

Taking action



Monken Hadley for ever

William Boyes of the Monken Hadley Common Trust explains how the common is now protected by its own act of parliament.

Monken Hadley Common comprises about 70 hectares of mixed woodland and grassland on the northern edge of the London Borough of Barnet. It is the seventh biggest common in Greater London and the largest in private ownership.

It was vested in the churchwardens of the parish church of Monken Hadley in the County of Middlesex by the Enfield Chase Act 1777. Section 5 provided for the common to be held in trust for those having common rights at the time the act was passed.

Over 100 properties scattered around Monken Hadley and High Barnet had rights of common and, until grazing ceased in the early 1950s, many of the commoners took an active part in the management of the common under the direction of the churchwardens. However, the commoners' and churchwardens' involvement steadily declined and in 1981 a committee was formed to take over the management. In 1997, after the London Boroughs of Barnet and Enfield stopped

their annual grants, a charity was established to provide financial support.

Due to the lack of involvement of the commoners, who had the rule-making power under the act, the legal validity of the rules was uncertain and it was impossible to comply with certain provisions of the 1777 act. In 2019 the committee decided that piecemeal reform was impractical and a bill should be promoted in parliament to establish a modern structure for the ownership and management of the common. A consultation, outlining the problems and possible solutions, was undertaken.

Petition

In November 2019 a petition was lodged in parliament and, after committee hearings in both houses and numerous amendments, the bill became law on 28 April 2022.

The Monken Hadley Common Trust, a charitable incorporated organisation with a membership, has been registered to take ownership of the common. The act came into force on 1 December 2022, the day appointed by the churchwardens, and ownership has been transferred.

A primary object of the trust, written into the act and its constitution, is the preservation of the common as a place for public recreation and enjoyment, and it is now secured for ever from development. Sadly, the public roads across the common will prevent it from reverting to the peaceful rural enclave that it used to be.

This has been a protracted and expensive process. For further information please contact williamboyes@btinternet.com, or go to mhctrust.org.uk. □



Monken Hadley volunteers in the woods.