

Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park

<u>Meeting:</u>	The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Park
<u>Date:</u>	Thursday 2 nd June 2016
<u>Time:</u>	7:30 pm
<u>Place:</u>	Eastwood Community Centre, Western Approaches, Eastwood.

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed Friends and members of the public to the meeting and introduced Rochford District Council's (RDC's) Principal Open Spaces Officer, Adam Aldridge. Due to further demands on his time AA gave his report and answered questions at this point in the meeting.

Report from Adam Aldridge

Car Parking: The matter of car parking charges is on hold now until January or until the work on the Joint Area Action Plan (JAAP) business park on the eastern side of Cherry Orchard Way begins. AA explained that parking charges will be in line with those in force in all other RDC Open Spaces and he hopes they will go some way towards preventing parking spaces being used by contractors/workmen on the building site rather than park users. On the plus side AA advised that there will be a financial bonus arising from the JAAP in the sum of £350,000 which will go towards improvements to the car park and a toilet block.

Member LH asked whether any thought had been given to park users parking in Western Approaches to avoid charges. AA advised that RDC are in negotiation with ECC Highways. He will report back to FOCOP on this matter.

Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS): RDC have welcomed the CSAS and all Open Spaces Officers have been trained and now have low level policing powers. In the coming weeks other Open Spaces staff will receive training and be accredited. A campaign to promote public awareness will follow with explanatory signage to support the Scheme.

Member CT asked what power the accredited staff would have. AA confirmed that they will be able to issue fixed penalty notices for dog fouling, littering, unacceptably rowdy behaviour, riding motorcycles in the park etc.

Former Member GH asked how RDC hoped to make the scheme work with no staff. AA assured the meeting that he was very positive that the scheme will operate and that RDC have now employed two Open Spaces Rangers and a third party contractor will be working alongside them.

Forestry Commission (FC) Grants: AA explained that the parameters for bidding for grants from the FC have changed and that problems within the FC have led to a situation in which RDC are owed in the region of £10,000. AA will report to the next committee meeting on this matter. AA further advised that plans to improve paths through New England/Grove Wood are still ongoing.

GH asked whether the bridleway proposed some years ago was included in the plans. AA advised that he hoped this could be addressed at the same time and that RDC have been offered a large donation towards this work and the legal department are currently looking at whether it can be accepted.

Member RB recognised the reality of managing a large area of land within a very tight budget and asked whether the current budget would be adequate. He went on to ask whether the coppicing of RDC woodland including New England Wood would continue as planned.

AA advised that the coppicing would continue, but would be on a longer time scale and finished by explaining that the budget is tight but RDC will carry out an asset review and put new management plans in place to make best use of it. He confirmed that Rochford's Open Spaces are highly thought of within the Council.

The Chair thanked AA for his report.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Sandie Bevan-Jones, Angie Coxon and Tricia Gulley.

2. Minutes

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2015, (previously distributed to members and available on the website, www.friendsofcherryorchardpark.org).

The Chair invited any comments on the accuracy of the Minutes of the 2015 AGM.

Former Member HM advised that she was unhappy with the interpretation of her statement read at last year's meeting under item 8. She went on to read a prepared statement to the meeting and provided the secretary with a copy. The Chair agreed that this would be included with the minutes of this meeting (attached).

MT proposed that the Minutes should now be accepted and signed.
SH seconded the proposal.

The Minutes of the 2015 AGM were signed.

3. Chairperson's Report

The Chair read her report, copy attached to these Minutes
There were no questions.

PD proposed that the Chair's report be accepted.
RB seconded the proposal.

The Chair's report was accepted.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer gave her report on the group's finances for the year, copy attached to these Minutes.
The books were available for members' inspection.

JE proposed that the Treasurer's report be accepted.
PD seconded the proposal.

The Treasurer's report was accepted.

5. Election of Officers

The Chair confirmed that the current officers were willing to continue in role in the forthcoming year as advised in the AGM 2016 information letter to members. Additional nominations were invited but none had been received.

JE proposed that the current Officers should continue in role.
AT seconded the proposal

The current Officers will continue in role.

Chairperson – Jill Ewing
Deputy Chairperson – Chris Taylor
Secretary – Penny Down
Treasurer – Mo Taylor

Former member RW noted that the Constitution of the group requires a representative of RDC to be on the Committee. The secretary confirmed that Marcus Hotten, Environmental Services Officer is the RDC member of the committee and he or his representative Adam Aldridge, Principal Open Spaces Officer, attend committee meetings whenever possible.

6. Subscription

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

7. Constitution

The meeting confirmed that no changes to the constitution are considered necessary

The Chair introduced the new holder of the Portfolio for Environment, Cllr Dave Sperring who spoke to the meeting.

Cllr Sperring assured the meeting that he intended to remain Portfolio Holder for his 4 year term of office and was committed to giving something back to the community. He assured the meeting that he was very familiar with Rochford's Open Spaces and looked forward to working closely with the various committees that make up the Rochford community. He went on to say that he was personally interested in this area which has been a very large part of his life. He explained to the meeting that proposals were being tabled and long term plans laid down about which he was unable to elaborate at the moment but he would be very happy to do so as soon as it is possible to make them public.

Member RB asked Cllr Spelling to trust and listen to Officers, staff and The Friends when it comes to park matters.

Former member GH said that he was pleased to hear Cllr. Sperring's views.

The Chair thanked Cllr Sperring for attending the meeting and speaking and looked forward to working closely with him in future.

8. Objectives for the coming year

The Chair noted the Objectives set at the previous meeting and highlighted progress towards achieving them as follows.

- I. Development and improvement of wildlife habitats
 - Bird and Owl Boxes donated
 - Close links with Essex Wildlife Trust who plan improvements to the water flow into the lake.
 - Conservation Volunteer Group established and working in the traditional orchard.
- II. Path Maintenance and improved access
 - Close links with RDC
 - Park Issues Log introduced
 - Conservation Volunteer group working to cut back growth along paths to let in light.
- III. Cleanliness, provision of litter/dog waste bins
 - "Litter Picking" team established
 - RDC on-going support
 - "Clean for the Queen" event supported
 - Advising and lobbying RDC about litter bins
- Ic. Improved signage
 - Sign locations identified and designs being finalised
 - QR Codes
 - Input from members

The meeting broke for refreshments and conversation

9. Open Forum & to confirm priorities

Following general conversation during the refreshment break the Chair proposed that the objectives set last year should be carried forward. The meeting agreed and was opened up for any further suggestions. The following points were raised

Friends would like more escorted walks, especially in Grove and New England Woods which are little known. The difficulty with the waterlogged condition of some of the pathways in late autumn, winter and early spring was acknowledged. The committee will bear this in mind when planning walks.

The meeting discussed the problem of inadequate litter/dog waste bins and recognised that without changing the contract little can be achieved. It was noted that litter in the car park has increased since the new fast food outlet at Toomey's opened. The committee will ask RDC to consider approaching KFC regarding sponsoring litter bins in the car park.

It was confirmed that there are dog waste bins at all the park exits but a large proportion of dog walkers still feel that it is acceptable to throw dog waste bags into bushes and scrub. Further signage was suggested to encourage a change of behaviour.

The meeting discussed the poor access for disabled park visitors. It was noted that any improvement to pathways must now include disabled access.

The meeting applauded the introduction of self-guided walks available on the website. The committee will follow up a suggestion to provide information packs to local schools, though recognise that visits are difficult for all but close neighbouring schools due to the lack of toilets.

The poor condition of the concrete bridge west of Pooh Sticks Bridge was highlighted. The meeting noted that this bridge is not on RDC land but the matter can be noted on the Park Issues Log so that RDC can notify the landowner. It was further noted that the small woodland areas to the north of Nobles Green Ditch (the stream) including Gusted Woods, The Scrubs, Cottons and Primrose Wood are not owned by RDC although there is public access to most of them. RDC are therefore unable to maintain, make improvements or provide signage in these woods.

10. Future Meetings & Close

To confirm the date for the next Annual General Meeting - Thursday June 8th 2017, to be confirmed.

COPIES of these Minutes sent to all members of the Friends of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, Cllr Sperring, Marcus Hotten, Adam Aldridge and published on the FOCOP website.

Friends of Cherry Orchard Park - Annual General Meeting 2016

Chairman's Report

The past eleven months have seen some significant changes.

Amongst these have been some of the personnel changes in Rochford District Council (RDC). Last July we were joined at the AGM by the relatively new Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Councillor Jo McPherson, and this evening we meet again with the relatively new Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Councillor Dave Sperring. We welcome you to our meeting and hope we will enjoy a productive and meaningful relationship in the future.

Perhaps even more significant than that has been the change for one of our Committee. Richard Bond resigned his post as Woodlands and Open Spaces Supervisor at RDC and they must be really mourning the loss of his knowledge and expertise.

Those of you who have attended walks and other events in the park will have met Richard and realised very quickly that here is someone who loves the Park and who is extremely knowledgeable about its history (back to the ice age!) and its flora and fauna. So we are delighted and tremendously lucky that he remains an active 'Friend' and advisor.

The Committee itself has enjoyed a more settled year but we were saddened to lose Stephanie Holt from our number. Stephanie has a very high pressure job and found it difficult at times to get back from Kent in time to regularly attend the meetings. We reluctantly accepted her resignation but were happy when she offered to contribute her expertise as and when needed (particularly around grant funding) in a consultative capacity.

The remaining Committee members all continue to bring their varied skills and knowledge to the 'Friends' and I believe we work well together as a team. As always a special mention must go to Penny Down who organises us all to make sure things come together, as well as carrying out all the admin and IT related activities. Thanks Penny.

The Park -

The Park continues to flourish and provide a haven for all. There has been slightly less development activity in the park in the last year although the path through New England Wood was completed and much appreciated.

We continue to receive information from members about things they see in the park which require attention so we have developed an 'Issues Log' to ensure issues raised with RDC are properly recorded and chased when necessary. On urgent items we generally get a prompt and positive response but we are ever mindful of the pressures staff at RDC are living with, not least of which are their finances. The log will, we hope, provide the Friends and RDC with a focus for future activity and potentially inform any future claims for grants to help fund remedial action.

Of particular significance this year has been the launch of the Friends' 'Conservation Volunteers'. This is a group of volunteer 'Friends' who have committed to giving a few hours of their time every month to carry out various tasks around the Park. The inaugural session was in April when we weeded around the base of all the fruit trees in the Orchard to allow them to be fed properly with organic fertiliser. This particular session took two visits to complete but I am happy to report that more than 100 trees were cleared and subsequently fed with fertiliser supplied by RDC.

Incidentally, while we were there we noticed that several trees had died or gone missing. The Committee has agreed to fund the replacement of these and the new trees will appear next winter.

The next session was to clear overgrown paths through one of the plantations. As well as making the paths more accessible, this lets in the light and encourages the growth of the ground cover which protects the wild life. Again this plantation has proved to be a 2 visit project and there are many other plantations which require attention so the Volunteers have plenty to keep them busy. Everyone seems to have really enjoyed the sessions despite the very wet weather in early May! If anyone is interested in joining the Volunteers or wants to know more there is information on the web site or please ask any of the Committee members for more details.

In February, a number of volunteers joined a group from Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) to install 'woody installations' into the stream. These are designed to improve the flow of water and create enhanced habitats for small fish and other aquatic species. While there we had a useful discussion with them about the future of the lake. EWT, with RDC approval, have applied for funds to improve the lake and the surrounding area. They have some draft plans which we have shared with members before but we are hopeful that they will be in a position quite soon to look at improving the flow of water into the lake thus improving the water quality and general well being of the wildlife in that area.

We will of course keep you informed of any developments.

During the year we have developed and published a number of self guided walks. The first of these the 'Take it Easy' walk takes the walker around the park via the various benches. This has had some very positive feedback and has now been followed by the 'Bite at the Bull' walks starting at different points but all ending at the Bull Pub via Hockley Woods. A seasonal walk is in development which will note the changes to be observed at different times of the year.

Following on from the purchase of benches, trees and bird boxes last year, we have now acquired owl boxes which will be put up in various sites across the park. We have also made progress towards finalising the initial installation of some low key signage in the Park and hope to see these appear in the near future.

Finally, earlier this year RDC announced a proposal to introduce parking charges in the Park. We have been assured, despite information to the contrary that this is not a done deal and that there will be a consultation about it. We await further developments but we hope sincerely that the promised consultation will take place and that our views will be listened to. It's interesting to note that one of the original aims of the Friends was to work with RDC to spread the word about the Park and try to encourage more people to use it. It seems that introducing parking charges directly contradicts this aim and it is particularly interesting to note that it impacts most on the park users who live in the RDC catchment area.

Events

During the year the Friends have organised and supported a number of events. I am delighted to say that all have been well received and have enjoyed very positive feedback. Among these have been guided walks including the Autumn Foraging walk and the Spring Dawn Birdsong walk. With a 6 o'clock start and light drizzle we were delighted when 20 hardy Friends turned up to hear the amazing Neil Sumner from EWT identify numerous species of birds for us. The bacon butties went down particularly well half way round as well.

We have also supported the Kirste 5 run through the park, supported the Sutton Hall Old Tyme Fayre, organised Christmas Wreath making, litter picking and more recently the volunteer sessions. We believe that all these activities fall nicely within our remit.

The Friends committee are happy to continue to maintain excellent relations with RDC and will strive to develop new ideas and activities to support our priorities. We also continue to welcome input and feedback from the membership.

Jill Ewing
Chair

FRIENDS OF CHERRY ORCHARD PARK
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2ND JUNE 2016
TREASURERS REPORT

Good evening everyone and thank you for coming here this evening

I am pleased to report that the books have been audited and signed off and my grateful thanks must go to the Auditor Gordon Ladd for his time which has been given free of charge. The books are available for inspection by any member of The Friends Group.

Membership has declined slightly from last year to 208 and the committee are hoping to raise awareness of who we are and what we do through various methods during the coming months. Subscriptions have amounted to £465.30, £245.39 of which was paid through PayPal. A further £65.95 was raised through members donating via Easy fundraising on internet purchases.

Money has been raised throughout the year via various events which proved to be very successful. We have had Autumn foraging walks, wreath making for the festive season and recently a very well attended Dawn Chorus Walk even with a 6 a.m. start! Our thanks go to Sandie for providing such a hearty 'after walk' breakfast in her barn.

These events, and others are being planned and details will be available on the website shortly.

At this point, I must extend the thanks of the committee to Mr Neil Sumner from the Essex Wildlife Trust, who led this early morning walk and his vast knowledge of trees and birds made the early start so worthwhile!! Although he refused to accept any payment for his time, a cheque for £70 will be sent to Essex Wildlife Trust as a donation*.

We have also purchased four owl boxes and are waiting for these to be placed around the park and again all members will be notified of this event. Signage in the park will also get underway during the coming months and that will be discussed further tonight.

Finally, the current bank balance stands at £2414.15 and this concludes my report.

**Excerpt from the Minutes of the 26th May committee meeting.*

As agreed at the last meeting, the balance of donations received towards the cost of the walk and breakfast, £47.50, will be donated to EWT, NS declined any fee for his services or expenses. The committee agreed to donate a further £22.50 in thanks for NS contribution to the success of the walk.

Statement from Heather Meggison regarding item 8 of the AGM 2015 Minutes.

I'm afraid that I don't agree that item 8 in the minutes regarding the constitution as I believe they are not a true reflection of what occurred at the Annual General Meeting held last year.

Item 8 states 'of the four proposals that HM put forward proposals 1 and 2, regrettably, sought to distance the friends from Rochford District Council by severely curtailing the group's relationship with Councillors including the Portfolio Holder and removing the right of an RDC Officer to be a member of the Committee.' This statement is the committee's view and at last year's meeting when the Chairperson stated this, I pointed out to her that that was not the case. However, the chairperson, said that that was how she had interpreted my proposals. At that point, another member of the audience, who, at that time, I didn't know (however, I do now) told the chairperson that he actually had a copy of the proposals with him and that her interpretation was wrong. Mine and the other member of the audience's corrections have not been included in the minutes.

For those of you here that may not have been at last year's meeting, my proposals for the Constitution were to replace the wording of

Work in partnership with Rochford District Council' to establish positive links and work with the officers of Rochford District Council' and to 'Lobby Rochford District Council Councillors on behalf of FOCOP members.'

And regarding the make up of the committee, I proposed that instead of the committee having 'to include a representative of RDC' it be changed to 'which may include a representative of RDC.'

I do not agree that those proposals could have been considered as 'severely curtailing the group's relationship with Councillors' nor does it remove the right of an RDC officer to be a member of the committee. Does the committee actually have a representative of RDC serving on the committee at this time?

I had added a further proposal that 'No elected Councillor of Rochford District Council or anyone having held such a position in the last four years shall be eligible for election to the committee, although they may be a member.' There had never been a Councillor on the Committee and having researched several other similar friends group's constitutions, this was a phrase often used, as were the other phrases that I proposed. After all, it's a friends group, not a council group.

On receiving a copy of the minutes of last year's AGM (that was in July last year) I immediately wrote to the group's secretary to request that the minutes be amended to reflect the fact that what the chairperson stated was not what was proposed and that she was corrected on that matter by myself and another member of the audience.

When the Chairperson responded to me some days later, She informed me that 'the phrase you quoted regarding the constitution item was taken verbatim from the meeting notes so is an accurate record of what was said. It appears that your dispute is more with the Committee's interpretation of your proposals rather than what actually took place at the meeting.' I was informed that the committee believed sincerely that they had issued an accurate record of the business of the AGM and as they had been approved and published (presumably by the then seven members of the committee, one of whom did not attend the meeting and one of whom was late), that the appropriate action I should take, would be to take this up at the next AGM and that as far as the committee was concerned the matter was closed.

I do not dispute that what has been recorded is an accurate record of what you, the Chairperson said, but the fact that it was actually pointed out to you that what you said was wrong at the time, by myself and another independent member of the audience has not been recorded and I respectfully request that the fact that you were told that your 'interpretations' were wrong at last year's meeting are recorded in tonight's AGM along with the explanation of what I actually proposed, so that members can see that my proposals did not 'seek to distance the friends from Rochford District Council by severely curtailing the group's relationship with Councillors including the Portfolio Holder and removing the right of an RDC Officer to be a member of the Committee.'

The reason I have come here tonight is that despite setting up this group with the previous chairman and having decided not to renew my membership of FOCOP, I do wish to ensure that anything that I said or proposed while I was a committee member or while I was a paid up friend of the group, is recorded correctly.

Heather Meggison