

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 10 September 2013**

Note - Play Area: *the Agenda for the meeting included an item on the proposed Play Area, for consideration whether the Committee should recommend Full Council to accept TRDC's request for permission to install play equipment at "location 13", the "Eibe" design with some further modifications. However certain further technical clarification was awaited, and the item was not discussed. As at 22 September, the Parish Council website says, on the "Latest News" page, that "this should not slow down the democratic process. The date of the meeting where this will be discussed will be published in due course."*

Matters arising from Minutes: Christchurch Car Park: the work discussed at the last meeting has not yet been done, because there is a shortage of pea-shingle; two 20-tonne loads are likely to be needed, and the work will be carried out when the material is available, possibly during the October half-term break. The Church has been asked to contribute to the cost, and a response is awaited.

War Memorial Hall and Shepherds Bridge parking areas: no sponsorship is forthcoming for ticket-issuing machines. The Clerk is investigating a proposal from a company which would provide the machines and carry out the legal processes, but the on-site monitoring would be the responsibility of the Rangers or other Parish Council staff, who would e-mail evidence of contraventions to the company. The Council would get £25 from each £60 penalty, but the main purpose of the exercise would be to deter commuters from using those areas. The Clerk will bring a report to the next meeting.

Public Forum: GH, on behalf of the committee of FoCC, welcomed the further progress with the grazing project (see below), and "put down a marker" that FoCC foresees possible difficulties with London Underground's current provisional proposal for Shepherds Bridge (mentioned in the paperwork for the Play Area): the suggestion is for traffic lights, and a footpath on the existing bridge - which might encourage drivers from the Station Approach side with a green light to assume all was clear, but there might be children on the bridge concealed by the parapet. (It was confirmed that any proposals would go to CWPC Planning Committee and Open Spaces Committee for discussion.)

Mr Robert Mann asked why the Play Area was not being discussed; (it was confirmed that information on technical issues was awaited;) and commented that there have been suggestions of "fracking" in the areas of Beaconsfield and Chalfont St Peter, and asked whether the Parish Council had considered whether that might also be proposed in Chorleywood, and the risks to groundwater quality. (It has not - yet - been considered.)

Financial information: the meeting authorised the officers to let vacant allotment plots

at half the annual rate for the remainder of the current year, to get them let and enable the new plot-holders to prepare the ground for next season. The fence around the Dog Kennel Lane allotment site is now in place. Arrangements have been made for some filming to take place in the week of 24 September, on the Common and elsewhere in the area, with the company's vehicles based at the Lorry parking area; the Council will receive £500 per day.

Open Spaces Officers' Report: a tour de force (GH has a full copy) including (in no particular order) the following points of particular interest.

- Amphibians: a report on the amphibians on the Common has been prepared and circulated to interested organisations and individuals.
- Flowers: two previously unrecorded species, Pignuts and Star of Bethlehem, were found on the land south of Shepherds Bridge (the Pignuts are also on the north side of the Cattle Creep), and the ecologist who came to the Commons Day in May also found Coralroot Bittercress. Later in the season there was a very fine show of Pyramidal Orchids in the Larks Meadow area: one of the volunteers counted over 400, and in addition six were observed the cleared field between Larks Meadow and the Railway Field, and one on the other side of Dog Kennel Lane. (The spread of the orchids may be the result of the weather, and also may have been helped by the grazing previously undertaken - the cows' hooves break up the thatch and the upper part of the soil.)
- Butterflies: the Ranger has noted 13 species of butterflies, and has passed the information on, to be included in the results of the volunteers' butterfly surveys.
- Ponds: none of the ponds actually dried out over the summer, and a good number of frog and toad tadpoles and newt larvae succeeded in metamorphosing. The Rangers have taken another 547 goldfish out of Darvells Pond, plus large numbers of sticklebacks; also 8 carp have been taken out, but at least one is still there. Christchurch Pond is recovering really well after the silt removal earlier this year: that work has opened the seed bank, and there are now nine species of plants in the pond (as opposed to the previous three), and pond dipping (with the children at one of the Woodoaks holiday clubs) also revealed abundant invertebrate life. Duckweed will have to be removed from Sladdys Pond, at a time to be decided to suit weather conditions and the needs of newt larvae.
- Children's holiday events etc: the Chorleywood and Loudwater Children's Centre organised a Children's Farm, which was very popular; and the Woodoaks Association held six successful Holiday Club sessions, with activities including bird box construction and den building. Clement Danes School has asked permission for pupils to undertake water testing in the ponds; and the Ranger will be taking a party from the U3A to look at and discuss the ponds and the heather.

- Grassland etc: the cut-and-lift was planned for the second week of September, with the Rangers dealing with the areas not accessible to the contractors' machinery. *[Now done.]* Two areas (east of Cherry Tree Cottages and between Old Common Road and Darvells Yard) are being left uncut until the end of May 2014 to provide overwintering habitat for insects, particularly butterfly larvae. The ragwort was less abundant this year; the Rangers have dealt with it, and have left those plants which were supporting Cinnabar moth caterpillars. The heather either side of Darvells Pond is regenerating well, and spreading; the contractor avoided cutting it. The Rangers and the volunteers will continue the heather regeneration project this autumn. The area between the Memorial Hall and Shepherds Bridge parking areas will be managed to encourage a succession of new and mature gorse bushes. The grass in the area of the May Bushes (between the cattle creep and the bottom of Larks Meadow) is not regenerating well; under the Stewardship agreement it is intended for regeneration, but it is only to be cut once a year, and it is proposed, as soon as practicable, to remove the layer of leaf-litter, which provides fertility and encourages rank vegetation rather than grass – the Countryside Management Service agrees, and grant funding is likely to be available through Higher Level Stewardship and also the Chiltern Conservation Board. Quotations for the work will be obtained for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.
- Village Day: was successful, and favourable weather meant that the Common took no damage. Some bags of litter were left and “got at” by (presumably) foxes; consideration will be given to having a skip at the Cricket Club parking area next year.

Seed harvest: the last seed harvest was in 1998, and supplies have all been used up. The Higher Level Stewardship agreement forbids the introduction of alien species, so when re-seeding is needed, either a special mix has to be obtained from a commercial source, or seeds previously harvested from the Common itself can be used; the latter course is cheaper. The chalk, neutral and acid areas of the Common have different plant mixes, but apparently if the seeds from all areas are harvested together, they do not need to be separated: the seeds which actually germinate at any location are the ones which like the soil they are in. There is one machine in the South of England which can carry out such a harvest, and it needs to be booked now for autumn 2014. The Committee agreed to include the seed harvest in the budget, and authorised the Clerk to book the contractor and his kit.

Grazing: the officers have been taking steps towards implementation of the decision to use “virtual fencing”. There have been meetings with the potential grazier (who provided the cattle for the original grazing trial), and it is anticipated that he will train the cattle (off-site) over the winter to get them used to wearing a collar and to the audible warning (delivered some feet before the electric shock), with a view to further trial grazing in spring 2014 and more in the autumn; it is anticipated that the same trained cows would come back in future years. Mark Carter of CMS has been asked to produce a detailed map; it is proposed to have three grazing compartments – so that the acid/neutral

and chalk sections of Larks Meadow and the May Bushes can be grazed at different times appropriate to their respective flora (for instance keeping cattle off the chalk section when the orchids are in flower; the extra cable to divide Larks Meadow would be likely to cost less than £100;) – and a holding pen in the Railway Field, where the cattle will be kept overnight. It is expected that the Higher Level Stewardship arrangements will fund a water-supply. More detailed arrangements will be proposed for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.

Appointment of a Steward of the Commoners: the main functions of the Steward would normally be to call annual meetings of the Commoners and other meetings as necessary, to advise the Commoners, and to liaise with the Parish Council as landowner. Mr John Warren has been the Steward since the 1960s: he advised the then Commoners in connection with the introduction of the Commons Registration Act 1965. He is now unable to continue as Steward owing to ill-health, and has tendered his resignation. There are five properties with rights of common (pasture and estover), whose owners at any time are therefore the Commoners. The Parish Council as landowner appoints the Steward, who should ideally have a legal background and an understanding of Common Land, and be able to liaise with the Council and advise the Commoners about their legal rights, duties and responsibilities. The Committee agreed that the position should be advertised, and a letter of thanks sent to Mr Warren.

“Four-year vision” – signage: a grant is available from the Chilterns Conservation Board for two information boards; it is considered that one should relate to the ponds and the other to Larks Meadow. The Clerk showed a mock-up of the suggested design. The advice received is that each board should have photographs or artwork, but not a mixture, and the text should be limited to 200 words; QR codes can provide links through mobile phones to supplementary information on Internet sites.

“Yellow dog” campaign: the PCSOs have instigated a “Dog Watch”, which is an e-mail based information service for dog owners similar to Neighbourhood Watch, and have asked the Council to promote the “yellow dog” campaign – the basic idea of which is that a yellow ribbon or other yellow indicator on a dog’s lead indicates that the dog needs space, for any of a variety of reasons: further details at www.yellowdoguk.co.uk and on the “latest news” page of the Parish Council’s website. The Committee agreed to promote the campaign.

Request to use a golf cart on the Common: a member of the Golf Club had written (with a doctor’s certificate as to his medical condition) asking permission to use a single seat golf buggy on the golf course. It was pointed out that the bye-laws allow the use of invalid carriages on the Common, and the Committee decided to grant the request, as a one-off, personal permission.

GH

[with apologies for delay and prolixity!]