

## **Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park - Chairman's Report 2012**

**Bearing in mind the main topic of discussion at the last AGM**, in the summer months of 2011 we made every attempt to impress upon fishermen at the lake how important it was to respect the conservation end of the lake, take their litter home with them and fish safely and responsibly. This included two "Lake Days", full days at the lake with the Friends of Cherry Orchard Trailer, Heather and Helen from Rochford District Council and various Friends who came by to support the occasions. We were able to speak to many visitors to the park and it was an excellent opportunity to gauge their feelings and take their comments on board. We were able to distribute a very useful leaflet about the Lake, produced by Rochford District Council, as well as plans of the park and leaflets about other local parks and woods. Unfortunately our efforts made little difference to the way in which the lake is used by a few people who cause a disproportionate amount trouble.

Matters came to head this May when the amount of litter left by irresponsible fishermen and the presence of drugs meant that further action had to be taken in the hope of avoiding increased problems during the summer months. A decision was made by RDC to drastically reduce the number of fish in the Lake. We must remember that the lake was planned as a wildlife habitat and was not stocked by RDC. However many fish have been illegally dumped in the lake over the years. A fishing competition organised and run by Mark Hall Fisheries in association with RDC was held in June. 498 pounds of fish were caught, removed from the lake and taken to a new home. Later in the Autumn the remaining fish, still a large number, will be netted and taken away.

Plans are being made now to improve the lake area, by protecting the banks with reed impregnated coir matting and providing spaces where dogs can still access the water. Once Byelaws are adopted and an enforceable law is in place notices can be erected either banning fishing altogether or restricting it to a designated area. We all know however that there are those who rejoice in flouting any rule or regulation, we don't live in a perfect world.

**On a cold November morning** we met with representatives of Rochford District Council, in the car park off Cherry Orchard Way and with the help of hot tea, coffee, biscuits and lots of information we encouraged responsible dog walking. We were lucky to have 'Friends of Abandoned Dogs at Acresway there as well and were also able to offer micro chipping while you wait. It was a successful morning - and we learned an important lesson. Next time we do it we'll make sure to give away the free 'poo-bags' in the car park – BEFORE the dogs reach the grass.

**In December several friends braved the cold** to help plant trees in the new Community Traditional Orchard. Richard Bond, of the Woodland Team, believes it to be important to maintain tradition and will look to nominate a guardian Apple tree within the Orchard and we will be happy to join him in a yearly Wassailing (a ceremony held around the 17th January to promote a good harvest which includes a little singing and Cider!) We also hope to celebrate Apple day on the 21st of October with an official opening. Richard has provided us with detailed information about the species of trees planted which can be found on the website.

**In March we supported Rochford District Council's** "Preserve our Parks and Open Spaces" initiative at the Grove Road Car Park. The weather was kind and many local residents and Friends of Cherry Orchard Park called by to see what was happening. A number of dog owners took advantage of the free micro chipping offer and many bicycles were tagged too. The local mounted police attended and rode through the park. Hawkwell Fire service was on hand to talk to adults and children about safety in the park.

**We have been involved in two Litter Picking initiatives.** The first, earlier in the year was part of the Love Where you Live campaign and involved members of Rochford Youth Council, one of whom was Ben Coombes who recently carried the Olympic Torch in Southend! There will be more youth volunteers litter

picking in New England Woods at the end of July. It's good to know that so many young people do care and are keen to make a difference. Then, on a sunny afternoon in May, armed with plenty of plastic bags and litter pickers Friends joined forces with volunteers from MacDonald's, Rochford District Council and SITA Refuse & Recycling We cleared litter from hedgerows, meadows, paths and round the lake.

**For the committee, I have to say that this has been a frustrating year.** At recent committee meetings we have again discussed the problems of the Lake, the lack of signage in the park and the long delay in adopting Byelaws for the park. There seemed to be no answers. Our good friends Heather Meggison and Helen Galley of RDC, were unable to give us any further information.

Finally our frustration and disappointment reached a point where we felt that our relationship with Rochford District Council had seriously deteriorated. We learned, through the local press, that plans were in place for a Pet Memorial Garden and tenders were invited for a Burger Bar and Ice-cream Van in the Car Park. The reaction of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park was fast and furious, many of you emailing us for information we did not have.

The committee met and agreed to write to all the Cllrs involved with the park, questioning the lack of consultation and asking for a meeting. We must give RDC credit where it is due. A meeting was very quickly arranged with Cllr Steptoe, portfolio holder for the environment, Richard Evans, Head of Environmental Services and Marcus Hotten, Open Spaces Manager.

Four members of the committee, myself, John, Nick and Penny attended the two hour meeting where we were able to go through several areas of concern, the greatest being the lack of consultation. It was a fruitful meeting and we are glad that we now have some answers for you and a positive way forward. We hope that our previous good relationship with RDC is back on track and a new, twice yearly meeting with Cllr Steptoe, Richard Evans and Marcus Hotten has been set up.

**I would now like to move on to the Pet Memorial Garden.** Your reaction to the news in the Evening Echo was immediate and we were disappointed that there was no proper consultation. However, by the time we met with Cllr Steptoe, Richard and Marcus, the decision had been made. There will be a Pet Memorial Garden in the Park, close to the Car Park off Cherry Orchard Way. (Outline plan available.) We understand that it will take the form of an informal or wild flower meadow with trees and benches, enclosed by fence or hedges. We are assured that there will be NO burials of animals in the park. A capital sum of £25,000 has been allocated for the garden. An additional sum of £2,500 has been allocated for maintenance. We know that many of you will be disappointed to hear this news; however we feel that to continue to oppose the decision now would be a waste of our time and energy. As a committee we have learnt a lot and will be keeping you up to date with future plans hopefully before the Evening Echo publishes them. We will be keeping a very keen eye on the development, use and maintenance of the Pet Memorial Garden.

**To turn to the invitation to tender for the provision of a Burger Van** and/or icecream van in the park, I've no doubt you will be glad to hear that there was no response.

**Finally, it seems that Byelaws are at last on the horizon.** We have been very pleased to be consulted and would like to thank everyone who emailed with their thoughts on the matter. The formal response from Friends of Cherry Orchard Park has been sent to Rochford District Council and we hope it will help to inform their discussion when the Legal Department considers the adoption of Byelaws for the whole area. A copy of our response was also sent to all members of our group. If you haven't received yours email Penny.

**I would like to thank everyone** who has supported the Friends over the last year and would encourage anyone who hasn't joined yet to do so this evening and help to make a difference.

Thank you.