

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 meeting on 15 January 2013**

Parking on the Common at Hillview and Raurdean Cottages. The residents at these properties purchased rights of access and parking for cars on the adjoining land which is part of the Common. Recently a tenant of another nearby property, not entitled to such rights, has been parking in the area in question and continues to do so, despite explanations to him and his landlord, from the residents and from the Parish Office, that only the properties which have paid for easements are entitled to park. One of the residents explained the position to the meeting and asked the Council to take steps to correct it. The meeting considered that the residents' rights ought to be protected, and that cars parked on the Common without authority were trespassing. After discussion it was decided (1) to instruct the Council's lawyers to send a letter explaining that unauthorised parking is not permitted and that if it continues, steps will be taken to stop it and (2) to investigate the practicability and cost (likely to be less than the expense of legal proceedings) of securing the area in question against vehicular access by anyone except those entitled, and if necessary of physically removing trespassing vehicles.

Play area update. (1) Background: English Nature has indicated that it is opposed to any new structures within 200 m of ponds in which Great Crested Newts breed: that means the Council's preferred site for a play area near Christchurch Pond is impracticable, and so are all but one of the other sites on the Common investigated last year by the Advisory Group. The one that remains possible is No. 13 on the Group's list, in the clearing in the woodland just above the Shepherds Bridge parking area (more than 200 m from the Dew Pond; any area near the Lorry Park is within 200 m of Top Common Ponds).

(2) Simone Tyson, Chorleywood Mums, addressed the meeting: she was glad that things were moving forward, but disappointed with English Nature's adverse view on the preferred site; however she felt that location 13 had positive aspects (such as being nearer the village), and could be linked to a "Play Trail" as previously suggested by the Council, though it is important to have a play area, as a meeting point, as well as a trail. The adequacy of parking and the risk of antisocial behaviour would have to be addressed; she hoped weight would be given to views expressed by residents.

(3) The Committee discussed the position in the light of English Nature's input. It was felt that location 13 did have some advantages, including that TRDC considered the slope could become a positive feature; and Mark Carter of Countryside Management Service had indicated that there would be no objection on environmental grounds to a certain amount of thinning of trees and removal of scrub. But there were also potential problems: parking is limited; the road access has no pavement; pedestrians on the bridge over the railway (children particularly) are invisible to cars approaching from the direc-

tion of the station; the PCSOs had expressed reservations about that site.

(4) **Recommendation:** the Committee considered that Chorleywood Council's decision should be taken by Full Council rather than Open Spaces Committee, and decided to recommend to Full Council that location 13 is in principle potentially suitable, but before any firm decision is taken it should be ascertained exactly what equipment TRDC would propose; TRDC's responsibility for maintenance should be confirmed; and consideration should be given to the difficulties of access and the PCSOs' concerns.

[Note: this proposal will continue to be of interest to members of FoCC ...]

Ranger's report: *[GH has a copy]* General maintenance continues: clearing trees blown down; work on the May bushes by the Cattle Creep (not yet complete); clearing dead wood and overhanging branches along the Fire Rides; removal of some trees to let light through to the gorse. The Tree Officer at TRDC decided to take no further action in relation to the tree work done by a resident without permission. The Higher Level Stewardship grant funding will be worth £60,000 over the next 10 years. An articulated lorry got stuck in the Shepherds Bridge parking area and damaged the bank; the vehicle and driver were not British and cannot be traced. Repairs are needed and quotations will be obtained for an altered profile of the bank which will be easier for the Rangers to maintain. Repairs to the surface and the drainage are to be made at the Cricket Club and Lorry parking areas and outside the almshouses. The eroded step at the Black Horse pub *[see previous notes]* has been repaired.

Grazing - "virtual fencing". (1) **The system:** the grazing working party and the officers and Rangers have investigated a system for controlling cattle without physical fencing above ground: a cable is laid in the ground around the perimeter of the desired grazing compartment which sends radio signals to receivers on collars worn by the cattle: when an animal comes within 10 m of the cable it gets an audible warning, and at 5 m it receives a shock – and apparently they learn within a day not to cross the boundary. The system has been used in France for some time, and at Epping Forest (now in its third year) and Burnham Beeches (second year); it is not absolutely impossible for cattle to break out, but the same is true of physical fencing. The "virtual" system is flexible, actually cheaper than temporary physical fencing, and does not engage section 38 of the Commons Act 2006, i.e. it does not have to have permission, or the benefit of an exemption, under that section. The signal has no effect on anything except the collars on the cattle (pacemakers are safe and there is no interference with mobile phones); obviously the system can only be used if the grazier is willing to have the cattle wear the collars. *[Note: it is hoped that the Parish Office will be able to provide, for posting on the FoCC website, a link or links to explanatory material on the Internet.]*

(2) **Recommendation:** the Committee decided to arrange a site visit to observe the system in operation and to keep the residents of the Parish informed of the proposal; it was suggested that a public meeting could be held at (say) the Memorial Hall. *[Such a meeting would no doubt be of interest to many members of the Friends ...]*

Classic car show on the Common: the Council has received a request for permission

to hold a classic and super car show on the Common, on the Cricket Club's outfield – if but only if weather and ground conditions permit – as a repeat of a show which took place successfully last year at Christ Church. The event would raise funds for the Cricket Club and Help for Heroes. The Committee decided to give permission, subject to the usual requirements that the organisers should be responsible for making good any damage, should conduct a risk assessment and have public liability insurance. Date: 27 July 2013.

Fungi on the Common: the Council has been sent a list of the species of fungi found on the Common by the Friends' "Fungus Foray" on 18 November. Cllr Mr Edwards expressed the Committee's thanks to the Friends for the information; I explained that credit for the day's success was also largely due to Steve Kelly of the Herts and Beds Fungi Group, who led the Foray, identified the specimens found and prepared the list.

The Parish Clerk reported that other surveys are also proceeding successfully: the grass-land survey will be extended, the RSPB survey of birds is in progress, and a start has been made on "fixed point photography" recording of the Common: volunteers are taking photographs at approximately monthly intervals at points around the Common identified for the purpose by the Rangers.

Restoration of Christchurch Pond: funding and a plan of action are now in place, and there is about a 10-week window to get the work done before the newts return to breed. Contractors will have to be used, and in the short term the visual effect will be most unattractive, but the work has to be done for the long-term benefit of the pond. The problem is that the pond is heavily silted and the silt contains contaminants, principally diesel, and related chemicals, in run-off from the A404. A survey has shown that the pollution is worst below the outfall of the drain from the road; about a third of the silt, from that side of the pond, will have to be removed and disposed of off-site, but fortunately the level of pollutant in the other two-thirds is low enough to allow the silt to be spread on the Common. To prevent more pollution reaching the pond, it is proposed to dig down to and break the drainage pipe and construct soak-aways. The Chiltern Conservation Board has agreed to provide grant funding of £1900, which will cover the cost of dealing with the silt that has to be taken away, and Hertfordshire Highways – whilst not admitting any liability – have offered a goodwill payment of £2000, which is a significant contribution towards the probable £3000 cost of dealing with the remainder of the silt and the work to the drain; the balance of the cost will be met from reserves. The Committee resolved to authorise the work proposed.

Budget: it was noted that the terms of tender for the ice-cream concession (at the Cricket Club) will make it clear that the tenderers will have to demonstrate that they have in place all necessary authorisations – the reason there was no one selling ice cream last year was that the successful tenderer failed to get appropriate licences. The Council will receive grant funding for schools' educational visits to the Common: a possible source of further income not included in the budget.

Four Year Vision: the use of Hollybush Hall as an education centre will be managed

by the Halls Committee: Cllr Mrs Worrall had discussed with schools in South Oxhey the possibility that they might use the Common and the Hall, but they had indicated transport would be a difficulty; Cllr Mrs Worrall agreed to investigate this further - given the funding available to the Council for school visits, assistance with transport costs might be possible. The Butterfly survey had been undertaken, but bad weather had meant it had been less successful than might have been hoped; Mr Cattle had agreed to continue passing on relevant information to the volunteers next season. Play Trail: the Office had obtained a copy of the leaflet showing how a similar Trail had been set up in Oxhey Woods, and further consideration will be given to a Trail in Chorleywood.

Rangers' responsibilities: the Committee decided to exclude the press [*none present*] and public [*by then only GH*] from a discussion of the restructuring of the Rangers' posts. [*Presumably necessary because Peter Monahan has retired and left and the apprentice is not fully qualified – watch this space?*]

This is a long note – but it was a heavy agenda and a long meeting.

GH