

THE COMMONS NEWS



Wimbledon
and Putney
Commons

Wimbledon Common Putney Heath Putney Lower Common

Summer 2024



The Newsletter of Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Chairman's Welcome

It is a real pleasure to welcome you to the this year's annual newsletter, my first official job as Chairman.

I was honoured to have been elected as a Conservator in the election held earlier this year, and even more so to have been elected Chairman by my fellow Conservators at the first meeting of the new Board in April. The first few months have been a whirlwind for all of us – getting to know the staff that manage the Commons and understanding the work they do, as well as how the heart of the Commons ticks.

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the previous Board of Conservators and in particular to those who stood down at the last election – Diane Neil Mills, David Hince and Peter Hirsch who all served for six years, and also to Nigel Ware who was the Home Office appointed Conservator for the last six years. Along with the two re-elected Conservators, Sue Bucknall and Michael Johnston, Defra appointed Conservator Oliver Bennett MBE and MoD appointee, Peter Shortt, they have laid excellent foundations in setting the Commons' strategy and policies.

It is an oft repeated phrase, but with the trials and tribulations of recent years, the importance of the Commons to the community cannot be overstated and the principle that the Commons provide an open space for exercise and recreation must remain sacrosanct. However, we must also remain mindful of our responsibility under the 1871 Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act to preserve, maintain and enhance this important and diverse environment. It is balancing those two often conflicting aims that is at the heart of all we do here, along with ensuring we also meet the obligations that come with being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).



Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators

The Ranger's Office,
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Registered Charity: 303167


Current Trustees:


Mauro Mattiuzzo - Chairman, Elected
David Brown - Elected
Sue Bucknall - Elected
Michael Johnston - Elected
William Liu - Elected
Peter Shortt - Appointed, MoD
Oliver Bennett OBE - Appointed
Defra Vacant - Appointed, Home Office


Officers:

Colin Cooper, Chief Executive
Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk & Ranger
Peter Haldane, Conservation & Engagement Officer
Lynnie Farrant, Fundraising Manager
(maternity cover for Maggie May)
Angela Evans-Hill, Executive Assistant &
Communications Officer

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The protection that the 1871 Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act gives us is vital to those aims but there is more work to be done on reviewing the legislative regime and how it can be made fit for today's requirements, without undermining those core protections. Likewise, whilst the proposed Levy rebasing, if approved, will provide additional operating revenue, there are still urgent capital projects, compliance with SSSI/SAC requirements and the work set out in the Masterplan that require us to consider innovative ways of raising revenue.

I am also keen for us to continue the work that has already been undertaken to increase community engagement. The team are working particularly hard to foster engagement with the Roehampton community, working with Our Roehampton and the Roehampton Women's Network, as well as continuing engagement with the Putney and Wimbledon communities. Through this we can increase the public's understanding of how the Commons are managed, the work that is done here, and why, and the challenges faced in managing such a diverse open space.

I want to bring you, our levy payers, our visitors and stakeholders on our journey with us, all pulling in the same direction to keep these Commons the special and treasured place they are.

Major Events in 2024

21 to 23 June - Weekend of Nature

Join our experts for a series of walks around the Commons to learn about our wildlife

24 June at 8.00pm - Conservators' Annual Open Meeting

The Conservators will present their Accounts and Annual Report for 2023/24. The meeting will be held at St Paul's Church, Augustus Road SW19 6EW. Details can be found at on our website: wpcc.org.uk/AOM24

8 September - Commons Open Day

14 December at 4.00pm - Carols at the Windmill

Full details of all the events can be found on our website:
wpcc.org.uk/events

Meet Your Conservators

March 2024 saw the triennial election for the five elected Conservator positions on the Board of Trustees that manage the charity, Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators.

There were six candidates standing for election and Levy-payers voted in the two Conservators who were seeking re-election: Sue Bucknall and Michael Johnston; along with three new Conservators: David Brown, Mauro Mattiuzzo and William Liu. At their inaugural meeting on 8 April 2024, the Board elected Mauro Mattiuzzo as Chairman for the ensuing year.

Oliver Bennett MBE, the DEFRA appointed Conservator since 2021, was re-appointed for a second term from 3 February 2024 and Peter Shortt, the MoD appointee remains in office until June 2024 when he will stand down. The Home Office

Appointed role is vacant following the end of Nigel Ware's second term in March 2024. A recruitment process for both these positions will be underway at the end of June. If you would be interested in being considered for one of these roles, or would like to learn more about being a Conservator, please do contact the Ranger's Office.

If you would like to meet the Conservators, do come along to the 2024 Annual Open Meeting. This is being held at St Paul's Church, Augustus Road, London SW19 6EW on Monday 24 June 2024 at 7.30pm for an 8pm start. The Conservators will present their Annual Report and Accounts and there will be opportunity for you to ask questions, both formally as part of the meeting, or more informally before and after the meeting.

New Chief Executive

In September 2023, we welcomed Colin Cooper as our new Chief Executive. Colin joins us from Habitats & Heritage, where he served as Chief Executive for 12 years. With a deep love for nature cultivated from his upbringing in Cambridgeshire and extensive experience in environmental issues, Colin is committed to ensuring the Commons thrive in the face of future challenges.



On taking up his role, Colin commented "The Commons have always held a special place in my heart, with their abundance of interesting species, diverse habitats, and rich heritage, while also supporting numerous community activities and sports. I feel privileged to work alongside the dedicated team at Wimbledon and Putney Commons and my partner, Leah, and I look forward to being a part of the local community."

Levy Consultation

In the Autumn of 2023, we conducted a six-week public consultation with levy-payers on a proposal to rebase the Commons Levy. The increase of approximately £375,000 that this would generate per year would help us to:

- Improve the paths, rides, cycle routes and signage to facilitate access
- Protect and enhance the nationally important heathland and restore wetlands (important for their carbon storage abilities)
- Improve ponds and the Beverley Brook (valuable habitats for wildlife)
- Manage and create wildflower meadows to improve biodiversity

The results of the consultation were received in late November. Of the 5,969 respondents, 79% were in favour of the proposed increase, while 21% expressed opposition, with their primary concerns being the cost of living challenges and a lack of usage of the Commons. Given the level of support, and the knowledge that any discount or exemption applied to Council Tax also applies to the Levy, the Conservators agreed to pursue the proposal outlined in the consultation document and have contacted the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to take this forward and a decision is currently awaited from them. We will keep you updated on progress.

Friends

The Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons continue to grow and achieve its aims of bringing together all of those who love the Commons and of fund raising. Income from subscriptions supports the wider work of the charity and this year has contributed towards the footpath restoration work and the surveys carried out at the Queensmere to help us apply for funding for a major restoration project (see Fundraising Update).

In addition to the existing five categories of membership, in 2023 we introduced a new Individual Concessionary membership for anyone claiming state benefits including disability, unemployment or pension credit; full time students and anyone under 21 years of age.

The Friends both organise events and assist with some of the larger events taking place on the Commons. They were

instrumental in organising and providing volunteers for the two events that the Commons hosted to mark the coronation of their Royal Highnesses, King Charles III and Camilla, Queen Consort in May 2023, with a successful "Lighting up the Nation" celebration and the Big Help Out Day which showcased volunteering opportunities on the Commons, and in the wider area.

The Friends also continued with their programme of local walks on the Commons, including walks to learn about birdsong, and three separate walks on some of the Commons' important habitats – woodland and heathland, and a tour of Putney Lower Common.

If you are interested in learning more about the Friends, please visit our website: wpcc.org.uk/friends

Nature Notes

Little Grebe

The 2023 Wildlife and Environment Report showcases not only the wealth of biodiversity on Wimbledon and Putney Commons but also the dedication of the WPCC staff, volunteers and conservationists working tirelessly to protect and nurture this precious ecosystem.

Much of our ongoing community engagement work will focus on spreading the word about why the Commons are so important for our wildlife, and why that wildlife is important for monitoring how the changing climate affects not only the Commons but in a wider context too. We hope that knowing about some of the important species that call the Commons home will encourage you to help us to protect this unique and ancient landscape.



Birds

Birds - The total count of 87 bird species reflected a normal year for birds on the Common although many species records were just for one or two sightings. Success stories included the Little Grebes breeding at Bluegate Gravel Pit, and Firecrests also continue to proliferate, clearly liking the dense, less managed, woodland habitats. A pair of Swallows and Pied Wagtails bred again at the stables. 2023 provided a crop of surprises including Wood Sandpiper, Golden Oriole, Grasshopper Warbler and Hawfinch. There is always the chance of something unusual appearing on the Commons!

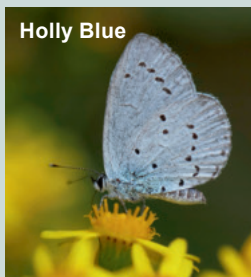
There were no sightings of Dartford Warblers and worryingly the decline in Swift numbers appears to continue with no reports of large gatherings. Autumn passage was poor for Stonechat with no records for Whinchat.

The year ended with some good winter visitors including Waxwing along with Redpoll and Siskin flocks no doubt attracted by the seed from the Alder and Birch trees on the Commons.

Butterflies

28 species of butterfly were recorded on the Commons in 2023. After a slow start, when concerns were being expressed about insect numbers in general in the UK, 2023 turned out to be a surprisingly good year for the more common species such as Gatekeeper, Holly Blue and Red Admiral, with the latter's number possibly augmented by summer migrants from the Continent. One species that has been a concern for several years is Small Tortoiseshell - there were no records in 2023. Even in the recent past this species would have been widespread and abundant.

Holly Blue



Dragonflies and Damselflies

The drought of 2022 led to fears that dragonflies and damselflies would suffer in 2023 but despite this, 19 species were recorded on the Commons in 2023.

They are a remarkably resilient group and some species have evolved to cope with the summer drying of wetlands. Their mobility in their adult stage means that they are able to quickly exploit ponds that start to refill. One species that has maintained its presence on the Commons, despite becoming quite rare in the London area, is the Emerald Damselfly which can usually be seen at Bluegate pond.

Female Emerald Damselfly



Moths

2023 was another exceptional year for moths with 459 species recorded - 27 more than 2022. 46 were new to the Commons and 22 species are a priority for conservation. These include the Light Crimson Underwing (*Catocala promissa*) and Latticed Heath (*Chiasmia clathrate*). Several moths from southern Europe were also recorded, perhaps because 2023 was again an exceptionally hot year. Most notable the Oak Yellow Underwing (*Catocala nymphagoga*). Only a handful have been recorded in the UK and it is possible that it may be colonising the UK due to climate change.

Yellow underwing



Beetles

We had a new volunteer on board in 2023 who is an expert in beetles, and he has opened up a whole new world for us! Several exciting species were recorded, including some that are nationally scarce. Of particular note was *Teredus cylindricus*, a rare insect historically endangered and restricted to a handful of locations in Berkshire, Nottinghamshire and Surrey. A total of 35 dead wood ('saproxyllic') beetle species were recorded - these are insects that depend on dead and decaying wood for at least part of their lifecycle. We know the Commons are one of the remaining strongholds for Stag Beetles and it seems that they could be equally important for other dead wood species.

This is a brief snapshot of the wildlife recorded on the Commons during 2023. A full copy of the Wildlife and Environment Report is available on our website - wpcc.org.uk

Conservation Update

Over winter, the Commons have been overwhelmed by mud and water due to higher-than-average rainfall, an issue shared by many open spaces, and the conditions have been the worst that our staff can remember. Although much of the Commons are wet by nature, especially the heathland, this year we are prioritising an hydrology study to better understand water movement and explore solutions which retain or improve access whilst providing a greater diversity of habitats, such as wet woodlands and seasonal ponds.

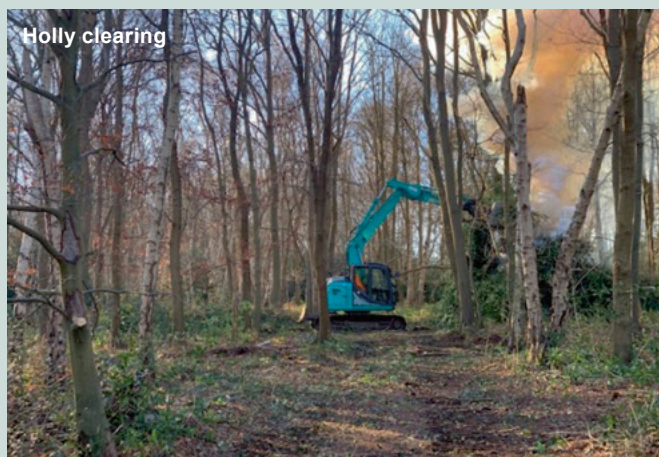
Woodland Management

Woodland is the largest habitat type on Wimbledon and Putney Commons, covering some 290 hectares. Recent assessments by Natural England classify the woodland habitats as “Unfavourable Recovering,” indicating that all the necessary management measures are in place and, if sustained, should result in the habitat reaching Favourable condition over time.

Part of the work in getting us to “Favourable” condition includes holly thinning and ride management and regular visitors will have noticed the significant works on the slope leading up to the golf course from Queensmere and along sections of Warren Farm Ride and Stag Ride.

Although Holly is a native species, its dominance has adversely impacted the development of a well-structured woodland and the lack of light this dominance causes has hindered the growth of essential layers within the woodland ecosystem - a healthy woodland structure should include a field layer, a shrub layer, an understorey, and a well-developed canopy.

We do recognise that Holly has a role in providing a nesting habitat for birds and is a vital source of nectar and pollen



for bees and other insects, so to maintain an ecological balance, approximately 10% of the holly is retained across managed areas.

Some have questioned why cut holly is burned rather than disposed of in a more environmentally considerate way. We considered all options such as removal but large vehicles would have caused significant damage given the site location. Chipping or leaving the arisings on site would harm soil health and impede regeneration.

Putney Lower Common

Back in 2022, we launched two fundraising appeals for projects on Putney Lower Common – repairs to the green footbridge (now affectionately known as Bill's Bridge) and the creation of a community orchard.

At the time, we let you know that any additional donations over and above what was needed for those two projects would be ring-fenced to projects specifically for Putney Lower Common.

We are delighted that we now have been able to utilise some of those funds. We have planted wildflower bulbs and sown wildflower seed to improve the grassland diversity and provide habitat for pollinators. Bird boxes were installed at the beginning of February of a design suitable for, and indeed already being used by, a variety of birds including Great, Blue, Marsh, Coal and Crested tits, and one box has been designed specifically for Wrens.

Additional plans over the coming year include improving paths, installing trail cameras to monitor wildlife and the removal of invasive non-native species such as Japanese Knot-weed and Tree of Heaven.

Volunteering

If you are interested in volunteering on the Commons, contact our Conservation and Engagement Officer, Peter Haldane - peter@wpcc.org.uk

London in Bloom

In September 2023, we were delighted that both Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common received Gold Awards at the London in Bloom awards in September 2023. Adding to this achievement, Wimbledon Common also received the prestigious trophy for London Common of the Year 2023.

The London in Bloom campaign, now in its 54th year, is the largest horticultural campaign in London, engaging communities from across the capital. Since 2009, the Commons have proudly participated in this important event, aiming to increase community involvement, care for the environment, and maintain our green spaces.

This year's judge had glowing remarks about both Commons. Regarding Wimbledon Common, they noted, "The whole day was an exemplar of textbook management and conservation of woodland and heathland areas." For Putney Lower Common, "a jewel in the crown", they praised its diverse landscapes, careful woodland management, and efforts to include the needs of residents in the conservation efforts.

Specific highlights included the construction of stag beetle log piles, selective woodland clearance, and the recording of bird and mammal species. The judge also commended the enthusiasm and commitment of both staff and volunteers.

Sign up to our new Nature Notes
Newsletter wpcc.org.uk/NNN
or scan the QR code



School planting project on Putney Heath

An area of open grassland on Putney Heath just off Telegraph Road has been transformed into a meadow to give a boost to biodiversity and provide habitat for pollinators. The project, which was run in partnership with pupils from Wimbledon High School and Granard Primary School, saw children plant native wildflower bulbs and seeds on the first day of spring, providing them with the opportunity to learn about nature and make a real difference to their local green space. This was a welcome opportunity for our staff to engage with two local schools and, as the area falls within one of Buglife's B-Lines (the creation of a series of 'insect pathways' running through the UK which will link existing wildlife areas together, creating a network for our insects) an important opportunity to improve one of the Commons small meadows.

The funding for the project came via a grant from HSBC and The Girls Day School Trust (GDST), with the aim of bringing local schools together to learn and become involved with their local environment. We are grateful to Wimbledon High School for securing the grant and bringing Granard School on board. We hope that the resulting meadow will be something that all our visitors can enjoy.



Enhancing Deadwood Habitats on the Commons

Deadwood is a fundamental component of a healthy woodland ecosystem and it plays a crucial role in supporting biodiversity, with approximately 1000 different species recorded as living in deadwood in Britain.

Recognising the importance of this habitat, WPCC makes every effort to retain as much deadwood as possible on the Commons. In early 2024 we continued this work by creating more of these habitats.

This involved burying cut timber in deep pits, stacking cut timber above ground, and the creation of large standing "monoliths" when appropriate as part of our tree safety work.

These habitats are vital for a host of wildlife, including the Stag beetle, whose ongoing survival on the Commons is of particular importance as the Commons are central to the south London distribution of the species and is one reason for our Special Area of Conservation status. In 2023 WPCC joined the newly formed Kingston Biodiversity Partnership and will be leading on work around the conservation of stag beetles.



Wildlife Garden Update



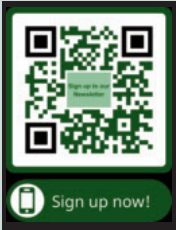
Located in front of the Rangers Office on Wimbledon Common, the Commons' wildlife garden was created in memory of local bird expert, Dave Wills, thanks to the generous support of local donors.

The garden burst into an amazing display of wildflowers in 2023 and is already attracting a diverse range of species including bees, butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies and beetles as well as newts, toads and other aquatic invertebrates. Dragonflies have been laying eggs in the pond and earlier this year staff were privileged to see a Broad Bodied Chaser as it transitioned from a larvae to an adult.

We have continued to make improvements and over the summer have installed a new wooden fence around the perimeter and planted a native hedge.

Sign up for our E-Newsletter

We can't include everything about our work on the Commons in this one Newsletter so if you'd like to keep up to date our latest news, or be the first to hear about events taking place on the Commons, do please sign up to our e-newsletter. Sent out every two or three months, it is a great way to keep in touch and has lots of information on what to look out for on the Commons and also our latest conservation works.



Fundraising update

Queensmere

Our big fundraising news relates to Queensmere. Established in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, it is one of the largest and most popular ponds on the Commons, drawing many visitors due to its proximity to the Windmill and the car park. Ponds are important havens for wildlife, however, Queensmere falls short of its potential as a habitat, shrouded as it is on all sides by trees and its lack of marginal vegetation.

During 2023, supported by a grant from the Mayor of London's Rewild London Fund and contributions from the Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons, we conducted a number of surveys to assess Queensmere's condition. These surveys went on to inform plans for a restoration project, enabling us to seek further funding.

We are thrilled to announce that in March 2024, our application was successful, securing a £130,000 grant from the Rewild London Fund. This funding will support the transformation of Queensmere, enhancing its ecological value and visual appeal by the creation of reedbeds, desilting, reprofiling the banks, and planting marginal vegetation. With the support of the Mayor of London in partnership with the London Wildlife Trust, we are grateful for the opportunity to improve Queensmere for all visitors and wildlife.

Queensmere Summer 2023



Footpath Restoration

Thanks to the generous donations made by visitors, the Friends of WPC and a grant from Southern Western Railway's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund, work to resurface and improve four main paths on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath was undertaken in autumn 2023.

A huge thank you to everyone who donated to make this work possible.

Get ready to snap!

Join our fun citizen science project with the Fixed Point Photography posts and help us monitor the ponds, build up a record of the seasonal changes and aid us in making the right decisions for their management.

The posts have been installed at each of the Commons' nine ponds and you just pop your phone in the cradle, take a photo of the view, and share on social media using the hashtag #WPCponds

**We'll track changes in wildlife and seasons,
all thanks to your photos!**

New Defib

Wimbledon High School has contributed to fundraising efforts for WPC through their 'Enterprise Fair', part of their 'Putting Young Minds to Work' scheme. The Fundraising Manager presented three projects for the pupils' consideration and they chose to support the purchase of a new defibrillator and first aid equipment. Our Fundraising Manager attended the fair in March this year to see the children making their presentation and to see the fair in action. Just over £1,000 was raised and a new defib for the Maintenance Centre has been purchased.

The Big Give Green Match Fund

WPC took part in the 2024 Big Give Green Match Fund to raise funds towards equipment to help us maintain our nationally important heathland. We needed to raise £5,000 which Big Give would then match. You did it in just 36 hours! **A huge thank you to everyone who donated!**

Dog walking on the Commons

Wimbledon and Putney Commons are a favourite spot for dog-walking with lots of open space and woodlands, mostly at a safe distance from busy roads.

As with all our visitors, we want you and your dog to enjoy the Commons and to do so responsibly and with consideration for others, but having a canine companion in tow does bring an added responsibility when walking here.

We urge dog owners to be mindful of their responsibilities and the impact their actions can have on these precious landscapes.

The PDSA estimated that between 2010 and 2022, the number of dogs in the UK dog increased from 8.3M to 10.2M, a rise of 23%. More telling is that the number of dogs increased by a million between 2020 and 2023 – pre and post-covid. Not surprising then that the UK has one of the highest pet-dog densities in the world. This increase is recognised by many open spaces and we certainly see the impact here.

As well as containing some rare and fragile habitats, the Commons are a shared space and every group needs to ensure they don't overly impact on any of the others, so for this reason we do have measures in place - some permanent requirements and some temporary restrictions - that help you to help us.

We love dogs here and it's important to us that you understand that there is a genuine reason for what we ask of you. Your support in ensuring the Commons remain somewhere for everyone to enjoy is vital.

Pick up after your dog - It is a requirement that you pick up after your dog on the Commons. As a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Commons hold significant ecological importance, boasting rare acid grassland and heathland, both of which require poor quality, low nutrient soil. Dog faeces contain nutrients that alters soil composition and encourages the growth of invasive plant species, threatening the biodiversity of the area, disrupting the natural balance and potentially the loss of native species. The "stick and flick" method of disposal that some open spaces advocate is not something that our habitats can tolerate so please pick up, dispose of the bag in one of the dog-waste bins, or take it home. DO NOT tie the bags of to a tree, a bush or leave it lying on the ground.

There are health risks associated with dog waste, and this is particularly relevant on the Playing Fields which are frequently used by children so picking up here is vitally important.

Walking on the golf course - The golf course is an integral part of the Commons' mosaic and in fact the course pre-dates the formation of the Commons as we know them today. The Green Keepers work hard to maintain the course in such good condition at a cost of around £250,000 a year. We understand that many of you are choosing to walk around the golf course given the wet conditions elsewhere on the Commons, but allowing dogs to run across the greens can damage the turf and disrupt play, affecting the enjoyment of golfers and potentially causing costly repairs so please keep off the greens.

For your own safety, be aware of golfers about to tee off or take a shot on the fairway. Golfers may not tee off if you are on the fairway, but walkers should not unnecessarily hold up play either. Please make every effort to get yourself and your dog out of their way as quickly as possible.

Keep your dog in sight and under effective control - If your dog is out of your sight, they could be up to all sorts of mischief - disturbing wildlife, bothering golfers, chasing cyclists or worrying horses, putting themselves and the riders in danger. Please keep your dog in sight at all times. Our Keepers will ask you to keep your dog on a lead if they are being a nuisance.

Don't let your dog disturb other visitors - Your dog may be friendly and harmless, and only want to say hello, but not everyone loves dogs, or is confident around them. Young children, the elderly or disabled can easily be knocked over by an excited dog.

Dogs on leads - From time to time, we will post notices asking dog-walkers to keep dogs on a lead or away from designated areas and out of the ponds, particularly during bird-nesting season (March to August) when we need to protect the breeding wildlife. Please adhere to the instructions on the signs.

Microchip and Tag your dog - It is a legal requirement for your dog to be tagged with your contact details, and also microchipped, when they are in a public place. You can be fined up to £5,000 if you don't. Here on the Commons, a tag means that should you and your dog become separated, we can reunite you quickly—if you use a dog-walking service, include their details too.

Don't let this be your dog



Flea and Tick Treatments

Would you be surprised to learn that the flea/tick spot on treatments used on dogs are polluting our ponds, rivers and waterways with chemicals that are toxic to aquatic life, such as the larvae of mayflies and dragonflies? These are species that serve as essential food sources for fish, birds and bats.

The Rivers Trust suggest that, based on Environment Agency data, the three insecticides used widely in these treatments are present in English rivers in concentrations that exceed accepted safe limits for wildlife.

The Trust also noted that "One of the most concerning pesticides found in pet medicines is imidacloprid, which is exceptionally potent, even at tiny concentrations. A single flea treatment of a medium-sized dog with imidacloprid contains enough pesticide to kill 60 million bees. It's a shocking revelation that should give every pet owner pause."

Studies indicate that these chemicals are finding their way into rivers from various routes, such as urine and faeces, and allowing treated dogs to swim in any waterway.

If you do use spot on chemicals, please make sure you follow the instructions about not allowing your dog in water for a period of time, or perhaps speak to your vet about a tablet form of treatment.