

Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park

<u>Meeting:</u>	The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park
<u>Date:</u>	Thursday 6 th July 2017
<u>Time:</u>	8:00 pm
<u>Place:</u>	Eastwood Community Centre, Western Approaches, Eastwood.
<u>Present:</u>	Members of The Friends of Cherry Orchard Park, members of the public, Councillor Dave Sperring, RDC Portfolio Holder for Environment Marcus Hotten, RDC Asst. Director Environmental Services

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair Jill Ewing welcomed Cllr. Sperring, Marcus Hotten, FOCOP members and members of the public to the meeting. The secretary acknowledged apologies from members who were unable to attend the meeting.

2. Minutes

There were no comments on the accuracy of the Minutes of the 2016 AGM, held on 2nd June 2016, previously distributed to members and available on the website, www.friendsofcherryorchardpark.org.

AT proposed that the Minutes should be accepted and signed.

DW seconded the proposal

The Minutes of the 2016 AGM were signed.

3. Chairperson's Report

The Chair read her report, copy attached to these Minutes. She invited anyone who would like to organise a park walk, or knew someone who would like to do so, to get in touch or speak to her after the meeting.

PD proposed that the Chair's report be accepted.

AT seconded the proposal.

The Chair's report was accepted.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer gave her report on the group's finances for the year, copy attached to these Minutes. The books were available for members' inspection.

JE proposed that the Treasurer's report be accepted.

VW seconded the proposal.

The Treasurer's report was accepted.

The meeting enjoyed a presentation by committee member Chris Taylor which explained where the new signage purchased by the group will be placed in the park and what it will look like. The presentation is available on the website.

5. Election of Officers

The Chair confirmed that the current officers were willing to continue in role in the forthcoming year as advised in the AGM 2017 information letter to members. Additional nominations were invited. None have been received.

DW proposed that the current Officers should continue in role.
BM seconded the proposal

The current Officers will continue in role.
Chairperson – Jill Ewing
Deputy Chairperson – Chris Taylor
Secretary – Penny Down
Treasurer – Mo Taylor

6. Subscription

The meeting confirmed the annual subscription at £5 for the forthcoming year.

7. Constitution

The meeting confirmed that no changes to the constitution are considered necessary

8. Update from MH and Cllr. Sperring

The Chair invited Marcus Hotten to speak to the meeting.

Marcus Hotten

MH thanked the Friends group for their support and also thanked them for the work being carried out by the Conservation Volunteer Group, confirming that RDC will support the group as far as possible. He emphasised that such groups are the way forward as council funding is cut further and further back each year. He went on to say that he recognised that the Friends group provides a good link with park users and that he welcomes all comments, (including complaints) and suggestions by email or telephone to customer services.

With regard to plans for the lake, put forward by Essex Wildlife Trust, MH explained that he is waiting for further information from EWT and has to work to their timetable in this matter. He anticipates that EWT will provide a rough draft map of their proposal and he would like the Friends to be involved in the consideration of these plans for the lake and surrounding area. He advised the meeting that any work agreed is unlikely to commence until October 2018.

MH went on to speak about the car park and confirmed that RDC will consult with Friends in regard to charging. MH will give Friends sight of the plans to enhance the car park when the new roundabout in Cherry Orchard Way is completed. At present designs and costs are being drawn up.
The meeting was shown photos of the work being carried out in Cherry Orchard Way.

The Chair thanked MH for his contribution and invited Cllr Sperring to speak to the meeting.

Cllr. Dave Sperring.

Cllr. Sperring reported that he and MH have endeavoured to honour the commitment made last year to support the Friends group in a financial environment that is very different to that in which the concept and creation of the park took place in 2001. He confirmed RDC's endeavour to synchronise the Open Spaces Team work plan with the Conservation Volunteers work days to maximise the efforts of both. He explained that he is meeting weekly with MH and that the park is on the agenda of each meeting. He also advised that he attended 'walk about' meetings in the park in the spring and early summer with MH and Friends committee members, during which works lists were compiled and that the work is in the process of being carried out by contractors and the Open Spaces team. It was noted that the majority of this work has now been completed.

Cllr. Sperring also advised the meeting that the Council have been able to purchase three parcels of land in Grove Wood thereby securing the continuous route through the park to Grove Road car park Rayleigh.

The Chair thanked Cllr Sperring. The meeting broke for refreshments.

9. Open Forum

Richard Bond (committee member and formerly managing RDC Open Spaces team) noted that the Friends group is becoming a group that takes a more active role in the development and care of the park, being a group that wants to help make a difference. He shared his thoughts that while many people may believe that the maintenance of the park should be the full responsibility of the council, the reality is that with government cuts to council funding they are no longer able to do as much as they would like. He thanked the Friends and volunteers who are supporting Rochford and is very pleased to note that RDC have kept to their word and are supporting the group. He advised that improvements have been carried out by volunteers with the support of the Open Spaces Team and contractors.

RD mentioned the following:

- Pooh sticks bridge badly eroded – now repaired
- Some of the bridges over ditches have been widened to allow access for disabled buggies, etc.
- The concrete bridge that goes onto farmland – this not a designated footpath, although clearly used for many years. It has now become so dangerous that access has been restricted and people use it at their own risk.
- Broken litter and dog waste bins are being replaced.
- Steps have been built from Edwards Hall park into COP.

RB finished by saying that as a Friends group our input is valued by RDC. Issues raised by members are logged and the Friends lobby RDC. Everyone wants to see a service delivered that unfortunately can't be what it was in the past. However, with the Friends and RDC working together we will continue to see improvements.

The matter of brambles along some of the paths was raised and it was **also noted that some paths had been mown but not all**. The meeting was advised that the fields would be cut for hay in the coming week and it was therefore not cost effective to send a mower in at the moment to cut more paths that will be part of the hay cut. The volunteer group will be cutting back brambles during upcoming work days. MH advised that RDC will endeavour to reclaim the lost paths in the Autumn with a side arm flail if necessary.

A member raised the point that COP appears to be a 'poor relation' of Hockley Woods as far as maintenance is concerned. MH explained that Hockley Woods has the benefit of additional grants from the Forestry Commission and Natural England, being designated Ancient Woodland and home to the rare Heath Fritillary butterfly. He explained that maintenance in Hockley Wood will also reduce now that CTEC workforce is no longer based near the wood.

RB suggested that it may be prudent to carry out survey work in the park as funding is sometimes available to support and protect a rare species.

The question of car park fees was raised and Cllr Sperring reiterated that both he and MH will be fighting for any income to be used in the park.

The meeting agreed that whereas in the past the park appeared to be loved and cared for, cuts in maintenance now give an appearance of neglect which encourages littering and vandalism. The volunteers, together with the Open Spaces team will continue to do what they can. The committee will look at possible grant funding. RDC confirmed they will support the committee in this area.

Regarding the new signage in the park – a question was raised about signage from Western Approaches. It was confirmed that no new signage outside the park was planned, and that the area to the south of the park boundary, Western Approaches and Repton Grove, fall in Southend Borough Council.

10. Close and Future Meetings

The Chair thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and for their input.

To confirm the date for the next Annual General Meeting - first week in July 2018 – to be confirmed Spring 2018.

COPIES of minutes available to: All Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, Marcus Hotten, Cllr Dave Sperring, and interested members of the public on the FOCOP website.

Attached:-

Chair's report 2017

Treasurer's report

Friends of Cherry Orchard Park - Annual General Meeting 2017 Chairman's Report

The last year has flown by and the Friends Committee have continued to pursue the aims of the organisation.

Aim: To encourage more people, from all sections of the community, to use the park and to enjoy its full potential and promote an atmosphere of mutual appreciation and respect.

Action: In our usual way we have promoted the Park through our web site and on Facebook and we should offer special thanks to Penny Down who, amongst other things, maintains the IT side of things.

We have organised and conducted advertised walks. All of these are popular and we would like to have more in the future. If anyone is interested in organising and leading a walk please let us know.

Our walks included the Autumn foraging walk led by guest Tim Chilcott a foraging and fungi expert, the New Year's Day walk and the Early Morning Bird Song walk led by Neil Sumner from Essex Wildlife Trust. We had to limit the places on the Birdsong walk and we did not advertise it widely as the places were snapped up very quickly by members.

The same can be said for the wreath making event in December where again the places were filled very fast and it's not surprising as it is such an enjoyable and fun event.

In July we supported the Kirste 5 run in the park. We had the gazebo up and were able to hand out information sheets to passers by as well as much appreciated water to the runners and walkers.

In August and May we held 'meet and greet' mornings just by the Cherry Orchard Way car park. These provided an opportunity to promote the park as well as the Friends and as a result we signed up quite a few new members. Also, as these events were advertised on Facebook it provided an opportunity for contacts to be made with a Badger Protection representative and Councillor Williams from RDC who is leading a project looking at how parks across the District can be made more financially self sufficient.

Aim: To protect, conserve and enhance The Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park as a place of freedom, recreation and enjoyment for the long term benefit of all sections of the local community

Action: Our Conservation Volunteer Group, led by Committee member Richard Bond, has gone from strength to strength in the last year. The numbers have increased and they have met regularly and carried out various tasks including tending the trees in the Orchard and cutting back and clearing the walk ways through and round the plantations.

We have now agreed with RDC that their Open Spaces team will attend and work in the park on the same day as the volunteers each month so that efforts and results are enhanced. Also, the RDC team can supply and use heavy equipment which is impossible for the volunteers. So, this is a real success story and we very much hope this arrangement will continue and be enhanced in the future.

We are now looking for a Conservation Group 'deputy leader' who could take responsibility for the group on days that Richard is not available. If you or someone you know is interested in taking this on please let us know.

While on the subject of Conservation, we have made contact with a company called Herpetologic. They advise Developers and Builders on their responsibilities for the wildlife that is at risk of being displaced as a result of developments. Two years ago a hibernaculum was constructed in one of the plantations to rehouse lizards and slow worms and they are very interested in repeating this process during the current developments across the locality. They are interested in gaining the support of the Friends and the Volunteers to create and then monitor habitats. We see this as a very interesting development and one which we hope the Volunteers will be willing to take on.

On another subject, one of our Committee Members, Matt Wedge, has conducted a thorough review of the park's litter and dog poo bins. (Some people get all the best jobs!!) His very detailed findings have led RDC to agree first to repair and now to replace the existing bins due to their poor condition and to add an extra bin somewhere near the lake. We will continue to push for this to actually happen and then for more bins, particularly at the east end of the old shooting range where there are frequently plastic bags left on the fence – so attractive eh!!

We continue to report issues to RDC as they arise across the park but with their limited resources, the urgency with which they receive attention depends on the risks. Therefore, some have been dealt with quickly and others remain on our issues log so they are not forgotten. It is disappointing at times that more cannot be done but we continue pressing RDC for action and attention.

Finally, under this heading – the Lake!

We have been bending the ear of RDC for a couple of years to try and improve the conditions in and around the lake as a wildlife habitat and general amenity. EWT have expressed an interest in doing some work there to improve things but we have waited and waited for something to happen.

So, great news. Last October, the dyke from the river to the lake was dug out and water started flowing into the lake once again – it hadn't happened for about 4 years!! We thanked RDC for the action and it turned out that they knew nothing about it but believed that the Dept. for the Environment people (they are responsible for rivers) had been working locally so it was very likely them.

Early this year we heard a rumour that the dyke had been dug out by a group of fishermen concerned about the conditions and hoping to improve the fishing.

To be honest we don't care really who did it. Whoever it was did a great job and the improvements were almost immediate with more and varied water fowl being observed there including Little and Great Crested Grebes and Coots and I daresay the fish are happier too!

Aim: To use its funds to support, maintain and increase the facilities in the park

At long last I can report that the long discussed and anxiously awaited signs have been delivered and at time of writing are waiting to be installed. The fingerposts are to be installed at 'Pooh Sticks

Bridge' and by the Cherry Orchard Way car park. They will provide directions and distances and we think they will be a real asset. We also have 4 marker posts which will be placed by and in New England Wood, by the river and the Orchard. Look out for them they should be in place very soon.

To act as a focal point for the involvement of the community in consultations with Rochford District Council concerning the park.

We continue to have excellent relationships with both the Officers and Members of RDC and they frequently attend our meetings. We have also joined them when they have conducted a 'walk in the park' to identify issues and actions required. A lot of the findings are 'aspirational' due to funding issues but we continue to press them to take action where possible.

You will also have seen that work has begun on the development of the Business Park in Cherry Orchard Way and now the roundabout, which will provide a new access into the park, is starting to take shape. It is inevitable that there will be overspill parking in the park and to deter this RDC will be obliged to introduce parking charges (they may not be that sorry as I daresay they want the income!). We have repeated assurances from them that we will be consulted on the charges and how they will work and that a strong case will be made that any revenue will be ploughed back into the Park. We will of course keep you posted.

Finally, during the last year, we have, sadly, said goodbye to Committee member Sandie Bevan-Jones who resigned due to domestic pressures. Sandie remains a keen Friend and, indeed, prepared and hosted our breakfast on the Bird Song Walk. We are all sorry to see Sandie go and wish her well in the future. On the other hand, we were delighted to welcome new Committee member Matt Wedge. Matt is a keen park user and brings lots of ideas and energy to the group and we are delighted to have him on board.

Jill Ewing
Chair

FRIENDS OF CHERRY ORCHARD PARK
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 6TH JULY 2017
TREASURERS REPORT

As our turnover is always low, it is not a requirement to have an annual audit, but as always, the relevant books and statements are available for you to inspect and they were audited in 2016.

Our membership currently stands at 181 active members and although this figure shows a slight decline on last year, subs are paid at various times throughout the year and therefore records are 'fluid' as to actual numbers. **Subscriptions have amounted to £523.17** (a slight increase on last year), and once again your preferred method of payment is Pay Pal.

Other income is generated throughout the year by events and various activities. In particular our wreath making morning in December was extremely well attended as was the Dawn Chorus Walk. This was followed by another of Sandie's hearty breakfasts at the Barn and whilst she has had to resign from our committee, we do thank her for all her hard work during her 'reign'

Further events are in the process of being arranged and will be advised to you by the usual method, i.e. website, Facebook and good old fashioned posters.

As happened last year, a donation in the sum of £70 was made to Essex Wildlife Trust Living Landscape at the suggestion of Mr Neil Sumner, in recognition of the contribution he made to the Dawn Chorus walk. Neil refused to accept payment for his time or expenses incurred. This sum was the profit from the breakfast provided following generous contributions received from participants.

I would advise you that our Bank balance currently stands at £1,214.08 which is significantly different from last year. The reason for this is the purchase of 2 finger posts, together with 4 waymarking posts at a total cost of £1573.20.

The committee agreed that the purchase would further enhance a visit to the park by way of these signs, which also advise distances between various points. The 'Friends' name has been printed onto these posts which may well encourage future memberships!

This concludes the Treasurer's report.