

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 21 May 2013**

Matters arising from Minutes: Cllr Mrs Sutherland commented that the Beating of the Bounds of the Common had been successful. The Clerk reported that unfortunately the tenderer for the ice-cream concession at the Cricket Club had withdrawn because he had found that the process of applying for a street trader's licence from TRDC (including a further CRB check) was too elaborate; he does wish to come to Village Day (and will pay a fee).

Woodoaks Association had written to the Council suggesting that they might be permitted to use the Common for children's outdoor sport and drama programmes in partnership with the Council and including an environmental element (involving the Rangers). A team from the Association attended the meeting to explain the proposal in more detail, and answered questions from members of the Committee. The immediate suggestion is for a one-day-a-week programme over the summer holidays (at £10 per child per day). Woodoaks are insured. In case of rain, they would hope to ensure that the children had appropriate clothing, and activities would simply carry on or move under the trees. The Clerk explained that including an environmental "slot" in the activities would qualify for grant funding (which would cover the Ranger's time and any use of Hollybush Hall), and on that basis it might be thought appropriate not to charge the Association a fee for the use of the Common for the other elements of the programme. The Committee decided to authorise the officers to pursue contractual arrangements with a view to providing activities as described in 2013, and then to review the position.

[Woodoaks have a website: www.thewoodoaksassociation.com]

Open Spaces Officers' Report. *[GH has a copy.]*

Dog bins: the bin at Shepherds Bridge parking area has been moved to a position next to the litter bin; the bin at Artichoke Heights has been replaced with a much bigger one.

Christchurch Pond: regeneration of the plant life is proving successful, and all three species of newts have come back and have laid eggs, the Water Forget-me-nots being particularly popular; the Rangers have started on the installation of a system to filter the water coming in, and will keep its effectiveness under review – it appears to be working so far. There is some but not much duckweed (much less than at Sladdys); if necessary it will be removed at the end of the season (when the newts have left).

Darvells Pond: the Ranger saw a shoal of approximately 300 goldfish (given their camouflage, there were probably several times that) early in March; so far 225 goldfish, 55 sticklebacks and six Koi carp have been re-homed, but there are at least two more carp which must be taken out before they breed and damage the pond's system. The

possibility of “electro-fishing” the pond is being investigated: an electric current is passed through the water and stuns the fish so that they float to the top and can be netted; the process can kill small fish and amphibians, and would therefore have to be left to the winter, and might have to be repeated. The process would be less damaging than the alternatives of drag-netting, poisoning or draining the pond; it would be paid for from the pond maintenance budget. The Committee considered that it is important to publicise the facts that fish must not be put in the ponds – and that if anyone wants to get rid of fish from a garden pond, the aquatic retailers will normally take them.

Amphibians: it is likely to be a poor year for the frogs because after they had spawned (in all the ponds except Top Common Pond North), there was a cold spell which froze much of the spawn. The toads spawned in large numbers in mid-April in Christchurch pond, the Dew pond and Darvells Pond. A “bottle trapping” survey between 29 April and 3 May found all three species of newts (Great Crested, Palmate and Smooth) in Christchurch pond and Sladdys pond and smooth newts in Darvells and the Dew pond, but all species have laid eggs in all the ponds.

General maintenance: an oak tree near the Cattle Creep was potentially dangerous and had to be felled; the timber was left at Shepherds Bridge parking area for residents to take as firewood, and it went. Brambles and saplings have been removed from the heather along Common Road; and the season’s grass cutting has begun.

Shepherds Bridge: the Clerk reported that there had been a meeting the previous Friday with TRDC, Herts Highways and LRT; London Transport’s scheduled inspection of the bridge had fallen due, and they are also concerned about road safety. It is possible that improvements will be suggested, but any significant change to the bridge will be likely to need to take land which is part of the Common, and an exchange will have to be arranged. For that reason, and because apparently it will take 14 months to arrange an overnight line closure for any work to be done, nothing is likely to happen in the immediate future, but “watch this space”.

Beating the Bounds. Cllr Edwards considered that there had been a good turnout. The Clerk explained that the identified fly-tipping would simply be cleared by the Council (it was not possible to say who had done it), and the other identified encroachments etc would be taken up with the neighbours in question; where neighbours are cutting grass, they will be asked to make sure that any fertilisers or other chemicals they use on their own ground do not get onto the Common. The galvanised sheet identified in the corner between Darvells Yard and the footpath to Green Street collects warmth from the sun and forms a shelter for newts and perhaps also grass snakes, slow worms and lizards; the Committee approved of it being left there on the basis that the nearby vegetation would be encouraged to grow over it.

Work Programme: the plan of the Common showing the 2013-14 projects will be put on the website. The Clerk reported that the Rangers have created a “holly tunnel” next to the horse track near the Lorry parking area, which is very popular with the children, but that section of the horse track itself is becoming very wet and soft; the Committee

approved a proposal to close that part of the horse track (after consulting with users) for a short period, probably in the winter, to repair it; this was added to the programme. The Clerk also reported that she is attempting to arrange a visit to Epping Forest to see grazing controlled by “virtual fencing” in circumstances similar to those at Chorleywood, i.e. with grazing in open areas near roads. (The “virtual fencing” grazing at Burnham Beeches was featured on the recent “Countryfile” programme, about three quarters of the way through, and will still be available on BBC I-player for a few days.)

Heavy duty flail collector: the Committee authorised the purchase of this equipment, which will enable the Rangers to work more effectively, though it will not do away with the need for cut and lift.

Higher Level Stewardship: schools’ education pack. HLS funding includes payments to the Council for up to 25 educational visits by schools in each year. Interest has already been expressed by schools in Abbots Langley, Croxley Green and Watford Rural and by TRDC. The Council has taken advice from Simon Smith of School Grounds Consultancy on developing a pack to be sent out to schools, on educational activities which can be undertaken in accordance with the updated National Curriculum, and on equipping Hollybush Hall for use as a classroom; Christchurch School will also be asked for input. (If issues of disabled access ever arise, it will be possible to use the Memorial Hall, which is “disability-compliant”, instead of Hollybush.) The Committee authorised the officers to take the project forward.

Apprentice’s planting project: the Committee authorised a project consisting of planting a flower-bed and hanging baskets at the office and perennial planting in the cemetery to be undertaken by the apprentice as part of his training.

Four-year vision: the Committee’s projects are all proceeding successfully: the upgrading of Hollybush is part of the “education pack”; water harvesting at the allotments remains under consideration; the Butterfly survey is continuing this year (last year was terrible for butterflies); there have been consultations with “Groundwork” in relation to the Play Trail, and some funding is likely to be available; two lectern-style information boards are being funded by the Chilterns Conservation Board, and it is proposed to install one of them at Christchurch Pond in the autumn; and the surveys of fungi, birds, the various grassland habitats, moths and invertebrates have been or are being undertaken and fixed point photography is also in progress.

The Common Users Group will be re-convened.

St Andrews Church have asked for permission to hold a fun-day on the Common, as in previous years; the Committee authorised it – date to be arranged, and the Church to be responsible for insurance, etc, in the usual way.

Cllr Eve’s memorial bench is to be sited in a position overlooking Larks Meadow.

[A fair amount to report, but the meeting still finished at 9.38!]

GH