

**Minutes of the 2021 Annual Public Meeting of
The Tooting Commons Management Advisory Committee, on Zoom 7-8.30pm, 28 June 2021**

1. Welcome and apologies

Oli Griffiths, as TCMAC Chair 2020/21, welcomed the 48 attendees

2. Chair's Report for 2020/21

Oli Griffiths delivered a presentation (attached) highlighting the role of the MAC, and thanked Enable especially for all of the work that they had put in - under sometimes extremely challenging circumstances - to ensure that the Commons remained safe, attractive and a valuable community asset.

In summary he said that the MAC is constituted:

- To monitor the Management Plan for Tooting Commons to help to achieve a balance between:
 - facilities for formal and informal open-air recreation on the Commons
 - the protection and development of plant and animal life
- To work to retain and enhance the Commons' natural character and to promote public interest and participation in the protection and appreciation of the Commons
- To raise funds in order to make other positive contributions to the Commons amenities
- To raise awareness of the Commons and the work of this Committee

The primary role of the MAC is to advise on how a productive balance can be struck between the various, and sometimes competing, interests that affect the Commons.

In 2020/21 the Commons have been heavily affected by the 'lockdowns' enacted to control the COVID-19 pandemic. These have led to periodically extremely heavy use of the Commons with some serious negative impacts, for example:

- Forging of new 'desire line' paths and the existing doubling or trebling in breadth of existing paths
- Much more off-path 'wild' cycling
- Major increases in defecation, urination and littering
- Heavy usage of quiet areas for den-building etc
- Increase in drug trading and usage

but these negatives should be balanced against the very considerable value that the Commons delivered as a community asset allowing existing users to use it more and new users to experience it for the first time.

The damage will take some time to repair and it may be that the experience has a lasting impact on how the Commons are used and managed – the full impact remains to be seen.

Persistent flooding exacerbated the problems of the increased foot and cycle traffic and the damage.

The Commons have also been impacted by the granting of planning permission to Balham FC to develop the Triangle site. This is a development that the MAC consistently opposed as an encroachment on the Commons and the principle that all areas should be open to all users. The MAC plans to work with the developers to mitigate any negative impacts as much as possible. One major concern is the use of floodlighting on the pitches and its effect on the darkness of the Commons, which has led to work on keeping the skies dark.

The MAC is keen to develop an up-to-date understanding of what Commons users want post-pandemic and plan a survey to achieve this.

3. Dark Skies

Megan Eaves from Dark Sky London (www.darksky.london) provided a presentation on the importance of the night sky not just as an amenity for human enjoyment, but also providing health and welfare benefits to humans and other fauna.

She proposed that a first step to safeguarding and enhancing the Tooting Commons' night sky would be to designate a Nocturnal Protection Zone and, beyond this, to seek to become a certified International Dark-Sky Association (www.darksky.org/) 'Urban Night Sky Place' – which could be the first outside the USA – this could also catalyse the movement further in the United Kingdom.

Megan emphasised that this could be achieved without any compromises on Commons user s' safety. Real progress could only be made in concert with the other Commons stakeholders. Megan was thanked for her strong and useful presentation and will continue to work with the Dark Skies Group to progress the work.

4. Commons Management Report (Enable)

Ian Mitchell from Enable Leisure & Culture presented on the many challenges that the Commons had faced over the last year and the initiatives that they had taken to support the Commons and their users. These ranged from work to deal with the much increased level of litter, to the work to protect especially damaged areas and reseed and aerate the ground. Enable has also been central to developing a comprehensive view of the flooding issues on the Tooting Commons and how they can be resolved, and using this approach as a template for other public spaces across the borough. Much of the work planned had to be delayed due to COVID restrictions and difficult ground conditions but work is now underway to catch up on planned work and to help the Commons to recover. There is a new emphasis on providing public information ahead of maintenance and other activities on the Commons [these are posted by the TCMAC at <https://tootingcommons.org/works-and-events-on-the-commons/>].

5. Election of the Committee for 2021/22

26 applications for membership of the Committee had been received at the time of the meeting for the 24 places. Two members – Anthony Gilmour and Duncan MacDonald – stepped down to make way for new applicants. The MAC thanked them both for their service and their offer to remain available to provide advice and support - and stressed that they are very welcome to attend any meeting in a non-voting capacity. This offer is also open to any other local people interested in Commons affairs.

The Committee members are:

Adam	Smith
Birgit	Waiswa
Clare	Fraser
Conor	Hagan
Hannah	Stanislaus
Kirsten	Botting
Leoni	Cooper
Liz	Powell
Mark	Bery
Mark	Shotton
Matthew	Hamlyn
Michael	Mario Smith
Mike	Squires
Mike	Morley-Fletcher
Nabi	Toktas
Oli	Griffiths
Robert	Broadhurst
Ruth	de Grey
Sarah	McDermott
Sion	Davies
Sophie	Cole
Tim	Whitaker
Tom	Willetts
Tom	Mytton

6. Questions and Comments

There was some discussion over whether councillors should be members of the MAC and it was agreed that this continued to be appropriate and beneficial, providing that their politics were put aside when discussing MAC business.