

Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park

<u>Meeting:</u>	The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park
<u>Date:</u>	11 th July 2012
<u>Time:</u>	7:30 pm
<u>Place:</u>	Grove Wood School.
<u>Present:</u>	The Committee of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park Members of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park Members of the public
<u>Copy of Minutes to:</u>	Members of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park The Cherry Orchard Park Advisory Committee:- <i>Cllr Mike Steptoe, Cllr James Cottis, Cllr Heather Glynn, Cllr David Merrick, Cllr Mrs P Aves</i> Richard Evans, Head of Environmental Services Marcus Hotten, Open Spaces Manager The minutes will be published on the Friends website.

MINUTES

Meeting started: 7:30 pm

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman, Graham Hutchinson, welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting and thanked them for coming. He also thanked Mr Green, Headteacher at Grove Wood School for generously allowing the group to use the Sports Hall for this meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Richard A. Amner, Jennifer Derby, Helen Galley, Gordon & Ruby Grout, Marcus Hotten, Richard Morley, Cllr Mike Steptoe.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th June, 2011 were confirmed and signed as a true copy.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

The secretary, Penny Down, addressed the following matters arising from the minutes.

Item 7 New Areas of Focus – Publishing a website. The group now has a website and this can be accessed at www.friendsofcherryorchardpark.org.

Item 7 New Areas of Focus – The Car Park at the Western end of the park. The meeting heard that Rochford Council have decided to upgrade the car park at Grove Road, from which footpaths lead into the park. A Landscape Architect has been appointed and is in the process of drawing up the improvement and access plans which will make entering the park from the Rayleigh end much easier. It was noted that the car park at the eastern end of the park is a temporary car park and that when plans for Cherry Orchard Way are finalised and RDC knows where the roundabout will be situated along the proposed dual carriage way a permanent car park will be located in the park with a better grade permanent surface. Since opening in November 2011 the car park surface has been repaired twice and there are plans for further improvements to take place. Further information regarding parking charges was received. It is understood that parking charges will not be introduced at Cherry Orchard Park, though there will be a charging system on week days at Hockley Woods. This is in part to discourage employees of a local business from taking a large proportion of the spaces for the whole day so that visitors to the woods have difficulty parking.

Item 8 – any other business – Rights of Way

It was noted that the metal girders at the entrance to New England Wood have now been moved away and there is free access. Additionally bridges have been placed over the ditches in the field behind Fleming's Farm and the concrete bridge across the stream behind Blatches Farm is easier to use as the metal cross bars have been removed following a safety inspection by the engineer.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman gave a report on the group's activities during the past year. A copy of his report is attached to these minutes.

GH took the opportunity to thank everyone who has supported the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park over the last year. He emphasised that the feedback received from members has been invaluable as the group needs to represent everybody's views, dog walkers, riders, fishermen, rambles.

Cllr Walker thanked GH for a very comprehensive report that covered everything. Cllr Walker proposed that the report be accepted. The proposal was seconded by Tony Capp.

The Chairman's Report 2012 was accepted.

The Chairman added the groups grateful thanks to Cllr David Merrick, without whom the group would not exist. GH explained that Cllr Merrick was taken ill recently. The group would like to take this opportunity to wish him a very speedy recovery to good health.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer Nick Cornish reported to the meeting and gave precise details of the group's income and expenditure for the year together with membership figures and commented on the success of this year's membership renewals in January. NC advised that membership has doubled over the last year and now stands at 136.

NC described the group's contributions to the park this year including four benches made by the Woodlands Team using timber felled in Hockley Woods and a variety of bird nesting boxes and bat roosting boxes purchased from HMP Bullwood Hall. He noted that the group wish to provide more benches in the coming year and that John Wilkinson will liaise on behalf of HMP Bullwood Hall with Richard Bond of the Woodlands Team to agree suitable sites for the boxes.

NC finished by advising the meeting that the current balance in the Friends Of Cherry Orchard bank account is £702.06p.

The Chairman, GH, thanked NC for his report and 100% attendance at committee meetings. GH proposed that the Treasurers Report should be accepted. Vice Chair John Wilkinson seconded the proposal.

The Treasurer's Report 2012 was accepted.

6. Election of Officers

The Chairman GH gave thanks to the Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary for their sterling support during the past year.

The Vice Chair gave a vote of thanks to the Chair and praised his commitment to the values of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park and the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Heather Meggison, Helen Galley, Richard Bond and Geoff Dawson of Rochford District Council who have been so supportive to the group throughout the year.

Standing officers were re-elected unopposed, details below.

Chairman: Graham Hutchinson, nominated by Penny Down, seconded by David Wells

Vice Chairman: John Wilkinson, nominated by Graham Hutchinson, seconded by Ruth Wright

Treasurer: Nick Cornish, nominated by Heather Meggison, seconded by Chris Walker

Secretary: Penny Down, nominated by Graham Hutchinson, seconded by Tim Longley

7. Subscription

The annual subscription of £5:00p per household is unchanged and was confirmed for the forthcoming year.

8. Constitution

It was confirmed that no changes are necessary to the constitution agreed last year.

9. The Forthcoming Year

Vice Chair John Wilkinson outlined the groups objectives for the coming year as follows:-

On-going:

- To continue to develop our relationship with Rochford District Council with an emphasis on useful consultation
- To continue to be the eyes and ears in the park for Rochford District Council, especially at a time when staff are under pressure since the company holding the contract for grounds maintenance in the district went into administration.
- To continue to support RDC by taking part in education initiatives in the park
- To increase membership and provide a broad base for consultation

New areas of focus were discussed at the recent meeting with Cllr Steptoe, Richard Evans and Marcus Hotten

- To mark the proposed route of the new bridleway within the park in a temporary manner whilst continuing to monitor the progress of the application for the new bridleway
- To monitor the progress of the byelaws for the park and look forward to them being adopted in the near future.
- To support RDC by designing temporary guidance notices for visitors and identifying useful sites for these notices.
- To support the use of authorised volunteer groups within the park for such activities as litter picking, fence mending etc.
- To continue to increase the facilities for those less able to walk by providing more benches and to support initiatives introduced by the council to improve disabled access to the park, such as:-
 - Arranging a Disability Discrimination Assessment
 - Arranging a Health and Safety check
 - Introducing an easy access path and improving existing footpaths.

10. Any Other Business

The meeting was given information about the Rochford District Council Have Your Say group and reminded that there is a link to the Have Your Say page on the website. Members were encouraged to sign up to the group.

Fire Service Training.

Cllr Walker asked whether the Fire Service Training due to take place by the Lake on the 12th July, will take place, taking into consideration the condition of the adjacent field following the recent very wet weather.

Richard Bond, Woodlands Team, advised that they would be inspecting the field prior to committing to the training.

11. Future Meetings

The date of the Annual General Meeting next year will be

Wednesday 3rd July 2013 – venue to be arranged.

Annual General Meeting closed at 8:15 pm

Following the Annual General Meeting the floor was opened for general discussion

Notes taken of the discussion following the AGM.

The question was asked:

Does Rochford District Council have any future plans for a visitors centre or café in the park?

Heather Meggison (Senior Environmental Assistant, RDC) was able to advise that although initially it was hoped to provide some kind of centre it is not at present on the horizon due to financial restrictions.

The meeting discussed the sum of money being spent on the Pet Memorial Garden, when the basic infrastructure needs of the park, footpaths, bridleway, drainage are not being addressed and the Woodlands Team are so stretched and short of staff. It was agreed that this is very disheartening for the Team.

The meeting went on to discuss priorities in the park, noting that it was important to separate those that were NEEDED from those that would be NICE TO HAVE.

It was agreed that it would be useful for RDC to know what is needed in the park and that Friends should be more positive about this in their approaches to RDC agreeing that basic infrastructure is of greatest importance if there is going to be a park worth developing.

In this respect it was felt that footpaths and the bridleway are of primary importance and that more benches to give the less able a more comfortable time in the park are essential. The meeting learnt however, that not all councillors support benches in the park.

A vote of confidence in the Woodlands Team and admiration for the work they achieve in difficult circumstances was expressed and this was supported by the whole meeting.

The suggestion was received to use a "Species Seen" board in the park, maybe taking the form of a blackboard maintained by local school children. This was felt to be a very positive suggestion. The theme was taken up by other members who would like more information about the trees and plants in the park.

Graham Hutchinson agreed to arrange further walks that will take in the newer plantations and invite his brother who has expertise in this area. Richard Bond volunteered to be involved as well and the walks should prove an enjoyable and educative experience. GH went on to emphasise his wish to encourage local schools to become more involved in the park and looked forward to including them in planned events.

GH asked for suggestions for future events in the Country Park. Apple Day was suggested, with maybe a show of vintage tractors. A small country fair was discussed, an idea for the future when access to

the park is better. The meeting was positive about this but felt that the infrastructure in the park needs to be better.

Once again the question of litter round the lake was raised, together with the problem that fires are often lit and left burning. Cans and empty wine and vodka bottles are regularly collected. It appears that most of the problem is caused by young people camping round the lake and in other places in the park. It was felt that there must be some kind of patrol in the park to protect it. The question was asked, what can park users, and those that live in the park, do.

Heather Meggison informed the meeting that complaints must be phoned through.

It was suggested that signs giving appropriate contact numbers should be displayed in the park. Out of hours calls to the Police go to Chelmsford and a postcode is necessary. When Emergency calls (999) are received the services are able to use a mobile phone signal to triangulate the position of a caller to within a few metres.

It was stressed that whether or not there are the resources to instantly respond to any phone call, it is important to register a complaint to build up a record of incidents that can be used to plan future development in the park, whether it be by RDC or the Police.

A question was asked regarding the reptile survey carried out last year, and whether any results have been published.

Richard Bond confirmed that a report was available and he will provide the group with the results of the survey.

The meeting was advised that there are adders in the park near Flemings Farm and that a dog has been bitten during the last couple of years.

A question was asked regarding the group's purchase of bird boxes. As there have been sightings of barn owls, and a barn owl nesting and successfully raising chicks last year just outside the park, are owl boxes amongst those purchased? It was confirmed that owl boxes have been purchased.

The question was raised as to why there was no Park Ranger for Cherry Orchard Park. The meeting heard that this was again a question of resources and finances.

The meeting heard that the Essex Wildlife Trust use volunteer wardens at ten of their nature reserves. They mostly live close to the reserves and develop a feeling of ownership of them. They receive training on conservation matters etc.

The following discussion included the insurance issues and the possibility of volunteers coming into a conflict situation. The meeting agreed that confrontation should be avoided and that any volunteer wardens should have an 'eyes and ears', monitoring role, and be prepared to pitch in and help with conservation work. It should **not** be a regulating or controlling role, just a presence in the park.

A show of hands indicated that the majority of those present would be willing to take on a role of volunteer warden. The meeting felt that this was an idea worth taking back to the council especially bearing in mind the positive reception to working with volunteer groups received at the recent meeting with Cllr Steptoe, Richard Evans and Marcus Hotten.

The matters raised at this meeting will be discussed at the next committee meeting.

Cllr Walker thanked the committee for their hard work on behalf of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park.

Meeting closed at 9:00 pm.

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.