

Chorleywood Parish Council: Open Spaces Committee -

**Notes by GH (in attendance as a member of the public)
of matters relevant to Chorleywood Common
raised at the Extraordinary Meeting on 7 August 2012**

Grazing.

The weather and the state of the grass. As everyone knows, the season has been very wet, and the grass has grown very tall and thick. It is already being beaten down by the rain, and there is a fear that if cattle were put on Larks Meadow and the rest of the proposed grazing compartment in the present conditions, they would not eat all the grass, but would trample a large amount of it down so that it remained and decayed, which would put nutrients back into the soil and create a thatch – both of which would be detrimental to the wild flowers and other less vigorous flora which conservation grazing is meant to encourage. The Committee discussed the position and considered a report from the Rangers, and decided, reluctantly, that in present conditions the less bad of the courses available will be not to graze this autumn. A letter explaining the decision will be sent to all households in the parish, and full details including the Rangers' advice, and relevant photographs, will be put on the website. *[This Note therefore gives only a short summary of the issues; everyone interested is strongly encouraged to consider carefully the explanatory letter and the further material to be put on the Council's website.]* The next grazing period will be in autumn 2013.

It will therefore be necessary to include the grazing area in this season's cut-and-lift programme; the extra cost of including Larks Meadow etc is likely to be of the order of £2500, but the exact sum will not be known until the job has been done, because the price depends on the area and the weight of the material removed. The presence of dog-dirt means that the grass removed cannot be used for fodder, and arrangements are being made for it to be composted. (Anyone who could use some of it for, say, animal bedding - it will be packed in half-ton bales - should get in touch with the Parish Office.)

“Slotties” and other infrastructure. The Committee considered quotations from three different companies for providing slotties and erecting the necessary post-and-wire fencing, kissing gates and squeezes, and decided on grounds of price, locality and reliability to use the same contractor as previously. The Rangers are satisfied that lessons have been learned from the episode of posts being stuck in slotties, and that the system has been improved so that the problem will not be repeated. It was decided that the slotties should be installed this autumn so as to be ready for grazing next year. The result of the Council's application for “Higher Level Stewardship” funding for (among other things) grazing is awaited: it is expected that some funding will be received but the exact amount is not yet known; the cost of the slotties etc will be incurred, and whatever funding is granted for grazing will be received, in the current financial year.

Legal issues. It has been suggested that CWPC is not entitled to make bylaws for the Common, and indeed does not even own it, because (it is said) on Local Government reorganisation in 1974, Three Rivers rather than CWPC succeeded to the position of the former Chorleywood Urban District Council. It is therefore said that the bylaw restricting horse riding to the Horse Track is ineffective, and some riders have taken to riding across Larks Meadow. The legal advice received by the Parish Council is that all this is simply wrong: at the 1974 reorganisation the Common could be and was transferred to the Parish Council, and the Parish Council remains entitled to amend or revoke the bylaws, and to make new bylaws about issues for which specific legislation authorises them (for instance Dog Control Orders, as discussed at the July meeting). Accordingly the bylaws do validly restrict horse riding to the Horse Track. Three Rivers, Defra and English Nature all accept that this is the position. *[Note: I have not gone through the 1974 reorganisation materials in detail, but the scenario is a fairly familiar one, and the result reached by the advice to the Council is very much what one would expect.]* The Committee agreed that the officers should explain the Council's position to the British Horse Society, and to the riding stables which use the Horse Track.

Members of the Committee expressed grave concern at the likely damage to wildlife and vegetation and, most seriously, the safety issues raised, if riders go off the Horse Track: if horses are ridden in other places, where they are not expected, there is a real risk (particularly with the grass and other vegetation as high as it is this season) that horses and riders and parents and children (or dogs and their owners) will not see one another and there will be accidents and injuries – and that if something does go wrong, riders' insurance may not cover them for accidents happening somewhere they are not permitted to be.

Apprentice: an apprentice to the Rangers has been selected. Josh has already spent a year at an agricultural college. He comes from Thame; he is starting a six-week trial and if everything is satisfactory (including his journey) his apprenticeship will start in October.

GH