about some aspects of the proposals. These are to do with the safety of cyclists on Major York's Road, unless some provision is made to separate them from the cars which will continue to use the road, now at much higher speed with the removal of parking.

We would also like to be assured that only cyclists can have access to Routes 18 and 21 - we are worried that motorcycles could follow. We welcome the removal of parked cars on all Commons roads.

Car Parks

PROPOSAL -the introduction of schemes to make parking easier for short term parkers, and more difficult for long term parkers.

RESPONSE -we accept that there is a major problem at the Pantiles end of the Common. The competition for spaces between the long term parkers (business users and commuters) and short-term parkers (shoppers/visitors to the town/dog walkers) could be solved by short term parking measures. Or even no parking before 9.00am? We would also accept a truly radical solution, such as an underground car park, if this were combined with the removal of carparking from Commons roads and speed limits across the Common.

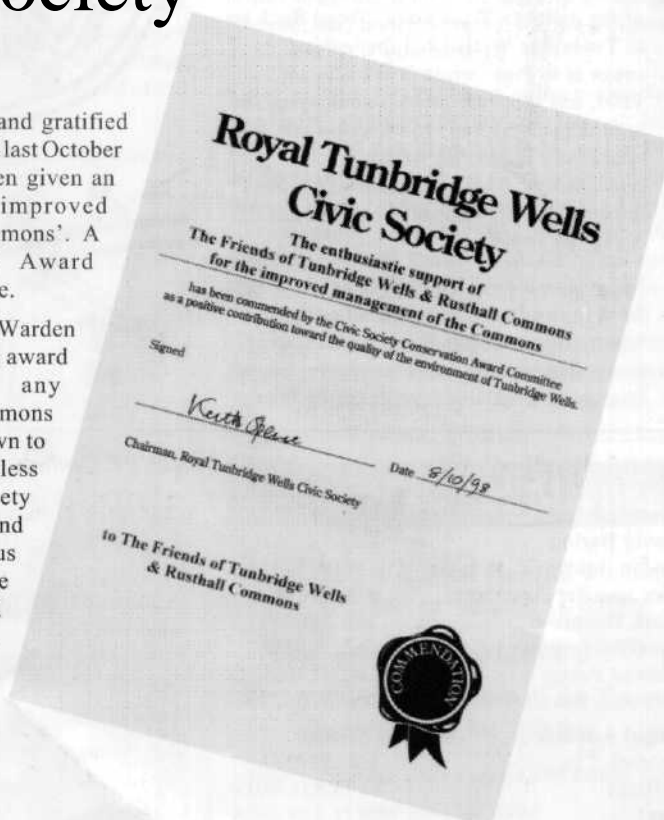
Conclusion

The full document is held by the Chairman and most committee members. If you want to read it, then ask to see a copy.

Civic Society Award

We were surprised and gratified to be suddenly told last October that the Friends had been given an award for 'the improved management of the Commons'. A reproduction of the Award Certificate is shown here.

At the same meeting, the Warden also received a similar award and, in fairness, any improvement to the Commons must be very largely down to him. We are nevertheless grateful to the Civic Society for honouring us thus, and hope that this will spur us on to greater efforts in the future. What I have in mind is a national award, since we are soon to be a centre of national scientific interest.



ANNUAL DINNER 22 January

Once again, the annual dinner was a great success, seventy members sitting down to a very good meal. I must say, each year we seem to get an improved meal, this year's meal starting with a salmon mousse, followed by beef on a bed of pate, and finished off by an elaborate chocolate mousse.

Our speaker was Colin Morgan of the Pinetum, Bedgebury, who had a lot to say about native trees and also about some rare specimens in the backwoods of Tasmania. He was lucky enough to be granted a Churchill Fellowship to visit that island, where are to be found some of the oldest and rarest trees in existence.

Try and get to next year's dinner if you haven't been before. The food is good, the setting lovely and we have had some excellent speakers these last few years and hope to continue the tradition in the coming year.

ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE IS AN INTERESTING DESCRIPTION OF A VISIT TO BEDGEBURY BY ALAN TITCHMARSH IN THE COMPANY OF THE CURATOR OF THE PINETUM, COLIN MORGAN



Diversions were such a success that we have decided to hold them again in 1999, changing the title to Frolics (in order to avoid any misunderstanding about 17th July 1999 road closures) and to alter the format very slightly, in that we are going to concentrate a bit more on children.

The proposed programme will give some idea of the lines we are thinking along.

- 2.00pm Stoolball matches start (in costume)
- 2.00pm 18th Century Bat & Trap
- 3.00pm Ass Races
- 3.30pm Jingling Matches
- 4.00-5.30-m Boys and Girls Races
- 4.30pm Terrier Races
- 5.00pm Sack Races
- 5.30pm Wheelbarrow Races
- 6.30pm Tug-of-War

We will have a marquee like last time, and will serve drinks, ice creams and wholesome food.

We hope to have some interesting animals present, besides the horses which came the last time.

We will finish with our Society's Annual Tea Party. Help is wanted from members.

Come in 18th century costume and win a prize. Beau Nash? Prinny? sailor? soldier? and for our women members, dairymaid?

We need help from members to:

- man the gate
- sell programmes & raffle tickets
- steward events
- make the tea

All volunteers happily received by the Chairman on Tunbridge Wells 523983

A WALK ON RUSTHALL COMMON

WALK D1

Approximate length of walk - 3/4 mile.
Allow about 30 minutes.

1 This walk begins at the gates of St Paul's Church, Rusthall. The church was built in 1850 from local sandstone and, until the middle of the 20th century when residential development had taken place near the church and the trees of the Common were permitted to grow unchecked by grazing sheep and cattle, stood as a landmark for many miles about.

2 Take the pavement which runs from the gates past the war memorial on your right and soon bear right to the entrance to Nevill Park. Continue along keeping the white gates and fence on your right, to where the asphalt path meets the Langton Road, which we cross and take the path right to the Rusthall Road. Cross and follow the pavement left. At a point between the 3rd and 4th lampposts, a rough path drops down right and winds between rocks covered with lichens, moss and ivy to the Old Bull's Hollow quarry.

The combination of impressive rock faces trees and undergrowth was particularly appealing to the Victorians who found it 'romantic and awe-inspiring'. They would look at the rock formations and find any number of likenesses to people, animals and things, and many rocks at Rusthall are known to this day as the Parson's Nose, Lion Rock, the Elephant and the like even though the similarity may have been somewhat fanciful in the first place and

not much improved by a century and a half of erosion.

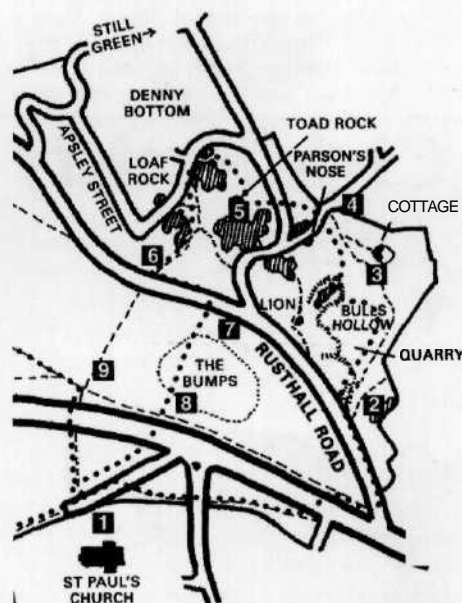
- 3** The path when it finds the rough floor of the quarry wanders out to the left to a point close to a rocky headland where it swings right. Almost at once you meet the driveway to a cottage which sits to your right. Take the drive as it rises left to a road signed Rusthall Park. The group of rocks on your left through which the road was cut are the Parson's Nose rocks. Victorian photographs show a credible silhouette but today the likeness can just about be seen from the other side of the rocks.

Proceed straight across the road beside a large stone and brick garage and as the sandy track emerges above a clearing drift off the path to a seat looking across Harmony Street which runs through this hollow.

- 5** Facing you is one of the best known sights of the district - Toad Rock. "Toad Rock is to Tunbridge Wells what the leaning tower is to Pisa" wrote E V Lucas in 1904, and this time there is no denying the considerable likeness to its namesake. It is apparently an entirely natural phenomenon. This area has recently been designated a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Make your way to the road which runs in front of the Toad Rock Retreat public house. This is Upper Street which curves away up round the rocks and peters away to a sandy track which we leave by taking

- the asphalt path left. This rises through the rocks until it meets the Rusthall Road. Alternatively, continue round and pick up the path at the Rusthall Road. The way in which houses have fitted in the valleys of the rocks have always been a picturesque feature of this part of Rusthall. At Rusthall Road ignore the path directly opposite but turn left and at a point just before the entrance to Harmony Street cross Rusthall Road to a track which leads through the undergrowth to a clearing (much used for ad hoc games of football). The path cuts across the clearing to where a short stretch through trees brings you to Langton Road again. Cross a little to your left and you are on the drive up to Rusthall Church where we began.



Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons - Membership of Committee 1998/9

Chairman	David Wakefield Tel: 523983	Members	David Barton Tel: 522318	Co-Opted Member	Andrew Weaver (for Juniors)
Vice-Chairman	Peter Freeman Tel: 524110 Fax: 549208	Dr Ian Beavis Tel: 523007	Mrs Jennifer Blackburn Tel: 546520	Receiving Papers and Minutes	Representative of the Freehold Tenants
Hon Treasurer	Lt Cdr G V Lawson Tel: 524019	Mark Dennison Tel: 528199	Dan Goddard Tel: 525042	Nick Hill Tel: 520599	Peter D Hoole Tel: 01580 752193
Secretary	Mrs Sylvia Luckhurst c/o TWBC Tel: 526121 ext 3251	Conrad Payne Tel: 513626	Mrs Ann Revell Tel: 520475	Gerald L Plastow Tel: 530487	Attends all meetings, if possible
		Legal Advisor	Michael Stewart Tel: 540673	The Warden - Steve Budden c/o TWBC Tel: 526121 ext 3250	
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