

## **Licence Hearing 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015 re: application for an events licence in the park.**

### **Statement from The Friends of Cherry Orchard Park.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Country Park at this hearing. The Friends currently have 297 members and we are here today to represent their views and concerns.

First of all we have some issues with the way this application has been handled.

The notices appeared in the Park at the end of November – not a particularly busy time in the park given the weather conditions and of course people getting busy in December making preparations for Christmas. I understand that local residents were not notified directly and it was mainly due to the leaflets delivered by the Friends that people first became aware that an application had been made. I suspect that there may well be other interested parties eg Keddies and the cottages across CO Way that may still not know about it. Finally, was a deadline of the 24<sup>th</sup> December really necessary? How many officers were in post on that day to deal with the objections and was any consideration given to possible delays in the Christmas post.

So... As far as the application is concerned, we are wholly opposed to this unrestricted license application being granted. As far as the licensing objectives are concerned (section 18 of the application)

**Crime and disorder** – at large scale events, particularly where they continue after dark, there will be an elevated risk of

- vandalism to private property but also to the park itself. There are 144 young fruit trees in the relatively new Orchard plus 420 recently planted saplings, bought with a grant from the Forestry Commission, which were then donated by the Western Front Association, and planted last November to commemorate the fallen from the local area. Both these plantings lie within the proposed license area
- there are also risks of littering and unruly behaviour

#### **Public safety**

- regular park users may be at risk from vehicle movements etc across the proposed area
- the access to the car park in Cherry Orchard Way is a weak spot and added congestion could cause accidents

#### **Public Nuisance**

- users of the park will have their access severely restricted particularly the residents of Rochford as they need to use the car park in CO Way to access the park
- loud music will clearly be unwelcome to both users and residents (also we understand that at a previous event, there was no-one available at RDC at the weekend to take or action complaints about noise etc, litter or parking)
- wildlife would be adversely impacted by large numbers of people gathering around their habitats and potentially disturbing them. Again this risk would be elevated at night.

We must also emphasise here the potential threat to wildlife. The proposed license area has a number of Badger Setts within it and at the edge of it –Frank Last of the Essex Badger Protection Group states, and I quote from his report xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Also at the edge of the area we have had numerous sightings of Water Voles. These also enjoy legal protection and are the most endangered mammal in GB. The Friends believe we have a responsibility to protect these and all the creatures who have made the park their home.

I'd like to move on now to some, what may be called, confusing elements of this application.

I'd like to refer please to Section 5 of the application (page 4.8) which states 'This is a Local Government owned park where it is likely that we will want to hold community related events ie plays, country shows, live music events etc.

The Friends are happy with the concept of 'community related events' provided they are just that. But we are struggling to see exactly how 2 days of amplified music for potentially 14 hours a day with up to 5000 people camping in the park and with the facilities to buy bacon butties at 3o'clock in the morning can be described as community related. Speaking to people in the park and some of the local residents living adjacent to the park I know that this is everyone's major concern and I am yet to find anyone who supports it.

The potential risk of unruly and loud behaviour caused by alcohol and drugs, which are inevitably linked to this type of event, is very real – why would RDC want to take these risks in this - quoting again from section 5 which is taken from your own website - '200 acre beautiful wildlife park which continues to mature, providing unique recreational facilities for residents and visitors. The woodland, lake, open grassland and network of connecting paths and bridleways also provide habitat for a huge range of animals and plants.' I find that confusing.

**Incidentally, I said up to 5000 people and I think that must be right but is that number specified anywhere in the application and if so where? I note that at section 19 of the application there is no 'additional' fee so must assume the limit would be 4999. Is this right? By the way I also note that the Declaration part of the application has not been completed – is this acceptable or might it invalidate the application?**

There is no doubt that the lack of any restriction in this application ie 24 hours a day, 7 days a week has added to people's worries, caused confusion and been the cause of mis-information..

The occasional references to music festivals and amplified music is the real worry. We know that there are people who would be keen to see such an event as we were approached about one last year. This was a proposal for the Friends to support a music festival in the park involving 3 separate stages, overnight camping plus all that goes with such an event. The proposed location was the meadow adjacent to the pumping station and it sits clearly within this application area.

I want to think about the possible implications if such an event were to go ahead.

The only access for vehicles to this area is from the CO Way car park so heavy lorries carrying fencing, staging, amplification and sound system equipment, scaffolding, marquees etc would have to drive nearly half a mile through open countryside to the proposed venue with all the potential to damage possibly sodden ground. On top of that you need refreshment vans, toilets etc etc. And then there's the 4999 attendees.

How will they arrive? Again the only way would be through the access at Cherry Orchard Way which incidentally is width limited. The potential for congestion there would be exacerbated by the need to check for tickets, conduct searches (as per the conditions laid down by the police), apply wristbands and check for alcohol. I suspect the traffic queue will stretch back to the A127! Also, where will the 2000+ cars go?

And then they all have to leave again. And if God forbid there was a major incident how would the Emergency Services fair as their only access is via the same route.

On mis-information - in an article in the Southend Echo on Tuesday the reporter has stated 'the

council has applied for amplified music to be used at big events in the park but only for 4 nights of the year and no overnight camping would be allowed'. Could you confirm whether this information was provided by someone at RDC or has it been misreported?

Richard Evans is also quoted as saying 'events will certainly not be run overnight' but is camping treated as an event? Again I am confused. I have not seen anything about camping in writing. But at item 4.68 there is a note from Martin Howlett the Acting Environmental Health Manager at RDC which clearly requests the addition of a condition that there be no more than 3 amplified music-led events, totalling a maximum of 4 days in any calendar year. I take this to mean that at least one of these events would be overnight which infers camping would be allowed.

So what do we the Friends want to see happen next

Well we would like to see these conditions applied to this application.

1. We would like to see more detail applied to the term 'community events' to ensure that future applications fall within this criteria.
2. We would like to see the area, covered by the application, reduced. We have a proposal for an area in which we think it would be reasonable to hold 'community' events. (See map)
3. We do not believe 'amplified music' falls within the 'community event' description, but if it does, then it should only be permitted for a much shorter period for example no more than four hours between 14.00 to 22.00.
4. No overnight events or camping. We cannot see any requirement for this at any 'community event' and therefore the overnight refreshment application (section 14) should be refused.
5. Limit pre-arranged attendance to 1000.
6. Clear information to be provided for all residents (both Rochford and Southend) and the Friends, on how to register complaints, and get action taken during an event.

I'm sorry to have taken so much of your time but the Friends are very passionate about the Park and it's well being but I am now on the home straight!

Cherry Orchard Country Park is a wonderful place. The number of people enjoying it's benefits are clearly increasing as we can see from our own membership numbers and the crowded car park on most days of the week.

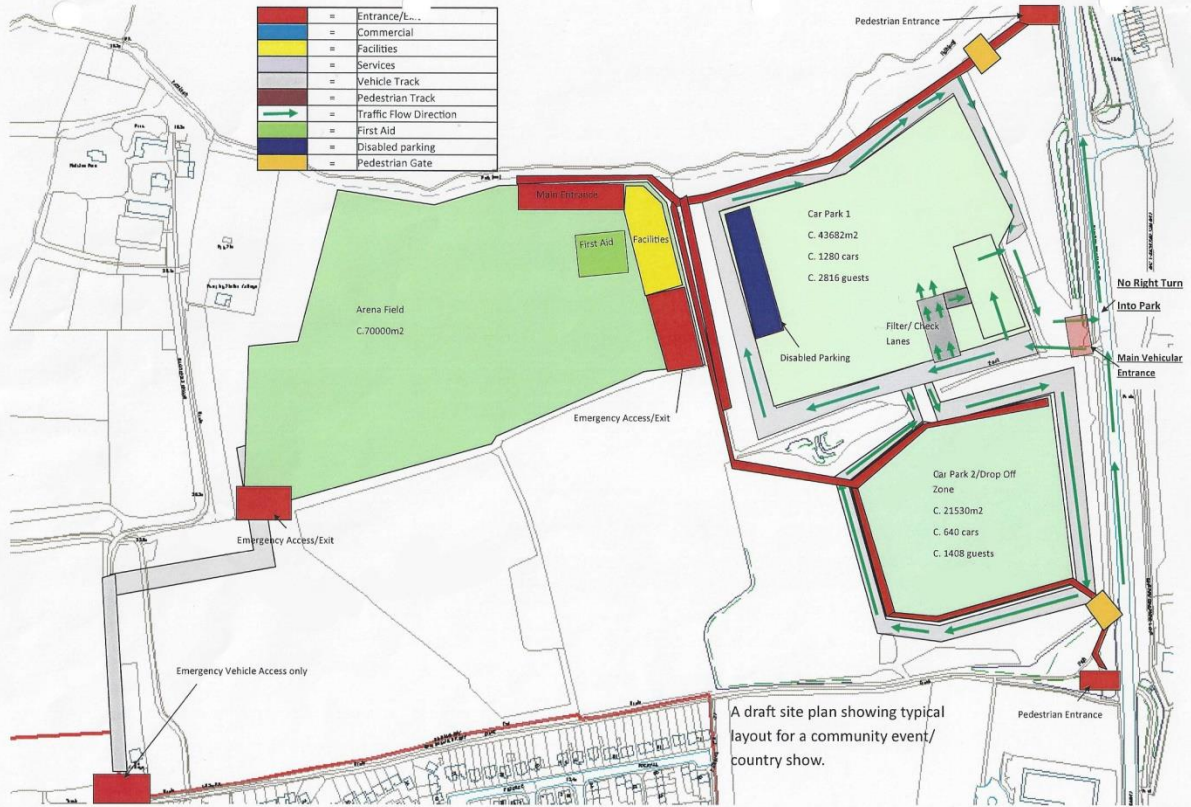
There may be a place for small or modest scaled community events in this unique Country Park but let's remember this is a Country Park and not a Showground!!

Let's therefore leave the music festivals to Hylands Park in Chelmsford, and 'Proms in the Park' is wonderfully catered for in Priory Park just a couple of miles up the road and Aztec Events hold wonderful events at Garon's Park and other locations nearby.

The Friends had assumed that profit was the motive for this application (in fact they had been told as much by someone from RDC) so it is very encouraging to see that Richard Evans was quoted in the Echo as saying 'The objective (of this application) is to benefit the wider community, not as a profit making operation'. If this is truly the case then we would respectfully request that the Committee take account of the community as represented here and address our concerns and objections in a positive way.

Finally, Rochford District Council Members and Officers should be justifiably proud of what they have created in this wonderful Country Park and the way it is lovingly maintained and cared for. We look to you to continue to guard it jealously and ensure it retains it's unique and tranquil ambience.

RDC proposed plan for events in Cherry Orchard Country Park.



Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park License Application Area

  FOCOP preferred community event site.

