



Registered Charity No. 1013975

# COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTER

The Society founded for '... the conservation, maintenance, preservation and peaceful enjoyment for the benefit of the public of the Commons by such means as the Society in consultation with the Conservators for the Commons thinks fit'.

Issue 31. Summer 2003

## Diary of Forthcoming Events

### Tea Party Outing

Sunday 13th July

Finchcocks (see separate panel)

### Walks

Saturday 9th August

with Dr. Ian Beavis.

Meet 10.30 am at Thackerays House

### Fungus Foray

Saturday 11th October

led by Keith Palmer.

Meet 2.00 pm at Fir Tree Road Car Park.

### Autumn Litter Pick

Saturday 27th September

Meet 10.00 am at Fir Tree Road Car Park or at Common View, Rusthall.

### Work Parties

Saturday 6th September

Saturday 4th October

Saturday 1st November

Saturday 6th December

Saturday 3rd January

Saturday 7th February

Saturday 6th March

Meet 10.00 am at Fir Tree Road Car Park.

### Spring Litter Pick

Saturday 3rd April

Meet 10.00 am at Fir Tree Road Car Park or at Common View, Rusthall.

## A View from the Top

It was very encouraging to see some 12% of our members in the Town Hall for our AGM in March. Yet again our thanks are due to the Warden, Steve Budden, for his admirable talk: this year his review covered not only the past year but the Management Plan prepared for the Conservators and approved by them in 1992. The Conservators are currently giving consideration to asking the Kent Trust for National Conservation for an updated plan and for their observations on the work carried out over the last ten years.

The Litter Pick, on Saturday 5th April, was also well supported and a particularly effective 'Spring Clean' was carried out and uncovered several camp sites, three of them occupied. These were subsequently removed together with a large amount of rubbish by a contractor employed by the Conservators. Steve Budden has agreed to try to open up the area concerned in the Autumn in an effort to deter any further vagrants using the area.

Our first Interpretation Panels have been very well received by members and visitors to our commons and aroused a lot of interest. A further panel has been produced by English Name, soon to be erected adjacent to Toad Rock, emphasising the importance of this site of Special Scientific Interest.

I wish to draw attention to the events, particularly the Friends Tea Party proposed for Sunday, 1st July. By the time this newsletter is distributed time will be short because of the need to confirm the numbers to Finchcocks. Also another

Fungus Foray is to be held on Saturday 11th October following the interest shown last year (see the diary of Forthcoming Events).

The March edition of the Borough News contained a brief comment about the new roundabout to be constructed at the top of Major Yorks Road. Funding for this has apparently been made available this year, some seven years or so after it was first mooted! During the intervening years we, the Friends, understand that an agreement was reached between the Highways Authority and the Conservators whereby parts of both Fir Tree Road and Bishops Down Road were to be closed and returned to Common Land in compensation for the ground lost to the construction of the roundabout.

There can be no dispute about the need to improve the junction of Major Yorks Road with the Langton Road and Bishop's Down which has been a notorious black-spot for years. However, it is a matter of concern to us that, upon seeking details, no formal form of agreement was ever exchanged between the Highways Authority and either the Manor or the Conservators. As this newsletter goes to press there are still many issues to be resolved so far as we are concerned: these are being pursued by us with Kent Highways, the local Highways Agency and the Conservators. We understand a report on the Public Consultation is to be considered by the Joint Transportation Board in Tunbridge Wells on 30th June.

I deem it important to detail below how we stand on

this matter and seek any observations you wish to make be directed to Jonathan Baker via our Secretary, Sylvia Luckhurst through the Town Hall.

In my Annual Report reference was made to the planning application from Orange to erect a mast adjacent to Spa Valley Railway, Eridge Road. The Borough Council granted permission (for a 25m monopole mast, cylindrical headframe, 3 polar antennas and 4 transmission dishes plus the associated equipment cabinets) on 18th May. We did succeed in gaining some protection for screening trees and to keep the railway bed free from obstruction.

## Tea Party Outing

proposed for

Sunday,

13th July 2003

at Finchcocks,  
Goudhurst

1500hrs ~ Welcome talk followed by tea at £6 to include Garden ticket.

House visit and music available for £4 extra.

Numbers are limited. Please contact Sylvia Luckhurst indicating transport requirements.

# KENT HIGHWAYS: Proposed Roundabout for Major Yorks Road

1. Advanced copies of the drawing showing the 'indicative' layout and explanatory notes came to us secondhand on 5th April. The covering letter referred to a copy letter "that is shortly to be sent to local residents and all other parties who may have an interest in the proposed scheme". This we did not receive. Extracts are copied herewith:
    - 2.1 - Request to be included in the consultation process.
      - Importance of site emphasised: our Common designated SNCI, site within a Conservation Area and is a significant 'Gateway' to the town.
      - Our concerns about erosion of the Common by traffic.
      - the lack of adequate pedestrian crossing facilities between the Commons and residential/business areas.
    - 2.2 The drawing does not appear to meet the Agreement which we understand exists between the Authority and the Conservators. Confirmation of the Authorities interpretation of the agreement requested. Though the drawing contains no measurements it appears to absorb more of the Common than originally intended.
  - 2.3 Safe pedestrian crossings essential over Langton Road at the existing refuge and over Major Yorks Road and Bishop's down adjacent to the roundabout and across Mount Ephraim at point 'B' on the drawing.
  - 2.4 The 30 mph speed restrictions should be reimposed on the roads crossing the Commons.
  - 2.5 The significant erosion of the Commons has occurred along the full length of Bishop's Down Road and the project should include reinstatement of the eroded areas, with kerbing if necessary and yellow lining to stop parking.
  - 2.6 Any advance notice on the A264 relating to Fir Tree Road car park would be erroneous because it is solely for Linden Park CC and short term visitors to the Commons.
  - 2.7 'Earth mounding' would not meet the requirement to reinstate the road areas to be closed to Common land.
  - 2.8 Access for cyclists to cross the reinstated closed length of Fir Tree Road would be in direct conflict to the Bye-Laws.
  3. Kent Highways letter (30th April) advised they "will write shortly when this matter has been fully investigated".
  4. Further Considerations: Consultations with local residents in the area, and verbally with Kent Highways and the Warden have raised other factors:
    - 4.1 If the west end of Bishop's Down Road is to be closed, the junction at the east end will require modification, especially the corner between Bishop's Down and Bishop's Down Road. This in itself might not be a significant loss to the Common since it is already badly eroded as a result of service vehicles turning to serve both the Spa Hotel and local residences. However, it would undoubtedly set an unfortunate precedent. Even if this junction were to be modified egress from Bishop's Down Road would not be easy because of the relatively poor visibility to the right. Since all the traffic from the Spa Hotel and from Hurstwood Lane and beyond would have to use this junction it would probably also become a black spot. Moreover, Highways already wish to take some Common Land in Rusthall to allow a traffic lane for vehicles turning right from Langton Road into the Coach Road. Permission might be sought for another mini-roundabout taking more of the common. Either of these alternatives would obstruct the possibility of the pedestrian crossing at this point so urgently needed.
- On 1st July your Committee unanimously agreed to oppose the current proposals until such times as the Highways Authority agree to close the north end of Bishop's Down Road and construct a 4-way roundabout at the junction with Major Yorks Road.
- Only two comments of adverse nature have been expressed to us about this idea:
- (i) currently, during term-time, school traffic tends to use Bishop's Down Road, Hurstwood Lane and Bishop's Down Park Road East as a 'rat run': it is felt the closure proposed would divert traffic along Mount Ephraim.
  - (ii) the aversion Highways have to making mini-roundabouts four-way.
- In fact the Bishop's Down Park Road Company has now submitted new proposals to have the road blocked once Highways agree objection (i) is countered. With regard to (ii) we have to argue the logic of our case.
5. Kent Highways were chased for response (8th May) and agreed to retort. Chase again (9th June) the reply was we must await their report of the Public Consultation.
  6. Recent discussions with head officers at Kent Highways and the local Agency indicate that there is considerable opposition to the two proposals as they stand. How much of this is based solely on maintaining the sanctity of Common ground or some of

# Minutes of the 12th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

**H**eld at the Town hall,  
Royal Tunbridge Wells  
on 26th March 2003

There had been no major grants this year but expenditure had been much as usual. As a result the Treasurer reported that the Society had a surplus of £3,695.00 of which £2,000.00 was earmarked for the Interpretation Panels which had only recently been erected. The year ended with a total fund value of £11,206.00 and the Society is flourishing financially. The accounts had been submitted to and approved by the Committee and the Treasurer requested formal approval by the meeting.

The Treasurer asked Friends to complete the Gift Aid forms in order that the Society may benefit.

The Chairman expressed his gratitude to Lt Cdr Lawson for acting not only as treasurer but also as Membership Secretary.

## 4. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE

The Chairman reported that no new nominations for the Committee has been received.

(a) Officers - the Chairman reported that the Officers were all prepared to stand again and the

- Chairman  
- Mr Rhys Revell  
Deputy Chairman  
- Mrs Jennifer Blackburn  
Treasurer  
- Lt Cdr G. Lawson  
Secretary  
- Mrs Sylvia Luckhurst

were duly re-elected

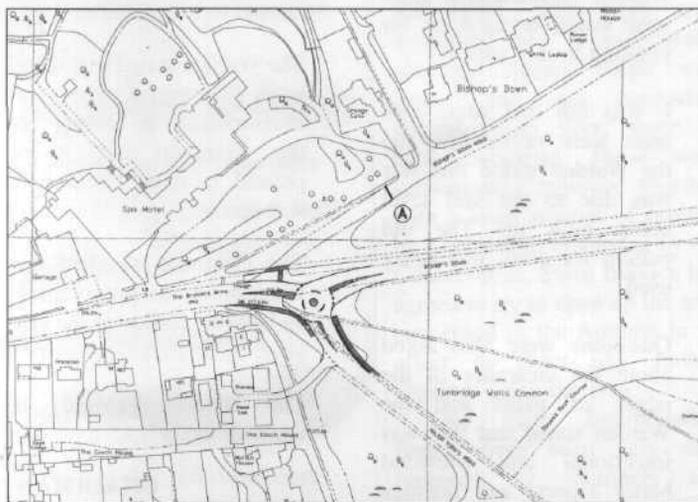


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### Notes

1. All approaches to mini-roundabout to be subject to a 30mph speed limit.
2. Earthworks not shown.
3. Bishops Down Road to be closed at Point A, 8m beyond the access to the Spa Hotel, subject to agreement with the Statutory Undertakers regarding access to their existing plant and apparatus.
4. Fir Tree Road to be closed, by earth mounding, at Point B. Advance warning signs to be provided on A264 advising no access to car park except from Major Yorks Road.
5. Fir Tree Road to be closed, by earth mounding, at Point C, 8m north of access road to car park. "No Through Road" signing to be provided at Fir Tree Road/Major Yorks Road junction.
6. Earth mound closures, at Points B and C, to allow a gap of 1.2m for pedestrians and cyclists to use Fir Tree Road.



the factors we have set out cannot be identified until the Consultation report is made available from the Town Hall on the 25th June with the Agenda for the Joint Transportation Board meeting on the 30th June. Jonathan Baker will be representing the Society at this meeting and at the Conservators meeting on the 26th June.

We are advised by Highways that a 4-way mini-roundabout is unlikely to gain approval on safety grounds but that alternative solutions can be considered, such as traffic lights.

7. It is a matter of regret that the Society was not invited to participate officially in the Consultation process.

1. After refreshments had been served in the Committee Room the Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming approximately 40 members of the Friends. Apologies for absence had been received from Dan Goddard, Conrad Payne, Patrick Shovelton, Frances Hunter, Sheila Syder and Jonathan Balcon.

Minutes of the 11th Annual General Meeting held on 27th March 2002 were available for inspection and it was proposed that these Minutes should be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**AGREED**

## 2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman reminded members that his report had been circulated to all members in the Common Ground Newsletter (Issue 30).

## 3. PRESENTATION OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

The Treasurer reported that accounts had been sent to all members in advance of the Annual General Meeting. He started that the distribution was, as usual, carried out by our team of 14 volunteers so only postage costs involved were for those members who lived outside Royal Tunbridge Wells.

The accounts had been examined and agreed by Roger Joye, a Chartered Accountant and Senior Partner of Creaseys Chartered Accountants of Tunbridge Wells. Mr Joye acts in an honorary capacity and we are particularly grateful for his gift of valued time and expertise.

Minutes of the  
12th Annual General Meeting  
of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells  
and Rusthall Commons

(b) Committee Members

Pat Maxwell and Jonathan Balcon were nominated as Committee Members.

Proposed by Mr Rhys Revell and seconded by Peter Freeman.

5. ANNUAL DINNER

The Chairman reported that he had arranged for the Annual Dinner to take place at the Spa Hotel on 20 February 2004 with Caroline Fitzgerald, Heathland Officer from Kent County Council acting as speaker.

6. TEA PARTY

Mrs Jennifer Blackburn reminded members that the Tea Party is booked to take place on 13th July at Finchcocks, Goudhurst. Numbers are limited to 40 with a tea of sandwiches, scones and cake with tea being served at a price of £6.00 which would include the garden visit. Members were requested to contact the Secretary to let her know if there are any spaces in cars and for any transport arrangements.

7. 400th ANNIVERSARY OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Mr Philip Whitborne reminded members that in 4 years time it would be the 400th anniversary of Tunbridge Wells and asked if any event could take place on the Common suggesting that the race course be used for donkey racing or similar.

It was agreed that the Friends take this suggestion to the Commons Conservators for their consideration.

8. CAR PARKING

Mrs Marion Goulden requested that consideration be given to reduce parking on all roads around the Common. The Chairman reminded Members it has long been the Friends' policy to seek only short term parking on all cross Common roads. He hoped to get restricted parking in Castle Road between Mount Edgumbe Road and Church Road with the aim of making the area of the Lower Cricket Ground better used and easing pressure around Fir Tree Road.

9. RIGHT HAND TURN FROM LANGTON ROAD

Attention was drawn to the Highways proposal to take part of Rusthall Common to make a right hand turn lane for traffic wishing to go

down the Coach Road. The Chairman stated he was personally opposed to this idea: it seemed unnecessary and the occasional traffic queue at that point was the only calming influence on that stretch of road. He hoped the Committee will agree.

10. WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden stated that he had now spent an agreeable 10 years in the post and hoped that he had fulfilled the main aims of the Plan of the Conservators for management of the Common.

1. Increase the amount of heathland
2. Reclaim areas of open water
3. Reclaim rock outcrops and vistas
4. Manage woodland
5. Increase public access and facilities (seat restoration, litter bins, new paths)

Illustrating this and his future aims with a selection of slides of great interest. The Warden then answered questions on:

Cherry Tree Avenue - The Warden reported that trees were being brought on for planting in this area.

It was felt that some new seats were rather low and the Warden stated that this was due to the soil level being built up. The old pattern for seats was being used.

Questions were also asked about the clearance of the edges of paths and the Warden stated that this was intentional and provided better aspects and feelings of security.

The Warden also reported that the steps and access to the Commons but it would be a benefit to both to link the Beacon Hotel and Happy Valley.

Questions were asked about homeless people camping on the Common and the Warden stated that there had been ten camps in the past year.



The Warden, in response, to questions, informed members that it was not very likely that the roundabout suggested for the Spa Hotel area would be finished by the end of the year but Borough Council Officers were working on this proposal and the Warden had seen plans.

A sea of yellow gorse in the Rusthall Church area had been cut back in order to generate heather in that area.

Questions were also asked about Japanese Knotweed and Ragwort and the Warden reported that measures had been taken to eradicate Ragwort where visible as it was known to be a danger to horses when eaten. Japanese Knotweed is known to be treatable.

The Warden stated that there were currently no cases of myxomatosis in rabbits on the Common but it is present in many areas and will return.

The Chairman thanked the Warden for his presentation and all his work over the last year.

The meeting closed at approximately 9.15 pm.

CHAIRMAN

OFFICER & COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2002/2003

Officers: (elected annually)

<b>Chairman:</b>	Rhys A. Revell	Tel. 520475
<b>Vice Chairman:</b>	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel. 546520
<b>Hon. Treasurer:</b>	Cdr. George Lawson	Tel. 524019
<b>Hon. Secretary:</b>	Sylvia Luckhurst	Tel: 526121 ext. 3251

Committee Members (elected for three years)

Dr. Ian Beavis	} elected 21.3.2001	Tel. 523007
Mark Dennison		Tel. 528199
Conrad Payne		Tel. 513626
Peter Freeman	} elected 27.3.2002	Tel. 524110
Dan Goddard		Tel. 535042
Cllr. David Wakefield		Tel. 523983
Pat Maxwell	} elected 26.3.2003	Tel. 531968
Jonathan Balcon		Tel. 515741

Sub Committee Chairmen

Interpretation panels/signage	- Dan Goddard
Membership	-
Publicity	- Conrad Payne
Social	-

Note: there is one vacancy on the Committee

