

Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park

Meeting: The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park

Date: Thursday 18th July 2019

Time: 8:00 pm

Place: Eastwood Community Centre, Western Approaches, Eastwood.

Present: FOCOP Committee: Richard Bond, Penny Down, Jill Ewing, Chris Taylor, Mo Taylor, Matt Wedge
Rochford District Council: Portfolio Holder Environment - Cllr Arthur Williams, Principle Open Spaces Officer - Adam Aldridge
Members of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park
Members of the local community and park users.

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the 9th Annual General Meeting of The Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country park.

2. Minutes

Member Catherine Welch proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th July 2018, (previously distributed to members and available on the website), be accepted and signed as a true record.

Member Anne Thurgood seconded the proposal.

The minutes were signed.

3. Chair's Report

The Chair gave her report for the year.

The Chair began by highlighting the excellent working relationships enjoyed with Rochford District Council and noted that it was through this that the Friends had been able to achieve so much.

The Chair invited Matt Wedge to speak to the meeting on his work for the group searching out and applying for grants to provide all-weather paths, improving access to the park for all. MW advised that in the course of the year the group has applied for two grants, both of which were successful. FOCOP 's bid to be included in the Tesco Bags of Help vote in local stores received the largest number of votes, and the group has been awarded £4,000 to be spent on improving the path from the Eastwood Rise entrance to New England Wood, enabling more people, especially those with mobility problems, to see the bluebells. MW explained that the group has received £3,000 so far and the final £1,000 will be forthcoming when the work is completed. Tesco requires the work to be finished by the end of November.

MW went on to advise the meeting that, working with committee member Richard Bond, a further bid was submitted to Veolia for pathway improvements. This was also successful and FOCOP has been awarded £27,000. Members of the committee are now working with RDC ensuring that compliance documentation is prepared and signed in timely fashion. To demonstrate value for money the work must go out to tender, three quotations being necessary. MW explained that this project must also be completed by the end of November. A FOCOP/RDC working group will lead and co-ordinate both projects.

The Chair thanked MW for his work on the grant applications and congratulated him on the success of his efforts.

The Chair invited CT to explain where the new/improved paths would be.

Using slides CT identified the short length of pathway from the Eastwood Rise entrance to the park to New England Wood, and the location of an intended new pathway that will lead from the car park to the bridleway at the junction with Blatches Chase. CT explained that this is a considerably longer path and the amount that can be completed within the grant budget will depend on the surface type.

CT asked RB to speak further on this point.

RB explained that the funding has been made available because FOCOP is trying to achieve inclusive accessibility for all. He went to say that while a cheap surface may mean that more pathway can be laid, this would not be a good decision for the park. He advised that the material used will have to provide a path that is maintainable, appropriate for a country park, looks good and in the long term is better value for money. RB further advised that some of the work will be undertaken by FOCOP Conservation Volunteers as well as youth groups such as the scouts.

The Chair thanked CT and RB and moved on to the significant contribution made by the FOCOP Conservation Volunteer Group.

RB, the Volunteer Project lead, went on to speak about the outstanding contribution to the park of the Volunteer Group, and thanked them for their hard work listing their efforts in the orchard, litter picking, cutting back and clearing, resurrecting a pond that has been on the site since at least 1755 and relocating into the park some rare wild orchids. He pointed out that volunteers have contributed over 750 hours of work, which at the minimum wage, is a contribution to RDC in excess of £6,000.

RB advised that there are now 36 regular volunteers, who come whenever they are able to the monthly work parties. He advised that the green winged orchids are becoming established and flowered this year. He also thanked all those who came to the Keep Britain Tidy litter picking campaign which was very successful, clearing the park of several bags of litter, insulations boards, a printer, a car battery and much more.

RB advised the meeting that FOCOP member and regular conservation volunteer, Ron Webb, sadly passed away in February. Volunteers have contributed to the sponsorship of one of the Trafalgar Oak Trees in his memory.

RB said that he would be interested in supporting a group of younger people (young adults/teens and twenties) who would be interested in volunteer work in the park and asked people to spread the word and get in touch so that he can gauge the level of interest.

The Chair thanked RB.

An estimate of the value of the grants, the work done by the Volunteers plus items supplied to the park by the Friends Group so far is in the region of £40,000.

The Chair reported that there has been no progress regarding Essex Wildlife Trust's plans for improvement to the lake environment. However, AA was pleased to advise that this week he has received an email from EWT indicating that the plans were still live. AA added that a meeting is being planned to which FOCOP representatives will be invited.

The Chair finished her report and thanked the committee members for their hard work and support.

PD proposed that the Chair's report be accepted.

Anju Lund seconded the proposal.

The Chair's report was accepted.

The Chair's report is attached and is available on the group's website.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, MT read her report and advised that the relevant books and statements were available for inspection at the meeting.

The Treasurer further advised that the group's current bank balance stands £4,714.26 and includes £3,000 from Tesco Bags of Help.

JE proposed that the Treasurer's report be accepted.

Val Whyley seconded the proposal.

The Treasurer's report was accepted.

The Treasurer's report is attached and is available on the group's website.

5. Election of Officers

The Chair reminded members that, as previously advised, the current officers are happy to continue in their roles unless nominations for positions were received by the closing date of 27th June. The Chair informed the meeting that no nominations have been received.

Sandie Bevan-Jones proposed that the current officers continue in their roles.

Catherine Welch seconded the proposal.

The meeting agreed that the current officers will continue in their roles.

6. Subscription

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

7. Constitution

The Chair confirmed that no changes to the constitution are considered necessary.

BREAK FOR REFRESHMENTS AND INFORMAL CONVERSATION

9. Open Forum & to confirm priorities

AA opened this section of the meeting by thanking Friends of Cherry Orchard Park and the Conservation Volunteers for all their hard work. He welcomed questions from the floor.

Clr Williams seconded Adams comments, again thanking the group for their contribution to the park saying that it was very much appreciated by RDC.

Fishing in the lake

The meeting discussed the question of fishing in the lake and the fact that RDC's website clearly states that fishing is not permitted. AA described the difficulty in policing the bylaws with such a small open spaces staff, who look after 56 open spaces in the Rochford District. However, he looks forward to working with Essex Wildlife Trust and a new RDC group looking at the future for the park. This new group will include representatives of FOCOP and will be looking at all the possibilities, including deterring fishing or the possibility of working with a partner to manage fishing. He advised that the lake will continue to be netted once a year under licence. RB added that lakes will always attract both positive and negative use. A request from the floor asked again for a litter bin on the bridleway close to the lake. AA advised that the number of bins can't be increased, though it is possible to move them to more useful places if necessary.

Bylaws

A question from the floor. What are the bylaws, why are they not available in the park? AA advised that the bylaws have been under review for some time and this is something the new working group will be looking at.

Access to the park and the lake.

A comment from the floor, that access to the park from Flemings Farm Road has been reduced since the bollards were put in preventing cars from parking. Also, at 9 Acres there is a well managed fishing lake so it should be possible to make the lake more secure thereby deterring irresponsible visitors while allowing responsible anglers access. AA confirmed that Flemings Farm Road, parking along it and access to the Byway to Gusted Hall comes under Essex Highways. JE pointed out that the lake at 9 Acres is on private fenced land with limited access . It would not be feasible to fence off the lake in the park.

Improved access to the west end of the park.

A short discussion about the possibility of working with Southend Council to improve access from Edward's Hall Park will be continued at the new working group.

Litter and fast food outlets

The meeting discussed the amount of fast food litter in the car park coming from KFC and McDonalds. Cllr. Williams will contact McDonalds, who have worked with RDC in the past, and ask them to consider a litter picking session in the park.

Grass cutting

AA advised that a hay cut should begin in the next week weather permitting.

Priorities for the coming year.

The Chair advised that the group will continue the work of the last 9 years, continue to raise funds, continue to support the activities of the volunteer group and also aim to boost membership to give the group a louder voice.

The Chair thanked Adam Aldridge and Cllr. Williams, members of FOCOP and members of the public for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussions.

Finally, she reminded everyone of two events as follows:-

Wild Woods Day – Hockely Woods, 20th July 2019, 11am – 4pm.

Kirste 5mile run – meet and cheer the runners by the lake, 21st July 11am.

10. Future Meetings & Close

To confirm the date for the next Annual General Meeting - July 2020.

COPIES of these minutes available to: All Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and interested members of the public on the FOCOP website.

Friends of Cherry Orchard Park - Annual General Meeting 2019

Chairman's Report

Yet another year has flown past and I'm delighted to be here with you again to report on what has proved to be an exciting and interesting year. The park remains a beautiful and mainly tranquil haven and if we take a moment to reflect on the Aims of our Organisation I think we are doing pretty well.

As a Friends Group we would not be able to do anything of significance without the continued support and backing of the land owners, Rochford District Council. We continue to enjoy excellent working relationships with them. A representative attends our meetings and wherever possible keeps us informed of plans and developments. We work together to try and resolve issues and we are working towards agreeing the priorities for using the limited funds they have at their disposal. A really positive example of working together for the Community.

Last year I reported that we had decided, in line with the results of an earlier survey, to progress a significant piece of work to improve access across the park through the improvement of paths. To support this we decided to have a go at applying for grant funding. Committee member Matt Wedge agreed to take the lead on this on our behalf and I will hand over to him now to report on progress.

Please refer to minutes for MW's input.

As you can tell we are very excited about this project and delighted at the success of our bids. Of course, there is more to do and we shall be looking at what opportunities there are for more funding in the future.

Another of our significant successes is the outstanding contribution made to the Park by the Conservation Volunteer Group. They meet once a month and continue to make a substantial difference in all sorts of ways from tending the orchard trees, clearing paths, resurrecting an ancient pond and planting relocated orchids. I'll hand over to our volunteers project lead, Committee member Richard Bond, to tell you more.

Please refer to minutes for RB's input.

The Friends have held a number of events this year including supporting the Kirste 5 run, Christmas wreath making, the New Year's Day walk, normally to the Bull but this time to the Cock Inn, and then an interesting walk around New England and Grove woods. I'm constantly amazed at the range of information provided by our Committee members who have the names of plants, trees and birds at their fingertips and not to mention the history of the Park and surrounds. Did you know about the nudist colony in Grove Woods?

Last year I reported that Essex Wildlife Trust had some interesting plans for the lake. The funds had been allocated and we were just waiting for work to start. Well you have probably noticed that nothing has happened. We understand that internal changes and staffing issues at EWT have held things up so we will need to wait and see if this has been delayed or killed off altogether.

One thing you will have noticed is the new car park on Cherry Orchard Way. RDC have indicated that there are no plans to charge for parking at the moment, but they will be watching to see the

impact of any overflow from the Business Park.

Other things we have progressed this year include:-

- the identification and registering of the Trafalgar Oaks which are now ready for sponsorship – details are on the web site
- chasing RDC for waterwise signage at the lake – they have been promised for later this year
- pressing for a secure, enclosed area which might be used for dog training – we are advised that RDC will be securing the fencing around the wild flower meadow
- the reporting to RDC of issues arising eg fallen trees
- Compliance with GDPR and the data protection requirements – issued to all members
- better placement and replacement of broken litter and Poo bins – on-going
- the development of a 'bulletin' information sheet

The main thing which continues to challenge us all is the issue of litter. We will continue to do litter picking but we need to think about how we can educate people more effectively to clear up behind them and take their rubbish away with them.

On membership, our numbers remain steady and we did notice an increase after we displayed a new poster in the park (thanks to Chris for that) but we are always looking for new members to provide the strength we need to ensure we are heard. So, if you are not a member already and even if you are, your £5 will contribute to the Path Improvement project, support the Volunteer team, contribute to bird boxes and other initiatives to support the park. It will also provide you with up to date information about what's going on in the park.

Finally, it would not be right of me to finish without saying thankyou to all our Committee members. Each member has an important role to play and they continue to do it with energy and enthusiasm. Without their dedication we wouldn't be able to survive as a group let alone enjoy the success we have. So, thank you all.

Finally, the Committee, as you can see, is a small and enthusiastic group of park lovers and if you think you would like to join us in our quest then please speak to any of the Committee members during the break. Thank you

Jill Ewing
Chair
18 July 2019

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 18th JULY 2019

TREASURERS REPORT

Good evening to everyone and thank you for being here tonight.

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.

Our membership currently stands at 218 active members which is an increase of 9 on the figures advised to you last year and these new members are very welcome.

Subscriptions have amounted to £468.73 including payments of £328.73 made through the ever growing number of members using PayPal.

Further income is generated throughout the year, including the always well attended, wreath making in December. Our grateful thanks must go to Penny who always takes on the brunt of all the hard work involved in making space available for the 'creations' which seem to get better year on year. Spaces for this event are always booked early, so be sure to watch out for the announcement on Facebook as to the date for 2019.

Another source of income is from Easyfundraising and this is done by ensuring that your online 'shop' is able to offer this unique way of donating funds to Cherry Orchard Park. We have also generated more funds from illustrated talks about the park undertaken by Chris and Penny this year and our thanks go to them and the generosity of the members of the Mums Night Out and the Eastwood Cockethurst Townswomen's Guild for their donations.

Expenses during this period amounted to £539.04 made up mostly of printing, insurance renewal and general sundry items such as postage and refreshments at events. However, we also 'splashed out' this year with some much needed tools and hi-viz jackets for our very important volunteers!

In conclusion, I would thank you for your continued support and advise you that our Bank balance currently stands at £4,714.26. This amount includes £3,000 from Tesco Bags of Help.