

Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park

<u>Meeting:</u>	The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park
<u>Date:</u>	29 th June 2011
<u>Time:</u>	8:00 pm
<u>Place:</u>	St Laurence and All Saints Church, Eastwoodbury Lane, Eastwood.
<u>Minutes Sec:</u>	Penny Down

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Meeting started at 8:00 pm.

Graham Hutchinson welcomed members of the group and members of the public to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Grant Maton, Tim Longley, Rosemary Ashby, Richard White, David and Linda Wells, Dorothy and Peter Cosh.

2. Election of Officers

Standing officers were re-elected unopposed, details below.

Chairman: Graham Hutchinson, nominated by Penny Down, seconded by Heather Meggison

Vice Chairman: John Wilkinson, nominated by Graham Hutchinson, seconded by Nick Cornish

Treasurer: Nick Cornish, nominated by Graham Hutchinson, seconded by Heather Meggison

Secretary: Penny Down, nominated by Graham Hutchinson, seconded by John Wilkinson

3. Subscription

It was agreed that the subscription should remain at £5 per household for the forthcoming year. GH advised that during the first year no money was used from the account for administrative purposes as people were glad to help get the group off the ground. It was suggested that in future the cost of paper, printing ink, postage etc should be covered by the money raised through subscriptions.

Membership

GH referred people to the 'Interest and enthusiasms' handout. He outlined areas in which The Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park (FOCOP) can work with Rochford District Council to raise awareness of the park, to value and develop the park as a haven for wildlife and to value and develop the park as a leisure facility for the whole community. He went on to say that all of the above is dependent on fund raising and grants. He concluded this item by encouraging any members of the public with enthusiasm and/or skills to offer to become members of the group at the end of the evening.

4. Chairperson's Report

GH gave a report of the group's first year, beginning with details about the situation that prompted the formation of 'Friends of Cherry Orchard' and the support offered by Councillor David Merrick. He also emphasised the importance of the development of the very positive relationship with Rochford District Council. GH went on to describe the growing membership, over 70 members now, and the ease of access to the council through the Senior Environmental Assistant and the Assistant Public Open Spaces Officer, Heather Meggison and Helen Galley. On behalf of the committee he thanked HM and HG for their continued support and commitment to the park and to FOCOP. GH went on to describe ways in

which FOCOP has been involved in development in the park with regard to siting of litter bins, installation of play equipment etc. He also mentioned that the group were updated on a regular basis at committee meetings on the progress of the application for a new Bridleway. GH described the activities FOCOP have taken part in during the past year, including being present at Wild Woods Day 2010 and 2011 and two very successful walks through the park which took place in September 2010 and March 2011.

Chris Walker proposed that the report from the Chairman be accepted. Seconded by Richard Amner. The report was accepted.

5. Treasurer's Report

Nick Cornish gave a short report on the group's income and expenditure. During the first year no claims had been made on the account so expenditure was nil. Income, from subscriptions, donations, a raffle and the sale of greetings cards amounted to £749:00p. NC went on to say that in view of previous discussion under item 3 the account would be used to cover administrative costs. He added that the books have been audited.

Sandie Bevan-Jones proposed that the report from the Treasurer be accepted. Seconded by Richard Amner. The report was accepted.

6. The Constitution

Copies of the Constitution were made available to the meeting. With the agreement of those present the Constitution was accepted and signed.

7. The Forthcoming Year

John Wilkinson outlined the group's objectives for the forthcoming year, including on-going matters and new focus areas. These included the following:

On-going:

- To continue to develop the good relationship with Rochford District Council
- To continue to support the application for the new bridleway
- To continue to press for byelaws for the park and possible guidelines
- To increase membership and fundraising

New areas of focus

- The lake, its management especially with regard to fishing
- Increasing the facilities for those less able to walk by providing more benches
- Increasing awareness of the wildlife in the park
- Publishing a website to facilitate better communication

GH brought up the matter of the car park planned for the western end of the park. He advised the meeting that he had received notice that the planning application had been withdrawn. HG was able to explain that this was a temporary withdrawal until a traffic survey in Connaught Road has been carried out and passing places investigated. Once this has been completed the application will be resubmitted. GH asked those present to support the application once it is resubmitted.

8. Any Other Business

No other business was notified to the Chairman who therefore opened the meeting for discussion
(This part of the meeting is minuted in detail to ensure a record of people's questions and concerns.)

A 'Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park' Tree.

A suggestion was made that FOCOP could purchase and arrange for a tree to be planted in the park to commemorate the formation of the group. It was agreed that this was a real possibility and GH explained that FOCOP have committed to buy a bench for the park. He saw no reason why a tree could

not be planted by the bench. GH will liaise with HG regarding this possibility. The delay in providing the bench has been caused by the lack of available timber. It had been hoped to use local timber from Hockley Woods and have the bench made by the RDC Woodlands Team. HG explained that unfortunately wood was not available at the moment as Hockley Woods is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and limited amounts of timber are allowed to be taken at any time. In the circumstances the group are attempting to source a bench that will be acceptable to RDC from an outside supplier.

GH went on to explain that FOCOP committee member Ruth Wright has been investigating the possibilities of grant funding and/or donations. The meeting was advised that Anglia Batteries have offered £300:00p to buy a bench. RW explained that any benches installed in the park would have to be cemented into the ground to prevent theft, hence the high cost. GH advised that should anyone have a request for a bench at a certain place to let the group know and it would be accommodated if at all possible. In that way FOCOP would be able to respond to members' and the public's needs and interests.

Vandalism and Fishing

The situation regarding vandalism in the park and fishing that is disturbing bird life was raised by a member of the public.

GH thanked him for bringing up this problem and advised that he didn't think it was something that could be resolved at the meeting. However he was glad of the opportunity for discussion.

The meeting received details of correspondence from a dog owner whose dog was placed in a dangerous situation due to becoming entangled in fishing line in the lake.

The discussion continued, with evidence of angling equipment left lying in the park that had injured someone – a sharp needle like object had pierced someone's shoe and gone between their toes, luckily avoiding injury. Additionally a hook and line being cast by a fisherman narrowly avoided injuring a child's face.

GH emphasised the importance of taking the needs of all park users into consideration. He recognised the issue and reminded the meeting that all points of view should be taken into consideration.

Byelaws

HM advised the meeting that although Byelaws had been formulated for the park, the Councillors had decided not to go ahead and adopt these. They decided to wait until the new Government Guidelines for formulating byelaws (which should make formulation easier) had been introduced, however, Rochford District Council Legal Department were still waiting for these guidelines to be produced. The Government department responsible for this has told RDC that some changes were needed on the guidance and it is unlikely that the guidance will be produced before the end of the year and it will be some time after that before anything can be formulated for the park. HM went on to point out that even when the Byelaws came into operation fishing may not automatically be banned. She went on to say that as an officer of RDC she can only pass concerns on to her manager and that it is Councillors who ultimately make the decisions.

HM went on to say that the National and Regional Fishing By-Laws applied at the Lake, i.e. anyone fishing must have a rod licence and comply with certain types of equipment. Enforcement of those laws is by the Environment Agency and the Police. RDC have no powers to enforce them. In answer to a question HM advised that the fish in the lake had been put there by members of the public. RDC did not stock the lake with any fish.

Environment Agency Crime Enforcement Officer

HM advised that the Environment Agency Crime Enforcement Officer attended last year to carry out enforcement operations in the district. She went on to say that there is one enforcement officer in this area, based in Ipswich. He will be returning to the district this year. Notices asking people not to climb the fence around the lake due to nesting birds are replaced whenever they are taken down.

HM advised that she is waiting for a response from the Police and the Fire Brigade who have also been invited to the park to take note of possible problem areas.

General opinion with regard to fishing in the lake.

GH asked the meeting "Who has a problem with fishing in the lake?" A show of hands confirmed that the majority of people at the meeting had a problem with fishing in the lake. A comment was made that people would prefer there not to be fishing in the lake.

RW raised the problem of Health and Safety, taking into account that young people were now night fishing and that sharp objects, knives and hooks, open cans and litter, were left where children walked during the day.

GH confirmed that fishing in the lake has been a constant problem and had been raised at every meeting during the year. SBJ suggested that liaising with the fishermen, most of whom were very responsible people, might be the first step.

JW asked whether it was possible for the lake to be managed by a private fishing club. HM explained that a fishing club would require on site facilities.

JW asked whether an alternative would be to drain the lake. HG said that it would not be financially viable considering the amount of investment there had been in the lake.

The question was raised as to where the council stood with regard to incidents/injuries occurring in the park. HM apologised for not being able to answer the question but she would take it back to the RDC Legal Team. She went on to point out that other park users have different concerns. Correspondence was read out from a walker who felt threatened by dogs not kept on a lead.

HM advised that RDC are willing to spend a weekend at the lake in the summer providing an education service. GH has offered his trailer to provide an information point. HM confirmed that she and HG will provide information/education leaflets for all park users and be available to talk to them.

GH went on to say that he felt part of the role of the Friends group is to educate park users and he was very supportive of this initiative. The meeting agreed that it was a worth while approach.

Public Rights of Way

There followed some discussion about public rights of way and tracks in local fields. HM advised people that Essex County Council issue a booklet that can be downloaded from their website, "Your Right to Use, Your Responsibility to Share". HG offered to email a copy of the park map, showing all public rights of way to anyone who contacted her or the group secretary.

At this point HM took the opportunity to advise the meeting that some of the woodland and fields surrounding the park was not owned by RDC and although they can advise owners if damage or litter etc is reported they cannot do more than that. Additionally some bridleways and footpaths are within Essex County Council's jurisdiction. HG added that having walked all the routes in the country park, up to Hockley Woods and through Primrose Woods she can confirm that all the signage and gates were checked. Metal barriers on the concrete bridge behind Blatches Farm will be removed and the metal girders at the entrance to New England Wood have already been taken down. She confirmed that an engineer will be inspecting the bridge behind the farm before any work is carried out.

Water Voles

HM asked people to note that fencing around the ditch that feeds the lake is not because someone had fallen in. It is to protect water voles that are now living there, by stopping dogs going into the ditch. Water voles are a protected species. An information sign is planned. In addition to this, following an ecological survey, it has been recommended that some of the river edges require clearing and fencing

to encourage the water voles, but there are concerns about this as this would open up the river to dogs which would discourage the water voles.

Flemings Farm Road

The matter of parked cars in Flemings Farm Road was raised. It was confirmed that this was an issue causing concern as access was blocked to emergency vehicles and to Flemings farm. HG recognised that this was a problem but the road is owned and maintained by Essex County Council so there is little that Rochford District Council can do. Notices have been placed in the past few days regarding parking. GH advised that the matter would be noted and the group will work with RDC to see if a solution can be found.

Crays Hill

RA advised the meeting that when this site was cleared of travellers there could be a problem for the park. SBJ informed the meeting that police advice was to ensure gates are locked. Should travellers then break onto the land, the legal process to remove them may then be less protracted. RA advised a telephone chain system to pass on information. GH confirmed that links were set up with RDC through HG and HM and the majority of members can then be quickly contacted by email. SBJ confirmed that whenever such a warning is received the gates at Blatches Chase on both sides of the old bridleway are locked.

Social Functions

RA suggested a social function such as a quiz night in amalgamation with the Chairman of Rochford District Council, Simon Smith, would be a fitting way to thank RDC for their support and raise funds both for FOCOP and the chosen charity of the leader of RDC. GH thanked him for the suggestion which will be raised at the next committee meeting.

HM added that the Chairman does have a function on the 9th July at which a Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park display will be mounted.

Thanks

GH thanked everyone for attending the meeting and advised members that they would be kept in touch with Park News by email etc.

9. Future Meetings

The date of the next Annual General Meeting will be advised.

Meeting closed at 9:32 pm

COPIES of these minutes to all members of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and RDC.