

**Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee**  
**Annual Public Meeting 2021**  
**Minutes of the virtual meeting held at 7pm on 14th June 2021**

**Speakers**

MAC: Chris Metcalfe (CM) Chair & Mark Luboff (ML) Vice Chair.

Enable LC: Ian Mitchell (IM) Managing Director, Neil Blackley (NB) Head of Parks & Valerie Selby (VS) Parks Development and Biodiversity

Continental Landscapes: Niko Mardushaj (NM)

**Other MAC members:** Rosemary Birchall, Julia Bott, Susan Dark, Richard Fox (Secretary), Liz Jevons, David Kirk, Susy Lloyd, George Meakin (Treasurer), Lewis More O’Ferrall, Charlie Oppenheim, Gwen Rosen, Derek Wright.

**Apologies:** Cllr Peter Dawson; Acting Insp Laurie Black (Parks & Events Police)

**Introductions**

CM introduced himself as Chair of the MAC. He welcomed everyone (total attendees 40, or 23 excluding MAC members and guests), including guests from Enable and Continental Landscapes. Unfortunately Acting Insp Laurie Black from Parks Police had technical difficulties and was unable to join the meeting.

CM reminded the meeting that the MAC is a community group set up by Wandsworth Council. Its role is to advise the Council and its Contractors on matters to do with the **management of the Common** – in doing so, representing all its users. Involvement in the development and implementation of the **Management and Maintenance Plan (MP)** is therefore a key activity.

Key functions include ensuring:

- **a balance** between formal and informal recreation
- the protection and development of the Common’s **flora and fauna**; and
- the preservation and enhancement of the Common’s **natural character**.

The MAC is also tasked with promoting public interest and participation in the protection and appreciation of the Common. To this end our sister organisation, the **Friends of Wandsworth Common** was launched in May 2018, and the two organisations work very closely together.

Broadly speaking the MAC is focused on the management and development side of running the Common whilst the Friends are more focused on outreach and engagement.

**Minutes of the APM held on 10th September 2020 were approved.** Matters arising were dealt with during the meeting

Copies of the minutes had been circulated in advance to attendees and are available on the joint MAC/Friends website (references to the website from here on are to [www.wandsworthcommon.org](http://www.wandsworthcommon.org)).

## **Management of the Common – Ian Mitchell (IM), Neil Blackley (NB) & Niko Mardushaj (NM)**

IM explained that Enable LC manage the Common on behalf of WBC under a 5-year contract which began in March 2020.

He introduced Niko Mardushaj, Operations Director for Continental Landscapes who had taken over the maintenance contract for 'everything green except trees' in Feb 2021. All employees had been TUPE'd over from idverde – the previous contractor.

NM said it was still early days and CL was still establishing itself in Wandsworth but he stressed that a key objective was to change the culture towards improved communication, especially with Wandsworth Common's strong MAC and Friends group.

IM described the continuing challenges prompted by the coronavirus pandemic including increased footfall, litter, ASB, resulting biodiversity and sports pitch damage and consequent pressure on staff, both for repair and policing.

NB elaborated on some of the challenges and achievements of the past year:

- social distancing had required work to direct footfall and relieve pinch points, eg near Skylark, but this had in turn brought damage to some amenity grassland. A major increase in signage had been required
- new signage also regarding rats and cycling
- toilet block refurb, although delayed due to technical problems and pressure on WBC contractors, was now complete and a major improvement
- new water fountains had been delivered but installation had also been delayed by pressure on WBC contractors
- Increased tree planting, in co-operation and in support of WC 150 plans, including 50 standard saplings and 100sqm of mini forest. Watering of new trees would be under the WBC watering contract
- efforts to engage with volunteers eg the planting on St Marks Triangle, litter picking and support for WC 150
- an inspection for masaria fungus which affects London plane trees in particular has been completed and shows only a minor presence
- planning permission had been approved for an improvement to the Windmill playground, using the Wandsworth Local Fund. The MAC had provided major constructive input
- licensing of fitness instructors had been taken back in house and after close discussion with MAC/FoWC a more effective system would soon be introduced
- repair to damage from unauthorised use of the bowling green would help establish the new AllStar/FoWC Bowls Club
- plans for a series of nature and heritage interpretation boards, halted by the pandemic, would resume with a meeting with FoWC in July

## **Biodiversity Management on the Common – Valerie Selby (VS)**

**Why are rules in place and how do they help biodiversity?**

Most of our work this last year has continued to be either ongoing or reactive as the ever fluctuating circumstances have made it difficult to look forward with any certainty. Now, in conjunction with the MAC & Friends, we are able to look at the principles of the Wandsworth biodiversity strategy and how they might transfer to action in the rest of 2021 and beyond. They are,

- i. Better – improving the quality of existing priority habitats / landscapes
- ii. Bigger – expanding the areas of priority habitats / landscapes
- iii. More – creating new habitats / landscapes
- iv. Joined-up – improving links and connections between habitats at the landscape scale
- v. Promote – informing people about how they can enjoy access to priority landscapes and work with us to benefit biodiversity

Since the Wandsworth Common Act of 1871, the land has always been safeguarded and managed for local people as a natural landscape. Steps have always been implemented to “stop people spoiling the Common” and that culminated in the implementation of byelaws – which effectively set standards for how everyone is expected to behave in this shared landscape. More recently Public Space Protection Orders have been added to give clarity on (amongst other things) how we expect dog owners and walkers to behave. I will go through just some of the byelaws and explain how they help us to safeguard biodiversity on the Common in conjunction with our management actions.

Bye-laws:

*3. No person shall remove, uproot, destroy, or injure any tree, shrub or plant or pluck any flower, bough or leaf or dig, cut or take any turf, sod, gravel, sand, clay or other substance in any open space.*

However well intentioned “I’m only taking one flower” or “I only take enough blackberries for one crumble” multiplied up by the thousands of visitors we have each year soon turns into unintentional significant loss to biodiversity, either to the plants themselves or to the ecosystems they are fundamental to supporting. As always with ecology, the impacts for good or for bad tends to be multi-faceted. No “one thing” alone can result in success or failure but what this byelaw is intended to do is minimise the negative impacts from people. Every single flower is an opportunity for nectar and pollen to be harvested by a wide range of pollinators. The ‘Every Flower Counts’ survey undertaken by Plantlife each year was able to demonstrate that whilst we may have enjoyed the hot dry spring as one of the few highlights of lockdown last year – that change in weather alone was responsible for a 7% drop in available nectar to our pollinators.

This was as a direct result of very hot dry weather together with compaction and trampling from so many more visitors than previously – this literally stopped the plants from growing and producing flowers and so there was less nectar and so we can assume that invertebrate populations certainly of pollinators have suffered and so also fewer birds and mammals. Therefore, any that did grow were so much more valuable

*4. no person shall climb on any tree or on or over any gate, fence or railing in or enclosing any space.*

We have had to temporarily fence some areas to allow the ground to recover – we don't do this lightly, particularly when there have continued to be restrictions on where else we can go. Indeed we are mindful that many more of you have discovered and now enjoy the Common – we'd like to be able to show you it at its best, and for biodiversity to once again flourish. The fencing along with the byelaws allows us to alleviate continued physical pressure on the land – allowing natural processes below ground such as worm activity to prompt growth above ground to give us grassland habitats that once again flourish and support a food chain.

*5. No person shall in any open space go upon any land specially enclosed or the entry on which is prohibited by notice or go upon any shrubbery or flower bed.*

On some areas, particularly the woodlands, fencing isn't so achievable and so we have used temporary notices particularly with regard to stag beetles and their habitats. Den building and the movement and removal of dead wood and log piles is quite damaging for the life cycle of the stag beetle and impacts may not be obvious for 7 years, so it was imperative that wood was replaced and in places partially buried to reinstate these habitats. We informed people via on site temporary notices and asked people to stop moving the wood around for biodiversity reasons.

Saproxyllic invertebrates are those invertebrates that are dependent on dead or decaying wood (or dependent on other organisms that are themselves dependent on dead wood). To try to improve the quality of our woodland habitats and go some small way to replacing natural biological systems we wish to retain as much dead wood as possible. Again to go back to the earlier byelaws – to remove this wood for your home fire or log burner is also not permitted so that we can support these habitats and landscapes

*8 no person shall camp out in any space.*

Dens become places for people to gather and whilst that is not a biodiversity issue per se, the damage to the woodland ground cover which could clearly be seen where people had been using dens each evening and where the floor was utterly bare, and the impacts of localised fires do have adverse impacts

*26. no person shall in any open space wilfully disturb any animal grazing or shall harry, illtreat or injure or destroy any animal, bird or fish or take or attempt to take any animal, bird, fish or egg or set any trap.*

Linked to dogs and how they are permitted by owners to behave – the most obvious is dogs in lakes where they impact nesting behaviour, hatching success and indeed juvenile water birds themselves can be attacked when natural instinct takes over. Indirectly dogs are also vectors for insecticide into our lakes where flea and tick treatment washes off, impacts

aquatic invertebrates and reduces available food up the food chain – this is why we ask you to keep dogs on leads around both the whole of the main lake and the stock pond.

Ongoing work such as grassland maintenance in late summer – cut and collect after seed is set to reduce nutrients and promote wildflowers. Last year there were some areas where there wasn't enough to mow – we hope for better this year. We were able to work with the MAC and Friends to agree locations for new hedge creation to improve connectivity at St Marks with thanks to Wandsworth Local Fund grant, and to join up parcels of habitat through the creation of the mini meadow on the Bolingbroke side. Tree planting included 4 new elms to support white letter hairstreak butterfly caterpillars.

Lastly some updates on matters raised last year: that we worked on & submitted the bid for a 25 year Woodland Management plan but were unsuccessful – our fundraising officer continues to work with me to identify new funding opportunities for us to continue to work to deliver this MMP action. Likewise with lake aeration we continue to keep up to date with possible solutions and concurrently seek to pursue opportunities for Corporate Social Responsibility contributions from skilled local businesses – again more as and when this evolves. Last but not least, the interpretation project was put on hold as funding streams for this area of work were suspended during Covid but we do now have a meeting in place later this summer with FoWC to pursue any opportunities that have re-opened.

#### **Q&A – Response to questions**

**Terrapins reported in 3-island pond for the first time.** VS said this wasn't a surprise and as elsewhere was due to their introduction by the public. The pontoon had not been as successful as hoped in capturing them and a problem was that even if captured they could not be released elsewhere and had to be either euthanised or re-homed with a charity (difficult). In fact, only the young terrapins were omnivores – older ones are herbivores. In short – not a major concern from that point of view – rather the concern is their potential to undermine lake edges if they reach the point of breeding. Some eggs would always be taken by other predators – foxes for example, which can swim. A higher priority was creating better habitat for waterfowl, like the vegetate edging recently planted. Unfortunately it was difficult to get vegetation to attach to the island itself.

**Byelaw enforcement** – dogs in the lake, use of trees by personal trainers etc. This was acknowledged to be a challenge given limited police numbers. IM encouraged people to report details of serious and/or repeat offenders to the police.

Education was important, and adequate explanatory signage. VS would address the lack of signage by 3-island pond.

Julia Bott (FoWC co-chair) said schools outreach was gearing up and was intended to help educate users.

**Algae on the main lake** – it was noted this could be pollen at this time of year. VS said water quality was tested twice a year and so far the dangerous blue/green algae had not been found. Blanket weed was also not a problem.

**Softball** – after many years pressing by the MAC and recent renewed public pressure, IM confirmed that softball would no longer be authorised on Bellevue Field. Existing bookings would be played out or relocated. This was generally welcomed given the importance of the area for informal recreation.

**Keeping Wandsworth Common Safe, including policing update – Mark Luboff (ML)**

The slides accompanying this presentation are available at [www.wandsworthcommon.org/policing](http://www.wandsworthcommon.org/policing)

“You won't need us to tell you that increased footfall on the Common has had its downsides - notably increased excessive drinking, late night parties in the Scope, social drug taking, littering, theft of bikes/scooters/phones/earbuds etc and generally more instances of unwanted and often frightening antisocial behaviour.

We therefore decided that it would be helpful, firstly, to identify and learn more about the surprisingly large number of agencies and teams involved in local policing and community safety and how they all worked and interfaced together.

Under the banner of "Keeping Wandsworth Common Safe", representatives of the MET, Parks Police, the Council's Community Safety team, Enable (managing agents for the Common), Wandsworth Common MAC and Friends and the Council CCTV team have been working on a co-ordinated response.

An initial focus has been increasing the coverage of CCTV cameras around the Common. Two new cameras have been installed - one at the Chivalry Road playground and one overlooking areas of the Scope from Trinity Road. Signs are to follow shortly which hopefully will act as a further deterrent.

The CCTV camera at the Cats Back bridge has been repaired and is back in full operation. There are also 3 cameras along Bellevue Road and 2 on Baskerville Road. These can all be directed onto the Common as necessary.

A review of lighting in and around all the greenspaces in the Borough is also being carried out, although this has to balance security needs against the avoidance of disturbance to wildlife.

Additional MET patrols will also be taking place on a regular basis on and around the Common (called “Days of Action”) and Wandsworth Common will have two dedicated members of the Parks Police patrolling the Common during the spring and summer.

There is plenty more to do but please be assured that action is being taken to deal with unwanted crime and ASB.

ML reminded people that the 9-strong Parks Police team (down from 16 at one time) patrolled all 800 acres of Wandsworth greenspaces, enforcing relevant byelaws, PSPOs and events. This had been an even greater challenge over the past year. The force is managed by Enable but funded by WBC.

ML also asked residents to continue to report on a timely basis any incidents they may see or be involved with. The various contact details will be posted on the Friends website.

The next meeting of the KWCS action group will be taking place at the end of June.

### **MAC Report and Accounts**

CM reiterated the MAC's primary role in helping monitor and advise on the implementation of the Management and Maintenance Plan published in 2019

Priorities are agreed with Enable and the MAC is actively working with Enable on over 20 actions at the moment, including 10 development initiatives, driven by a number of working groups.

These working groups have really started to gain traction and I'd like to thank all the MAC members involved for their very considerable effort over the last 12 months.

A copy of the Management Plan is on the website. Please do have a look and if there are actions that you support and would be happy to get personally involved in making happen, either through one of the working groups here, or by creating a new working group, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Whilst the Management Plan has been our primary focus, just worth touching on some of our other activities

**COVID19 Management:** There has been ongoing liaison with Enable and the Council around managing the Common over the extended lockdown period including signage, implementing social distancing and one-way routes, and dealing with the huge litter issue we've had (particularly on Bellevue Fields).

**Maintenance Contracts Retender:** Along with other Wandsworth Green space reps, we were actively involved during the year inputting to the services specifications for the Commons maintenance contracts prior to their retender. These include the Tree planting contract that Green Garden Company retained and the much larger maintenance and sports pitch management contract that Continental Landscapes successfully won, and we've been very pleased by the performance of both contractors since the start of the contracts.

**Planning Applications:** Little activity this year. We and others objected to the development of Jaggard Way and supported applications for the extension of the fence-line around the Windmill playground.

For those people listening who are not members of the Friends – this year is the **150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wandsworth Common** Act of Parliament that made it Common Land. A range of activities are being organised to commemorate this – co-ordinated by the Friend's Heritage sub-group – so please do check out the website for details and if you haven't already bought the book 'The Wandsworth Common Story' or contributed to our tree planting initiative, do please consider doing so.

CM thanked all MAC members for their efforts, especially Mark Luboff for his work on policing and Richard Fox as secretary. RF would be standing down as secretary from September but would continue to deal with the joint MAC/Friends website and external communications.

**Accounts** - There had been no transactions on the bank account. The previous main income stream – swan and duck food sales – had been transferred to the Friends who now managed the operation. Consideration was being given as to how to spend the outstanding balance of £3.2k in the spirit of WC 150 and leaving a green legacy.

#### **Q&A**

**Lighting** - JB questioned the assumption that lit areas were safer, recalling a point made by Inspector Biggs that illuminating individuals would be felons meant this was not a straightforward issue. IM agreed and said that the lighting review was mainly aimed at identifying lit paths that could leave individuals stranded in a dark area as they crossed the Common at night. The impact on biodiversity precluded major increases in lit areas

**Electric scooters** – IM said legislation is in flux but as of now e-scooters are not allowed anywhere on the Common

**Reporting problems:** The best number to ring in the case of a problem was the **patrolling mobile 07500 959 442**. This switched through to the 24/7 WBC operator out of hours. The landline advertised on notice boards 020 8871 7532 also switched through to the mobile.

If an incident was a serious one, requiring Met involvement, the usual 101/999 numbers were available. However, the Met was generally only involved in incidents bordering, rather than on the Common.

#### **Election of MAC Members**

A third of MAC members stand down every year but are allowed to restand.

**3 members had confirmed that they did not wish to stand for re-election. Susan Dark, Emily Jennings and Christina Potts.** CM thanked them for their contributions and was pleased that SD and EJ had confirmed they would complete their work on litter/recycling and playgrounds respectively.

Rosemary Birchall, Julia Bott, Richard Fox, George Meakin & Charlie Oppenheim are **seeking re-election**

**One new member – Peter Farrow** – had nominated himself and was duly elected.



The new MAC therefore consists of 15 members: Rosemary Birchall, Julia Bott, Anna Bradford, Peter Farrow, Richard Fox, Elizabeth Jevons, David Kirk, Susy Lloyd, Mark Luboff, George Meakin, Chris Metcalfe, Lewis More O'Ferrall, Charles Oppenheim, Gwen Rosen, Derek Wright

**Any other business**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.45pm