

[Charity Commission concludes inquiry prompted by dispute at South London charity](#)

Press release

Charity Commission criticises a group of trustees of Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators over long-running dispute



The Charity Commission has [concluded its inquiry](#) into [Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators](#), finding that one group of trustees' inability to manage a long-running dispute is evidence of mismanagement.

The charity was established to preserve the commons for the purposes of exercise and recreation. In 2014, it sold land access rights (an easement) to Wandsworth Borough Council to allow for a road to a primary school and residential flats being developed on part of the commons.

The granting of the easement led to damaging disputes between the trustees over whether it was sold at an undervalue and whether the sale was in the best interests of the charity. The Commission opened a statutory inquiry into the charity in August 2016, after it failed to resolve the issues with advice and guidance from the regulator.

The inquiry did not find any one individual responsible for any incorrect decision, act or omission, but finds the inability of the trustees in post between 2015 and 2018 to manage the dispute resulting from the granting of the easement has been costly to the charity, and is evidence of mismanagement.

The Commission did not make any findings about the decision to grant the easement or the terms of that grant.

Helen Earner, Director of Regulatory Services at the Charity

Commission, said:

All too often we see differences of opinion amongst charity trustees deteriorate into entrenched disputes. We would expect charities to resolve such disputes themselves, before they damage the charity's reputation and deplete its funds. Unfortunately, in this case, the trustees failed to make this happen, to the detriment of the charity.

I am encouraged by steps we are seeing towards improved governance, and increased transparency and accountability at the charity. I expect progress to continue, with trustees living up to the high standards of behaviour and conduct that the public rightly expect of charities.

Alongside its own inquiry report the Commission has, in the interests of transparency, published [findings made by an interim manager appointed to the charity in 2017](#). A [full report of the inquiry](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Ends.

Notes to editors:

1. Due to the long-running issues spanning several years, the report distinguishes between three sets of trustees; the original trustees, subsequent trustees, and current trustees.
2. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.
3. It is not for the Commission to take sides or mediate in disputes. The Commission's role is, instead, to ensure that charities are governed effectively, charitable funds are properly accounted for, and trust in charity is maintained.

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