



TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY AND THE COMMONS

Chairman's Report by David Wakefield

The long awaited 'Tunbridge Wells Borough Council 2000+ Transport Issues' has finally emerged.

This document complements '2000+ Local Plan', about which I wrote in the Spring Issue of Common Ground. It is inconceivable that we can consider the implications for the Borough of the addition of 2700 (est) new homes, without taking into account their transport aspects, so '2000+ Transport Issues' is very welcome.

It is a long document, full of background ('what is transport strategy?' and 'what is Tunbridge Wells Borough 2000+?') but it also covers possible solutions.

It is here that the trouble begins. In order to be comprehensive, the authors list a whole gamut of possible solutions, starting with walking and cycling and ending up with car sharing.

None of these can one be against, but common sense and observation of my fellow men tells me that none of these stands a chance against the attractions of car ownership followed by car usage.

Conversely, the Government's own strategy document 'Breaking the Log Jam' is much more clear cut. It makes only two main proposals:

- charging for road usage
- workplace parking levies

To be fair to '2000+ Transport Issues', these are mentioned, but are lost against the background of nice ideas, but ones which will not work. Is charging for road use not applicable to our Borough?

Nevertheless, your committee intend to be represented at the various public consultation meetings to be held this Summer.

They also intend to respond in writing along the lines already set out in the Spring Issue of Common Ground: 'Enhancements to the Common - Possible Responses', since these seem to be the issues which most affect the Commons from a transport point of view. After all, none of these proposals has been acted upon even though they appear to be perfectly feasible and even though they have, in the main, received our blessing and yet we are being asked to make responses to yet more proposals.

Turning to other matters, elsewhere in this issue you will see details about 'Frolics', which will be held on 17 July and early warning of our annual dinner, to be held at the Spa Hotel on 28 January 2000 next year.

New Butterflies and Dragonflies on the Commons by Dr Ian Beavis

The current conservation management programme on the two Commons continues to improve them as a habitat for wildlife, and the long-established resident butterflies and dragonflies are flourishing in consequence. In addition, new species continue to appear. Some of these may have been present all along, but previously in such small numbers as to escape detection, but others are evidently new visitors or colonists for which conditions have now become suitable. It is fortunate for the Commons that the development of Tunbridge Wells has never cut them off completely from access to the open countryside. If they had become isolated islands in an urban landscape, it would have been much more difficult for wildlife from outside to reach them. Tunbridge Wells Common is open on its western boundary to the woodlands and meadows of the county border, and those same extensive habitats are adjacent to the southern edge of Rusthall Common.

One of the most interesting new discoveries among the butterflies has been the Purple Hairstreak, which was first observed in August 1997 among the trees between Wellington Rocks and Mount Ephraim, as well as at Happy Valley. The Purple Hairstreak is a medium-sized butterfly. Although quite

widespread in the High Weald, it is a notoriously elusive species because the adults feed on honeydew deposited by aphids on the foliage of oak trees, rather than visiting flowers as most other butterflies do. It thus spends most of its time high above the ground and out of view. This butterfly may well have existed on the Commons for many years, since even in their virtually treeless past there were probably always a few isolated oaks such as those ancient examples seen today on Tunbridge Wells Common's western boundary.

The Ringlet butterfly, on the other hand, is certainly a new arrival, appearing in July 1997 along Pope's Terrace Walk. It was there again in 1998, as well as on the edge of the Fairground. The Ringlet is a butterfly of broad woodland rides which evidently finds the widening of the Terrace Walk to its liking. Previously, this species had always avoided the urban area of Tunbridge Wells, never coming closer than High Rocks to the western edge of the town. Now it has presumably found its way on to the Common via High Rocks Lane and Cabbage Stalk Lane, which of course meets the Terrace Walk at the Common's western edge. The Ringlet is a relatively large butterfly. However, when it is settled with its wings folded, the row of cream-

coloured circles, filled in with black and with a white central point, from which it gets its name can be clearly seen. The Ringlet commonly feeds on bramble flowers, and is notable as the only butterfly that is regularly active in dull weather.

The dragonflies recorded on the Common now number sixteen species, of which nine are definitely breeding in the various ponds, while others are, for the moment at least, occasional visitors. Adult dragonflies can wander considerable distances from the lakes, ponds, rivers and streams where they breed. A recent exciting addition to the Commons' dragonfly list is the Golden-ringed Dragonfly, an example of which appeared in July 1998 patrolling the strip of acid grassland along Mount Ephraim in search of prey. This distinctive species is reckoned to be the largest British dragonfly on account of its body length, and it is the only one which is patterned with yellow and black bands. In Britain it is a predominantly western species, and the Tunbridge Wells area is an isolated stronghold in the south-east of the country. It breeds in woodland streams at Pembury and in the Broadwater Forest area, but this is the first time it has been seen within the urban area of Tunbridge Wells.

A HISTORY OF TREE LOSS

Tree cover has been declining over a very long time; in fact since clearances for agriculture were started by Neolithic man in about 4000 years BC. The original total forest cover had probably halved by the Iron Age (500 BC) and been reduced to 15% by the Domesday Book in 1086. Woodlands were very important in the local economy and through coppicing provided brush, poles and timber for firewood, fencing and building needs.

As traditional uses and markets for wood began to decline so did woodland cover. Since 1947, mainly due to mechanisation and intensification of farming methods, 45% of the remaining ancient woodland has disappeared.

By the turn of the century the UK's woodland cover was 5% - the lowest in Europe. The increase to the present cover of 10% has been mainly due to plantations or conifer forestry.

Why we should plant trees:

1 For wildlife

Most British flora and fauna evolved in the wildwood and remain dependent on trees, shrubs and their associated clearings and glades.

2 To conserve native species

Planting native tree and shrub species in groups to form woods and thickets will not replicate natural woods for centuries, but will ensure a good start for colonisation by native wildlife.

3 To reduce global warming

The burning of fossil fuels and the destruction of the tropical rain forest has released more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Trees need carbon dioxide to grow and during photosynthesis give off oxygen. Trees also absorb moisture.

4 To improve air quality

Tree shelter belts can measurably reduce air pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and lead from industrial and car emissions. Dust is filtered from the atmosphere, becoming trapped on leaves and then washed down by rain.

5 To stop soil erosion

Shelter from tree leaves and the binding action of tree roots help to prevent rain from washing soil away.

6 To reduce noise pollution

The foliage of trees is flexible and soft and so absorbs sound, whilst their branches and trunks deflect it.

7 To improve urban areas

Plantings in urban areas focus on the beneficial effect trees have on the climate and their surroundings.

Alderman's chat - a dip into the past ...

Complaints by George Hollands (February 12) about the "rubbish-strewn" Common led me to look back into times past, using an extensive hand-written report produced early this century titled A Retrospective Chat with Alderman Barton.

William Barton, alderman, magistrate and Tunbridge Ware manufacturer, was a London-born cabinet maker who learned the ware business from George Wise at Tonbridge, and from 1836, when he was 17, worked for Edmund Nye for 27 years.

Barton set up on his own, and though a virtual invalid for the latter part of his life, remained active well into the 20th century with the help of several nieces.

He called the Pantiles and the Common "the greatest landmarks of old Tunbridge Wells" and went on: "The Common is little altered, but decidedly better kept. Horses as well as cattle were formerly let loose to graze, and that led to the railing of the cricket ground, which was then much smaller, although some good cricket was witnessed on it."

"The Victoria Grove had not long been planted when I came here, and it was considered a rather clever feat to climb on the largest of the Wellington Rocks, but the rocks have been worn considerably since then.

"Several houses have been built on the Common in my recollection, but other land has been reclaimed, notably Jeffrey's Yard in the centre, at one time the only monumental mason in the town.

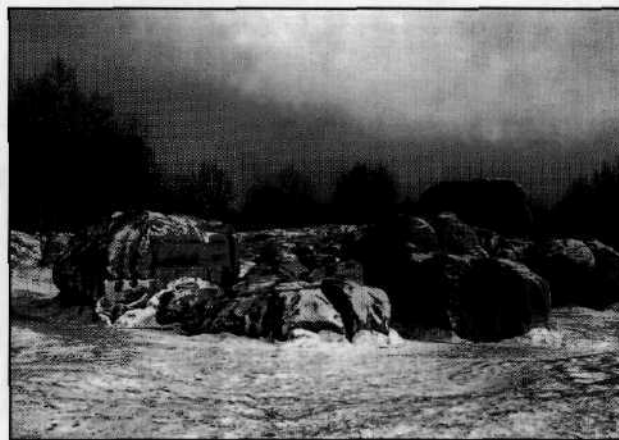
"There were a great many ponds on the Common 40 or 50 years ago, but they have been gradually filled in.

"Tunbridge Wells Races on the Common in August ended because visitors left the town during Race Week when the Common was turned into a gypsy encampment. Part of the racecourse crossed the cricket ground and the horses sometimes bolted past the winning post and down the alley towards what is now Nevill Park.

"My earliest recollection of the Pantiles was as a youth seeing the colonnade illuminated for some festivity with candles stuck in clay."

reproduced by kind permission of the Kent & Sussex Courier

Blue Paint - the 'art' of the vandal



This has not enhanced their beauty; there is no Technicolor effect now apparent, which was not there in black and white.

We are also faced with the problem of getting it off.

Too vigorous scrubbing will take away the soft underlying sandstone. The Warden is considering a solution proposed by a chemical company, which might do the job, and which in return for publicity, they propose doing for free.

The latest vandalism on the Common has involved the pouring (the choice of words is deliberate; it was not sprayed) on to a face of the Wellington Rocks.

As to the future; how can we protect natural features from vandalism of this sort? CCTV? Does this offer any advantages?

Any ideas on how to identify the culprits?

Why plant trees?

In recent years there have been two important stimuli for tree planting. The loss of hedgerow elms to disease and, more dramatically, the estimated 15 million trees uprooted in the storm of October 1987.

Native tree species blend in most effectively into the rural landscape. However, the most common tree in Britain is sitka spruce making up 28% of our tree cover, with oak only 9%.

It takes a long time to get the mature treescapes that we enjoy today. They were planned and planted generations ago. Working with trees is a long-term project and must involve careful planning and aftercare if the results are to be enjoyed in 10, 50 or even 100 years' time.



**British Trust for
Conservation Volunteers**



FROLICS - 17 July 1999

This is almost upon us. We start at 12.30pm with the Stoolball match, ladies of Kent versus ladies of Sussex (in costume).

We follow this with a demonstration match of the ancient Kent game, 'bat and trap'. We are hosts to a team from the Plough Inn, Basted, and we hope to field a side from the Borough (Town Crier, Vicar, etc).

Bat and Trap's roots go back to ancient times, and has almost died out, except in rural parts of Kent. Come and see whether it was the 'father' of cricket.

The programme then proceeds:

2pm	Arrival of the Mayor Donkey Races Terrier Races
3.30-4pm	Children's Races
4pm	Friends' Tea Party
4.15-4.30pm	Sack Races
4.30-4.45pm	Wheelbarrow Races
4.45-5.15pm	Terrier Races
5.15-5.45pm	Tug of War

Note particularly that the Friends' Tea Party is at 4pm in the marquee. As we are using an outside caterer, there will be a charge for the tea.

Besides the animals of past years, we are also encouraging visitors to bring their own animals. We will hold a small animals display.

A Victorian funfair is coming a long way to be with us.

We hope that children will come in costume, and if any adults feel inclined to also dress up, they will add to the occasion.

We need help from members to:

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

All volunteers happily received by the Chairman on Tunbridge Wells 523983

SPONSORED ABSEIL Bulls Hollow



After scaling the 101 Steps on Rusthall Common last year with the assistance of the Sevenoaks Air Cadets, I said that I wished I could abseil but, with my dodgy leg (*I have had MS for 22 years*), could never do it.

The cadets said that, once again, I could and they would help me.

So on 17 April - a lovely spring day - we took off over the rocks at Bulls Hollow. I was a little nervous but knew that the lads would take care of me, however deep the drop. As I was well sponsored for charity (*Multiple Sclerosis*) there was no going back on my wish anyway.

I was well supported, physically and morally, by friends, but did slip a little as we took off over the top. I had the commanding officer, Flt Lt Nigel Grapes from Rusthall on one side of me and a cadet on the other and was greeted at the bottom by the other cadets with a wheelchair.

A very generous old friend from Bidborough, John Cook, paid for a soup and sandwich lunch for the cadets afterwards in the Frant Room at the Spa Hotel - a most memorable and enjoyable day.

Sylvia Luckhurst
Secretary

FRIENDS' ANNUAL DINNER

This will be held on
28 January 2000

at the Spa Hotel

Make a note in your diary, forward planning section.

We will be addressed by Chris Clennett, Gardens Manager, Wakehurst Place on developments of the gardens at Wakehurst Place and construction of the new 'seed bank'.

It promises to be a good evening.

AUTUMN LITTER PICK

19 September

Start Time 10am

at Fir Tree Car Park

or The Brahms Pub (*for those who want to concentrate on the Rusthall end of the Commons*)

*Jade...
the Warden's
Dog*



Trusted friend and rabid rabbit router outer!

A WALK ON TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMON

This walk on the Common begins and ends at the Pantiles but it mainly a circuit of the old disused race course. The soil of the Common, lying over sandstone tends to drain quickly but in a few places can be muddy after rain.

1 Starting at the Pantiles mount the steps between the Swan Hotel and "Tracks and Trimmings" turning right at the top and crossing by zebra crossing to the Common. Take the asphalt path bearing left (there is a wooden finger post incised 'Groombridge and Speldhurst'). After 50 or 60 paces the path is crossed by another asphalt path which you take, turning right.

This path runs roughly parallel to the busy Major York's Road, but before proceeding note York Cottage on the other side of the road, one of the oldest buildings on the Common.

The path runs uphill through woodland - mainly birch, beech and oak. It is not an arduous ascent but there are seats at several points along the way, a reminder of the past popularity of Royal Tunbridge Wells as a place for convalescing to recuperate. The air of the Common has long been considered as invigorating and restorative.

2 The first seat on the left bears a plaque;

THIS SEAT DATING FROM VICTORIAN TIMES WAS DISCOVERED IN THE UNDERGROWTH WHICH FORMERLY COVERED THIS AREA WAS REPAIRED AND RENOVATED BY THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS APRIL 1995

3 60 paces further on there is another seat on the right and the asphalt path is crossed by a broad grassy glade. This is the old 18th century race track. It was laid out at a time when Tunbridge Wells was one of the most fashionable places in the country with 'Society'. One of the things which this society enjoyed hugely was gambling - on the Pantiles, where Beau Nash ran the gaming tables, and at the races held

here on the Common. Turn right along the racecourse which curves gently away to the left. As it bears left the course rises slightly. It is wooded on both sides and crossed by a number of paths, but follow the course round to a point where the bend tightens and you come to a double avenue of trees on the left.

4 This is the Royal Victoria Grove, planted in 1835 to commemorate the visits of Princess Victoria and her mother the Duchess of Kent. Victoria Grove was planned as a double avenue of sycamore, limes and elms. The elms succumbed to disease in 1972 and in 1992 the 3rd row was replanted to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth IP's accession. The Grove is reputedly haunted on summer evenings by the grey figure of a woman in Victorian garb.

Continue past the end of the Victoria Grove passing also a small area of heather scrub on your left, but still bearing gently left until you meet an asphalt path. At this point there is an open area with Victoria Grove on the left, the cricket pitch in front of you and to the right an outcrop of rocks. Take the asphalt path right towards the rocks. These are known today as Wellington Rocks and in the 18th century they must have made a natural grandstand to the start and finish of the horse races. The tallest of the rocks was nicknamed 'the pulpit' by the Victorians. Other 19th century inhabitants sought 'diamonds' in the sand around the rocks. These were quartz crystals which could be polished up and used for costume jewellery. The rocks with their clefts and crevices have been a magnet for children of countless generations (*Ruskin said they were his childhood Switzerland*).

At this point the race track has been overlaid by the construction in the 19th century of the cricket pitch - in fact, the upper cricket pitch, there being two pitches on the Common. The upper pitch has been, in its day, the scene of important matches and Dr W G Grace played

here in 1875 and 1882. Nowadays County Cricket is played at the Nevill Ground about a mile away.

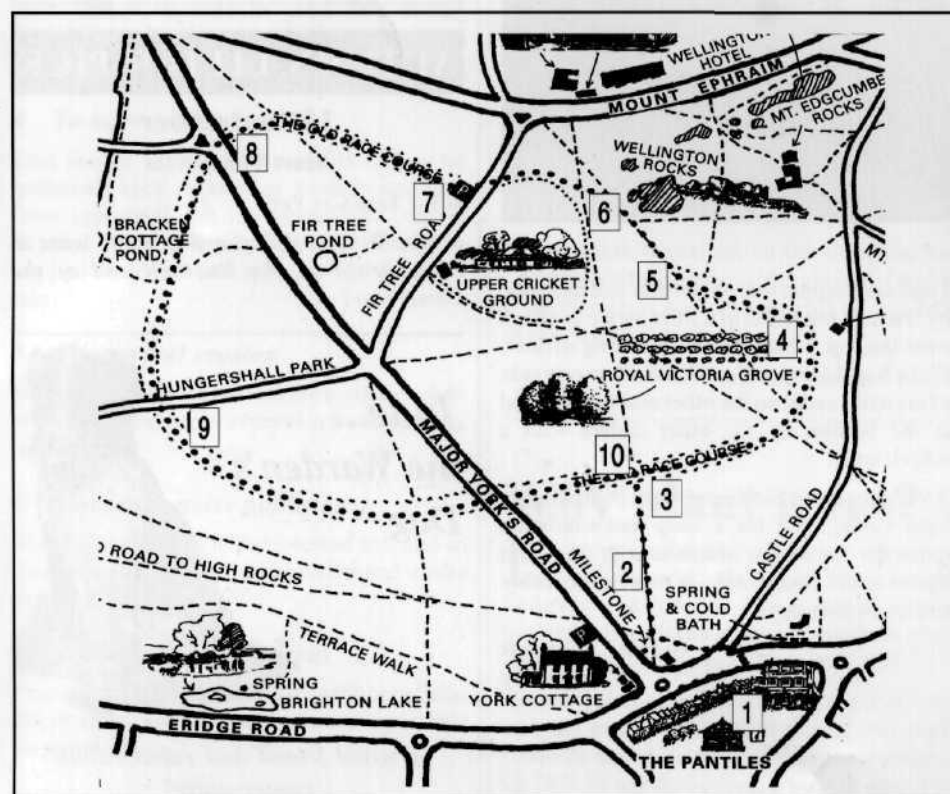
6 Walk up the asphalt path to a point just past Wellington Rocks (*to your right in the trees is a pavilion with public toilets*), and then take the newly surfaced track left round the top edge of the cricket pitch. If a game is in progress there are plenty of benches from which to enjoy the match. Continue across the road (*Fir Tree Road*) to a small car park. On the left

7 you will see a litter bin near a small oak tree. Walk toward this and you will see an unpaved track on your right curving downhill - this is a resumption of the race track. At the end of the glade the track is crossed by another small path, carry straight on toward Major York's Road. Major York built this now busy road across the common to connect the Pantiles with his house at the top of Bishops Down. His house, much enlarged is now the Spa Hotel.

8 At the road, take the footpath left for a few paces to a break in the grass verge and cross the road to a row of short wooden posts. These posts straddle the width of the course along which we proceed. This straight section is crossed by a private road marked by more posts. Continue across this road along the race course. The woods on each side have been left largely as they were after the hurricane adding to the variety of wildlife habitat on the common.

9 When the race course turns again to the left it is crossed by another road marked by more posts. This is Hungershall Park Road which we cross. Following the track we come to a clearing on the left, skirted in the main by a birch wood, which has been opened up to encourage heather to grow and butterflies to proliferate. Continuing along the race track we come to Major York's

10 Road again. Cross, and complete the circuit of the race course, returning to the Pantiles by the asphalt path on the right which brings you back to the start of the walk.



Approximate length of walk - 1.25 miles

Allow about 45 minutes.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

These last few days have been enlivened by the sight at lunchtime of a kestrel, soaring above the middle reaches of the Tunbridge Wells Common.

It is not an uncommon bird, but one not seen all that frequently in a built up area.

As it has been around for a week or more, one can only assume that supplies of food are what makes it come back day after day.

