



NEWSLETTER & UPDATE - FEBRUARY 2011 (ISSUE 6)

1. **The Friends of Park Fields.** The organisation is robust and healthy, and is enjoying good support. We have *lost* a few members unfortunately, but we still have a very loyal core and our numbers are currently around 130. We should like to attract more Members in view of the work that lies ahead, and maybe you can assist us in that task by passing on the tear-off Application Form to likely supporters. Practical support will be needed soon - not just financial support. We should also like to be able to communicate with everybody **via email** wherever possible.
2. **The Committee.** **Chairman:** Brian Elias; **Vice-Chairman:** Jim Hollinshead; **Secretary:** Chris Try; **Treasurer:** Colin Nicol; **Committee Members:** Pat Allen, Liz Ledsham, and John Lobley. Peter Allen (original founder of the Group) will be re-joining the Committee in March. We meet at least once a month and are regularly in touch with each other on developments and the on-going work of the *Friends*.
3. **Council Matters and Local Support.** We are engaged with Cheshire West & Chester Council (CWAC) on a number of issues, and enjoy a good relationship with the Council - especially over the Management Agreement for the "Cowfield" area of Park Fields. To a lesser extent, we are engaged with Neston Town Council (NTC) and that body has donated the popular Bench (c £450.00), sited at our expense at the top of the Cowfield. Brenda Dowding, a Cabinet Member of CWAC and our Ward Councillor, has recently donated a sum of money (c £720.00) to purchase *and install* a second Bench out of her annual Councillors' Discretionary Budget. She has also indicated that - funds permitting - we may be in line for some more money with which to improve the entrances to the Cowfield and sites around the Notice Boards. A local engineering firm - Bibby Engineering (close to the windmill house in Leighton Road) - has provided free services and metalwork in relation to the Bench siting and has promised to assist us with other similar projects.
4. **The "Village Green" Project.** Our Dossier (March 2010) requesting CWAC to favourably consider the Voluntary self-Registration of the Recreational Area, led to several meetings and exchanges on the topic with senior Officials and a Councillor during last year. As anticipated, the Council does not relish the idea of "surrendering" this land in perpetuity and despite a Site Visit by the *Senior Manager Leisure and Green Spaces* last summer and several further exchanges, we are not very hopeful that the Council will agree to take this action. The matter still rests with them.
5. **"Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge - 2012".** This project, launched by Prince William in June 2010, aims to 'capture and secure' 2012 Playing Fields and recreational Open Spaces to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in year 2012 and, of course, the Olympic Games. Fields nominated (mainly by *Local Authorities*, but some by private land owners) will be voted upon by the public in 2011 and successful nominations will receive the official accolade and status of becoming a "Queen Elizabeth II Field" with accompanying protections for the long term (c 99 years). We have been gently lobbying the Council - as perhaps an alternative to seeking 'Village Green' status - for the Recreation Ground of Park Fields to be included on the list of possible fields within Cheshire. We are slightly more optimistic of a favourable response to this approach. CWAC is, apparently, enthusiastic about the whole Challenge and is said to be drawing up a list of potentially suitable sites. If Park Fields *is* included, we shall have to mount a big campaign to enlist public votes.
6. **"The Cowfield".** Behind the scenes, much work on fund-raising to support the Management Plan for the Cowfield has been going on. Approaches have been made to the new Sainsbury's Supermarket in Neston, and as well as to the NatWest Bank and Gordale Nurseries. A major funding request has been submitted to the Lottery organisation known as "**Awards for All**" (AFA) to support the hedge-laying and gap-filling project all along Wood Lane. We are hopeful of receiving an award. And, of course, we have already mentioned the support received from NTC, and Brenda Dowding, with the prospects of more financial support to come from these sources.
7. As recently as Friday 28 January 2011, a team from the Committee met with members of the **British Trust for Conservation Volunteers** (BTCV), (a Charity with a successful history of environmental conservation throughout both the UK and the world), to discuss their possible involvement in, and costs of, tackling the major hedge-laying project - provided, of course, that we can secure the funding from AFA. We were impressed by their professionalism and great enthusiasm for work of this kind. It is a project that will take considerable time to complete, because of the groundwork involved, the clearance of unwanted growth, the planting required, the disposal of debris, and the need for natural growth to occur beforehand and subsequently. We shall certainly need some volunteers to assist with *this* project - and others !
8. Following investigative work on soil and fertility across the Cowfield, spearheaded by Jim Hollinshead (our own environmental expert) and involving Professor Robb Marrs, "**trial plots**" will shortly be established to determine the best method of reducing soil fertility where needed and to achieve the best possible grassland and flora growth, in line with our Management Plans for this beautiful open space. Choice of method has to take into account the "**costs versus effectiveness**" equation " as well as creating an attractive environment for wildlife and conservation in general.
9. In due course, work will commence on removing the delapidated post and barbed-wire dividing fence between the Recreation Ground and the Cowfield - to be replaced in stages by a subtle combination of new post and wire sections,

and hedge planting. We have to delineate this boundary carefully, to control path / entrance / exit points, to the Cowfield, to constrain various activities to the Recreation side, and to demarcate our area for insurance purposes.

10. **Public Liability Insurance.** Whilst CWAC has general PLI in place for the *whole* Open Space, the Council has advised us that we shall need our own insurance to cover activities which are part and parcel of our responsibilities under the 10-year Management Agreement. We are urgently obtaining quotes for this insurance, for without it we cannot commence work on any of the above mentioned projects.

12. **Summary.** Much activity is taking place by *the Friends*, in line with our stated objectives. The Committee believes that much more visual evidence will soon be apparent to all users as work commences in earnest on the various projects, which in turn will hopefully encourage more people to join our organisation and, importantly, to offer assistance through financial and practical support.

13. **What Are Our Problems ? Where Could You Help ?**

- **Membership and Volunteers:** We need to maintain and increase our Membership Base. Recruitment is an ever-present requirement, and increasingly we shall need volunteers. **Can you assist ?**
- **Work Allocation:** The vast majority of work falls upon just 7 Committee Members; whilst well-intentioned and industrious, this group can't possibly do all that has to be done. We need assistance in a variety of ways, and will need more as time goes by. **Can you spare some time occasionally ?**
- **Dog Fouling:** Many dog owners are responsible owners and "pick-up" after their pets, but there are many who don't. The Council's policy is *NOT* to provide more bins: these cost money and have to be emptied at considerable annual cost. Their policy is to persuade and educate people into a more responsible attitude and behaviour. Some people who bring as many as 6 or 8 dogs to the field at a time (possibly dog-minders) are sometimes amongst the offenders. Dog fouling contaminates the grass rendering potential revenue from hay crops virtually worthless, but more importantly it works against the most important need to reduce and maintain soil nutrients at a much lower level in our aim to create traditional haymeadow flora. **Any ideas ?**
- **Entrances/Exits/Notice Boards:** The entrances/exits are muddy and slippy, particularly at this time of year. *We* have a responsibility to improve them - not the Council. The Brooklands Road / Parkgate School corner is perhaps the worst. We have plans to improve this one with reinforced, revetted 'steps' and all of them with compacted limestone 'crusher run'. We are going to lay flagstones to the front of each Notice Board - funds permitting. Occasional "litter sweeps" and tidying up the congregational areas is required. **Perhaps you could assist with these tasks - without even being asked ?**
- **Benches:** We hope to acquire another two or three. These will require some maintenance by means of wood treatment and cleaning (and temporary screening when treatment is applied). **Can you help ?**
- **Communications:** Postal mail is expensive and inefficient. Written communications, however, will still be needed. We can cut costs by hand-delivering Newsletters etc. We could also leaflet-drop to houses in surrounding roads in the quest for new members. **Can you help to deliver these ?**

Email: Whilst not everybody is on-line, substantial numbers of Members are - but we need to encourage more use of this medium, particularly when we need to summon help in a hurry. Will *you* agree to let us use email ? If so, let us have your address (if not already supplied). We shall protect this information.

Can you think of ways to encourage more use of email - eg by draws or other incentives ?

- **Hedge-laying and Restoration:** Work will soon be starting to restore the hedge-line along Wood Lane. We shall be replanting sections, laying others, and some sections will be left to make more growth before laying in a year or two. If you are reasonably fit and handy with a bow-saw, **and would like training in traditional hedge-laying techniques, please let us know !** For the less adventurous, there will be much clearance and planting work to be done, under supervision. Everybody, including your friends, will be welcome. **Can you let us know what you could do to help and your preference ?**

14. Thank you for your support in the past, and your anticipated support in the future. We are to enter an exciting and progressive phase in the forthcoming months. Please contact our Secretary (Chris) or any of our Committee if you have any queries or wish to volunteer and/or submit some ideas. **We really do need your assistance to make all this a success !**

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