



Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators' Election 2015 Candidate statements

Andrew Bignold

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I love our Commons. I have been lucky to enjoy them all my life – living nearby, I have walked my children and dogs on them, run over them, played sport on them and even camped on them as a Scout. In my semi-retirement as a Livery Company Assistant Clerk, I wish to reciprocate these wonderful experiences by assisting in the governance of these world-class places. The Conservators are to be congratulated for their bold commissioning of the Governance Review. I agree with the content of the report and in particular the communication issue. I do not understand why there isn't a 'Friends of the Commons Group' to support the staff, and more regular communication with prime user groups such as Residents' Associations, running clubs, football/rugby teams, dog walkers and cycling clubs. In my opinion, communication is the burning issue for better coordination of the facilities.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

After 31 years in the Metropolitan Police I understand how demanding and rewarding public service can be. Parallel with my duties I have enjoyed its sports activities – I am a long distance walker and runner. In gratitude for my good fortune in my career I have served fourteen years on the Athletic Association's Finance Committee managing assets that closely mirror those of the WPCC. Similarly, in appreciation of my Scout experiences I now progressively manage a Group in Hampton with 200 members and its own HQ. Despite the necessary changes, no-one has left the group. Preparing for retirement, I have developed and still run a successful business as a compère/toastmaster. By nature, I am a cautious reformer, trying to blend established good practice with the best of the new. I bring to the Board extensive knowledge of charity finance and working, proven communication, change management and motivational skills, and commitment.

David Birch

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

In my possession, I have a unique, handwritten diarised record from 1866, regarding the mammoth battle which took place to secure OUR COMMON from enclosure by the, then Lord of the Manor, Lord Spencer.

The book is entitled "Wimbledon Common Minute Book", and is a rare historical gem.

The expensive legal rankle that followed, which was eventually won by local citizens, culminated in the all important **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871.**

This freedom of access was a precious hard fought gift, which, as custodians, we must conserve, for not only our own free enjoyment, but for future generations as well.

Therefore, if elected, I would help to maintain the standards originally conceived by our forbears and protect the Common from encroachment, that all should have access to enjoy.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

My wife Brigitte and I, have lived and worked in Wimbledon since the late 1970's.

As a professionally trained potter, we have run our very successful pottery business from both The Broadway and our well established Design Studio in the Kingston Road, and therefore know the Borough and its people very well.

Conservation is in my DNA. I was fortunate, some time back, to be able to restore a Brocklesby designed flint Cottage, not far from the Common. Since ownership, this property has now been listed Grade II and is sometimes opened up to Special Interest Groups. In addition to a strong academic background, I also have very practical skills to match.

John Cameron

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

The recent independent "Governance Report" described multiple failings by the current Trustees. The Conservators have totally failed to protect either Putney or Wimbledon Commons, accepting a fraction of the open market value for the hospital access and refusing to release the Drivers Jonas professional valuation.

The Conservators' failure to consult residents was further compounded by cynically ignoring resident's views. Responding to thousands of objections, the Conservators hid behind "confidentiality" and "legal privilege".

I believe residents should be represented by Conservators who act independently of external political pressure, who communicate transparently and who manage the Charity with integrity.

If elected, I will ensure a policy of openness and greater accountability. I will end the sham of "secret" board meetings, improve consultation with residents and allow greater public scrutiny. I will ensure that income from ratepayers is only applied to legitimate areas.

Crucially, I am committed to protecting the Commons, regardless of all external political influence.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

On a day to day basis, the Commons are capably managed by an experienced operations team; the challenge is to urgently introduce the necessary standards of improved governance.

With boardroom experience at plc level, as well as working as both an advisor and volunteer to charities, I have the experience to ensure that the essential requirements of governance will be achieved.

Multiple terms of office can often lead to complacency. The urbanisation of Putney Common by the Conservators starkly illustrates the need for the election of a new team of motivated Trustees who are not prepared to capitulate when faced with threats from Local Authorities.

Timothy Daniel

Why I want to be a Conservator

The last 25 years of my life have been spent living by the Commons-20 years by the Lower Common and now on Putney Heath. My four children all went to Primary School at All Saints, and now their children are benefiting from this outstanding amenity. I want future generations to share the joys of the Commons for many years to come.

The Conservators have done a huge amount in recent years to meet SSSI and SAC criteria in order to ensure that maximum environmental benefits are achieved, but the new Chief Executive's 2014 review has highlighted the extensive work that needs to be done to preserve the Commons and to take them forward.

Future funding will be a critical issue and, as with all charitable ventures, will require high-level professional skills and commitment. I believe that I can offer those qualities.

Experience and skills

I have been a litigation partner in a City law practice for forty years. My clients have been primarily governments in developing countries for whom I have acted in land and maritime boundary disputes before the World Court, and in recovering assets stolen by their leaders. Much of my work has been for Commonwealth countries and I served for a number of years on the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, five of them as Treasurer. I was also Treasurer and latterly Hon Secretary of the British Branch of the International Law Association. I am a co-author of Corruption and Misuse of Public Office published by Oxford University Press.

In light of my experience I believe that I can bring to the Board the professional and informed approach necessary to be a Trustee of a charity, and to contribute to the Board's strategic planning, and implementation of policy.

Charles Dorin

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I am a semi-retired architect and I have lived in Putney for just over a year, having previously lived in Fulham for twenty years. I enjoy the Commons as a walker, a cyclist and a golfer and if elected as a Conservator I would look forward to putting some of my working experience into the service of the local community. My particular interest would be in the maintenance and improvement of the buildings for which the Conservators are responsible.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have had over thirty years in private practice as an architect, dealing with often sensitive and contentious aspects of design, planning, building conservation and construction procedures, mostly in London. I am familiar with good practice in the public and private sectors having been a community school governor and a partner in a firm of architects. I am supportive of the recommendations of the recent governance review which has now been accepted by the Conservators, and I am strongly in favour of the Commons retaining their independence under the terms of the 1871 Act of Parliament.

Nicolas Evans

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

It has always been assumed that the Conservators will "protect the commons and preserve them as open spaces" and will resist encroachment and political pressure. Unfortunately recently this has been far from the case. For example, Putney residents were ignored when rights to build roads on Putney Common were signed away without consultation. This was justified later by claiming in the High Court that in the Conservators' judgment it was somehow "necessary or proper". Access worth £millions was sold for just £350,000. The recently published independent "Governance Review" demonstrates how the present Conservators have failed. I pledge that if elected I will resist any further encroachments, whether on Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath or Putney Common. I will follow the Act's guidance that our Commons be kept open for "purposes of exercise and recreation" and that the professional staff are given the necessary resources to protect and maintain our Commons.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have lived in Putney for over 25 years and now own a house in Comondale opposite Lower Common. Semi-retired, I am an Executive Committee member of the Putney Society and edit their newsletter and website. I have felt for some time that the WPCC, which has expenditure of c£1.6m a year and controls 1,140 acres, needs more modern and relevant management skills on its board to meet future challenges. I have been a director of public and private publishing companies and also worked for large non-profit organisations, including ten years with the UN. I specialised in the dissemination of public information and therefore know from direct experience how modern communication techniques can make a real difference by involving stakeholders. Being a local resident I also understand how important Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common are to all of those who live nearby.

Archie Galloway OBE

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

My family moved to Putney in 1972, living firstly in Festing Road where we enjoyed the amenities of Leaders Gardens, the Thames and the Common, and secondly in Bowling Green Close with the alternative benefits of Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common virtually on our doorstep. I walk, cycle and occasionally run on both.

Having retired from my professional career, and a lengthy stint in local government in the City, I would like to show my appreciation of these wonderful open spaces in a more tangible way than just paying the local levy. Being a Conservator would accomplish this aim and I hope to be successful in the ballot.

I am anxious to see that the main thrusts of the 1871 Act are maintained over management policies including the resistance to encroachment.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I started working for John D Wood & Co in 1960, became a partner in 1976 and subsequently a director of the commercial property side retiring as a consultant in 2009. I dealt with all aspects of property, mostly offices in the City.

In 1981, I was elected onto the City Corporation where I remained until 2013. This is the only politically independent local authority in London and has remits wider than the others. One such is the provision of approximately 10,000 acres of open spaces for public benefit. These include Epping Forest, Hampstead Heath and Burnham Beeches. My connection with these areas was through the Corporation's Policy Committee participating in the strategic oversight of the managing committees.

Since 2007, I have been one of 18 trustees of Trust for London, a grant making charity distributing some £7 million annually to reduce the impacts of poverty and inequality in London.

Shirley Gillbe

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

A Putney resident for close to 40 years and a dog walker for 25 of those, I know and use Wimbledon and Putney Commons on a daily basis. I love the access for all to safe open space that they provide whilst retaining their rural nature, apparently unaltered by time and social change. I am committed to conserving and future-proofing these aspects of the Commons' character, whilst understanding the need for them to be managed such that they develop alongside the changing needs of users, within the confines of necessarily finite resources. I know that I have the time, the ability and the common-sense to contribute to the future of the Charity and it is an important way for me to recompense the Commons that have given me such pleasure, whilst ensuring that there is a future that allows others to feel the same way.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have a primary degree in Zoology, in whose environment and ecological aspects I have retained a lifelong interest. I have a postgraduate Diploma in Management and a Master's in Business Administration. I am a registered nurse qualified in Infection Control. I have worked in several aspects of healthcare for 30 years, including senior management with budgetary responsibility. Latterly, I was a management consultant working in healthcare business case development and health planning, including aspects of public health. This encompassed facilities development, refurbishment and future-proofing, workforce planning and people flow modelling, with a project scope running from General Practices to the design of the largest hospital in the UK, honing my financial, negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

I was the Chairman of the Roehampton Garden Society, a local amenity society, for 5 years and am politically well informed. I am an allotmenteer and gardener and a committed conservationist.

Ian Green

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

Putney has been my home since 1999, my workplace since 2002 and during that time the Commons have been my playground.

Over the years I've enjoyed ball games with my children and their friends, jogging and cycling to keep myself fit and healthy, walks with my wife and other family, watching the wildlife on Wimbledon Common and the cricket on Putney Common and much, much more.

Whilst my business and financial experience will be of use if I am elected as a Commons Conservator I believe the greatest benefit I will bring is that above all else I am a regular user and huge fan of the Commons.

I was born 100 years after the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 and I'd love to do all I can now on behalf of local residents to ensure the Commons survive and thrive for another century and beyond.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have 19 years of business and financial experience and during that time I have also voluntarily served on numerous boards and committees and as a trustee of a charitable foundation.

I run a financial planning firm in Putney and have been a licenced financial advisor for 19 years. The rules and regulations of the Financial Conduct Authority apply to me.

I have an interest in 'socially responsible' financial planning, being a member of the Ethical Investment Association.

In terms of skills I am numerate, used to board structures, understanding of strategy review and implementation, delegation. Comprehension that board decisions and actions often need to be 'big picture' yet the detail remains important.

Clive JP Handford

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I first came to live in Wimbledon in 1969, whilst a student, and there is simply nowhere else in London I would prefer to live. The reason is very largely because of the Common and this unique open space that brings a real sense of the open countryside to the urban sprawl of South West London.

It is a tranquil haven for wildlife, flora and fauna within a very short distance from the centre of one of the world's largest capital cities.

The diversity of the users is also remarkable. Walkers (with or without dogs), runners, equestrians, cyclists and golfers happily co-exist in their shared enjoyment of this wonderful natural environment.

The Commons must be protected and nurtured and I am fully committed to help achieve this aim.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

As a retired Chartered Surveyor I have 40 years' experience in all aspects of the property industry and have sat on the boards of a number of publically quoted companies.

I now manage my own property portfolio.

I am currently a Trustee of the Wimbledon Guild and also of the Wimbledon Village Club and Lecture Hall.

I would bring to the role of a Conservator senior management experience, estate management expertise and a proven commitment to voluntary service in the local community.

Susan Jell

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I have lived next to Wimbledon Common for the last 15 years and I strongly believe in the importance of preserving our Commons and the wildlife which depends on these green areas. Our well-being and that of our children is increasingly affected by the busy life around us and being in nature is a wonderful way to balance our needs and bring communities together. I am also interested in current research into how studying nature can be of positive use in human medicinal and scientific endeavours.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have previously worked in advertising and P.R and believe that communication with the public about the benefits of maintaining the Commons can help to encourage respect for the natural world.

During the past 7 years I have been a Committee member of the Art Group at the Roehampton Club – arranging talks, workshops and trips and my own painting practice is wildlife and landscapes which help to support Wildlife charities.

Keith Luck FCMA, CGMA, AMCT

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

It's all about the Commons. I love this unique and historical habitat and want to ensure it remains for current and future generations. Before moving to Wimbledon, my family and I would often visit the Commons; and today, with my home backing onto one of its golf courses, I run across them almost every day, joining the Parkrunners most Saturday mornings. I know the landscape well and am particularly interested by the challenge of balancing the natural environment with increasing recreational usage (both formal and informal). But things are changing and pressures are building. Usage is intensifying and diversifying. The 1871 Act provides a framework for the Conservators' unique management approach, but other legislation applies – for example, the Charities Act introduced additional Trustee duties in 1972. A strategic approach is needed to ensure the Commons' long-term survival. This is where I can help.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

The current Conservators' Governance Review recommended establishing a dedicated Finance and Investment Committee (including Remuneration), and an Audit & Risk Committee. As a qualified Management Accountant and President of The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), I have extensive experience of financial management and the Governance arrangement that the Conservators' Review aims to introduce. I am currently a Financial & Commercial Director of the Central Government Division of a plc, having been Director General Finance at the Foreign Office, Finance Director at the Metropolitan Police and also, of an Inner London Authority (as well as holding several other private sector roles). In my current position I sit on a number of plc and Limited Company Boards. I am able to work with different stakeholders in challenging environments and I will contribute a broad range of relevant experience in governing organisations to ensure resources remain focused on the Commons' long-term survival.

Stuart MacWhirter

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I have lived for 22 years overlooking and enjoying Wimbledon Common. I walk on it regularly, enjoying the environment of these unique lands. It requires strong dedication and protection on the part of the Conservators.

Today the Common is at a critical stage in a litigious world. The Board of Conservators need greater professional experience to reduce exposure to costs and risks. My experience as a Chartered Accountant specialising in forensic corporate investigation and litigation support can provide that expertise.

Environmental, tree husbandry, conservation and safety functions are well managed but restrained by limited funds. The audited Accounts illustrate catastrophic result of unnecessary enforced unbudgeted legal and professional costs and the urgent necessity to improve income from all sources.

My election will assist the improvement of safety measures, financial security and strengths. Wimbledon Common is under threat and we need to protect its current and future use.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

As a younger man I prepared official representations to Treasury and Bank of England at Assistant Permanent Secretary level on proposed law reform. Held Director status in Retail Banks, Food Industry, Investment Sector and manufacturing. I was an approved Director for compliance and money laundering supervision.

Currently active in land matters (litigation support) and strategic restructuring. Partner in a Chartered Accountancy firm (forensic and investigatory only – no audits). Experienced in crisis management and restructuring co-incidentally bringing a Victorian Foundation (like Wimbledon and Putney Commons) incorporated by an Act of Parliament into twentieth century legal framework. Experienced in managing Solicitors, Barristers and professional teams including instructing Counsel directly. Held Chartered Accountants Practising Certificate for fifty years. Skills include experience in Sectors urgently required by Wimbledon & Putney Conservators, successful record of thinking “outside the box” and ability to deal with long-term strategic and commercial threats (horizon scanning) before they become critical.

Andrew Simon

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

My service as an elected Conservator over the last nine years has proved very fulfilling. The management team is small but highly committed and motivated: it has been a pleasure to work alongside them in providing oversight and support. Service as a Conservator also provides many opportunities to learn more about the wildlife and flora of the Commons, and their history. But above all it provides the chance to contribute something in return for the many happy hours spent on the Commons over the last 40 years, in earlier years as a parent of small children, and since then as a walker, bird watcher, and runner. I would like to continue with fellow Conservators and the management team in protecting the wildness of the Commons, and defending their independence from party political and other encroaching interests.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I worked originally as a property lawyer. Since then I have been a trustee of various charities and church organisations. Training seminars have increased my knowledge of governance and other relevant topics. I have served as an elected Conservator for the last nine years, for three of them as Chair. In the local area, I served for several years on the Putney Society committee, and remain a PCC member of the Parish of Putney. I remain on the Wimbledon Society committee. These have all contributed to my understanding of the challenges and tasks facing the Conservators, and to my knowledge of the area and its residents. A fair balance has to be struck between the increasing leisure activities on the Commons, while protecting their wildlife and flora from undue disturbance: I hope my strong dislike of all kinds of unfairness will help me in this.

Professor Robin Touquet RD

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

First elected 2012, I stand for a second term because I wish to continue my work in helping to sustain the Commons in their natural state. This is particularly to enable the wide range of users – especially local people – to enjoy all of the 1,140 acres for their health and happiness, with mutual respect, and without harm to themselves or to the Commons, from Putney Lower Common to Rushmere, Wimbledon Village.

As a Levy Payer, living in SW19 for 30 years, the Commons have been central to my life, including running (Wimbledon Windmilers), providing medical cover for Rugby (RE playing Fields), being a Medical Housman at Putney Hospital 1971-72, bicycling and walking with my wife Liz & two children (plus Andy and Fido, springer spaniels, now departed), enjoying the birds and their very varied Commons' habitats of woods, heathland, grass plains, ponds, Beverley Brook and sunny glades (golf course).

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

Having now served for three years – with membership of the Communications, Golf Course and Natural History Sub-committees – I have gained the experience and understanding of how the Commons are run to further enhance my contribution, focusing on maintaining the Commons as an independent Charity covered by the 1871 Parliamentary Act, free from Council, Political or Government interference. I have undertaken training on modern day Charity Governance, contributing to the now agreed Commons Governance Strategy December 2014.

As a modern Trustee (Conservator) I have focused on strategy and functionality at Board level. I believe in openness, e.g. in negotiations with local Councils, and responsiveness to local opinion, supporting our excellent new Chief Executive Simon Lee, and his team, to carry out their operational work on the Commons.

Retiring from Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, in 2014, I have the time, volition and courage to 'stand-up' for protecting our Commons.

Neil Vass

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I have loved the Commons since I moved to Putney in 1986. It was a happy meeting and has blossomed since then. I have walked, run and cycled across the Commons for almost 30 years. The Commons are a finite resource that cannot be replaced if lost. They must be safeguarded for our children's children to enjoy in their old age. Too many decisions of government both national and local are based on short term expediency and this year's balance sheet. The Commons can flourish, whilst not preserved unchanged, but their boundaries must be protected from encroachment. Conservators as trustees need to plan for the very long term as did those who established the Commons.

What experience and skills do you bring to the role?

I have been lucky to have been a GP for the past 30 years. The role has changed dramatically and now in the Clinical Commissioning Group (a new type of health authority) we are involved in board activities more common to large firms. Just like Conservators our plans have long term consequences: better babies live longer lives.

I am very comfortable with the good governance, stewardship and probity needed by a Conservator and would be able to fulfil the tasks demanded in the custodianship of the Commons.

Prue Whyte

Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I have lived on the edge of Putney Lower Common for 30 years and during this time have walked extensively on both Wimbledon and Putney Commons. I know the Commons well, care deeply about them and wish to contribute to safeguarding them for the future.

Our Commons are unique in providing space for a huge number of recreational, sporting and educational activities. I am committed to ensuring that these spaces remain safe for users and continue to provide the maximum benefit for the greatest number of people.

The governance of Wimbledon and Putney Commons has come under pressure and criticism in recent years. I am committed to rational thought about the way forward and believe they should remain under independent control but that more attention needs to be paid to the charitable status.

I retired two years ago and have the time and energy to dedicate to being a Conservator.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have a background in natural history and biological sciences and the natural environment continues to be of interest to me. I belong to the Natural History Museum, the London Wetland Centre and the Royal Institution.

Being a Conservator will mean being a Trustee of a Charity. During the past 22 years I have worked as a group psychotherapist for two charities and am aware of the commitment and dedication shown by employees to working for a non-profit making organisation.

I was on the Executive Committee and Board of my professional body (700+ members) for 8 years. During this time radical changes were made to the structure and governance of the organisation. I applaud the Conservators for commissioning the recent Governance Review and endorsing its recommendations. This provides a framework for the future.

I enjoy working as a member of a team and have qualifications and interest in group dynamics.