



The Friends of Tunbridge Wells
and Rusthall Commons
The Coach House
Tunbridge Wells
TN4 8AY

Key Points of Meeting with Members 24 January 26

- Concerning the organisation of the Friends of the Commons:
 - New Trustees of the Friends of the Commons are Roger Barton, Adrian Berandt, Nick Leech. They are assisting the existing Trustees: Joy Podbury, Chris Gurr, Ian Beavis, Lizzie Gripper and Clive Evans. Alan Leale-Green has resigned as a Trustee. Roger Barton will take over the Chair from Joy Podbury.
 - The Trustees have been ably assisted by John Barber, the Freehold Tenants, Gemma Stapeley and the Town Forum.
- The majority of the meeting was focused on the forthcoming sale of the Commons.
- The Commons have been owned since 2008 by Targetfollow, which is a property management company based in Norwich. They are selling the Commons now to refocus on city centre investments. They will continue to own part of the Pantiles.
- The Friends have been exploring the possibility of buying the Commons from Targetfollow on behalf of the community.
- Ownership of the Commons carries with it the title of Lord of Rusthall Manor, and grants 4 places on the 12-person Commons Conservators, which is responsible for management and upkeep of the Commons, and is an important largely independent control for the Commons. The Friends intend to work closely with the Commons Conservators.
- The Commons are governed by a range of controls which protect the Commons and ensure the right of access.
- The Friends do not know the price at which Targetfollow will sell. In commercial terms, the Commons, together with the Major Yorks car park, generate approx. £150,000 pa according to its public sales brochure. Targetfollow has stated that they might sell the Major York Road car park as a separate lot.
- 2 statements in the sales brochure for the sale are that:
 - further income could be achieved from the 900 properties that require rights of access and access to services over the Commons
 - it might be possible to build a substantial new development on the site of the Major Yorks car park. However, such an initiative faces a high legal bar, and there is no certainty that it would be allowed to proceed.
- If the Friends own the Commons, decisions will always be made locally, in the public interest, in a transparent manner, by a charity whose sole purpose is stewardship, not return on investment.
- Ownership by the community removes ongoing uncertainty and commercial pressure. It is about certainty for future generations, not having to react to problems later. For example, the Friends would not be seeking extra income for the people who live round the Commons and would not seek to build flats on the car park.



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- Many pledges of early support have already been received. These pledges are important because they show credibility and intent. They strengthen negotiations, unlock conversations with other funders, and help determine whether a community purchase is truly viable. The Friends are aiming to raise in the region of £1 to £1.5 million pounds
- Such a purchase will not be easy, and carries risks: the Friends will need to gear up substantially, create new charity structures and bring additional resources on board. Members will be kept informed of progress along the way.
- The prize if the Friends get it right is substantial. Opportunities to bring historic commons into community ownership are extremely rare. Once lost, that opportunity may never return.
- There were a range of questions from the members. These comments were supportive of the initiative of the Friends buying the Commons. Ian Marshall, Chair of the Commons Conservators, gave more detail relating to the annual income from the Commons, stating that the majority of the income comes from the Major Yorks Road car park.
- There were questions about:
 - Who might be potential buyers? The response was that Targetfollow is marketing the sale broadly, to 'global customers'.
 - The likely sale price – the answer to which was we do not know at this stage.
 - Timescales. The response was that whilst a sale cannot be concluded until the end of March, the expectation is that sale is intended to be as soon as possible. A member highlighted the need for swift action
- There were questions about how to make a pledge (Details are set out below).
- A number of people offered their services. All were thanked for their offers, and will be followed up.
- The meeting concluded that there was support from the members to proceed with the initiative of buying the Commons, and that the Trustees keep the members informed of progress.