

**FRIENDS OF HURST PARK
WORKING GROUP MEETING,
Garrick's Ait, 27 November 2013
MINUTES**

Present: John Inglis, (Chair); Jill Sanders, (Secretary); Alison Frawley; Addy Johnson

1. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from John Fitzpatrick and Hilary Powell

Having reluctantly accepted Paul Gossage's resignation from the Friends committee, the Chair on behalf of committee members wished to express thanks for Paul's past contributions and the regular work he carries out on the Hurst.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

There had been no formal minutes produced from the last meeting (July 2013) as it was felt nothing new had been addressed. It was **agreed** that henceforth detailed minutes would be agreed in draft by members of the group following each meeting, to be sent to council officers and for publication on the Friends of Hurst Park website, with a request to the community for any agenda items for the next meeting.

3. Management of the Meadows and copses

a. Future role of the wider Friends in relation to management plans and public consultation, in light of recent controversial and divisive issues.

It was felt that the recent unexpected proposal from the council to remove two copses and the assertion that the officers concerned were under the impression the Friends supported this unpopular proposal, had had the potential to do great harm. The consensus from the community had been clear, and it was overwhelmingly in opposition to the proposal. There was discussion about the council officers' position and it was agreed that they did not appear to be working to any 'secret agenda' on behalf of the cricket club, although this had been a concern expressed by many people in the community. Members of the community had been encouraged to express their views publicly about the park and Meadows, and the council was able to see those views on the Friends website. It was equally important that park users were kept informed of any proposals, actions or views from the council so that communication went both ways.

b. The committee's approach

The following policy proposal was agreed unanimously (including those not present who agreed via email): That all members of the Friends committee

refrain from publicising their personal views during public consultations or through the Friends website.

It was agreed that the role of the committee was to facilitate communications through the Friends of Hurst Park and to ensure that the council was fully aware of the views of users of Hurst Park. The council had to take into account local opinion and this would be seen on the Friends' website.

4. a. **Relationships with EBC officers and other local organisations**
Engagement with Parks officers

It was agreed that there must be frequent regular communication with the wider Friends on matters relating to Hurst Park and Meadows. The secretary reported that there was greater response from a direct approach through the database of Friends, compared with the website. The meeting agreed that both should be used, and that the committee should ensure regular communications with Elmbridge Council officers so that they were fully aware of the opinions expressed by users of the park, and in order that council information about the park could be disseminated to the membership.

The Secretary reported that the Friends had tried for many months to arrange a meeting with Parks Officers and eventually she was not getting responses to her emails to them. Despite these regular approaches asking for a meeting, and to be involved with the management plan for Hurst Meadows, there had been nothing from Elmbridge Council for a long time. This had been disappointing, especially following the first Annual General Meeting in January 2013 and undertakings from a senior officer of the council's wish to work with the Friends group. The committee felt particularly let down when members had taken time, trouble and expense to put in place effective means of communication with the website and database. However, despite these efforts, following the last public meeting communications had effectively ceased; it was agreed that this must not be allowed to continue. The recent copse removal plan repeated the scenario which followed the Council's proposals to put a cricket pitch in the heart of the Meadows in July 2011, which had prompted the formation of the Friends Group in the first place.

ACTION

b. **Relationships with local Residents' Associations**

The secretary had been asked to attend a Rivermead Residents meeting the previous week (21 November 2013) to update them with the latest information about removal of the copses, and she had been able to tell them that the council would not be going ahead with its original proposal but would publish a management plan. This would be open for public consultation through the Friends' website. The secretary reported that Rivermead residents reflected the view widely expressed that there was a need for management of the copses, but that local park users were overwhelmingly against complete removal. They also objected to the illegal moorings and the undisposed of

dog poo. A conversation with Paula day of the HPRA confirmed that there were now good working relationships and understandings across the three local groups. There had been some initial concern from the HPRA that the Friends might be in competition, but this had proved unfounded; the groups each had different and complementary interests, and this strengthened efforts to ensure local views were not overlooked. Many members of the Friends Group were also members of the HPRA or Rivermead Residents.

5. Updates and matters for action:

Flytipping - the recent appearance of dumped building and plumbing rubble in the Sadlers Ride car park and in the Graburn Way Car Park had been promptly reported to the council by the Friends group and it had been removed the following day. There was a notice on the website requesting people to keep a watching brief and note any registration numbers should further dumping occur.

Waste bins - this was a long standing issue that had been brought frequently to the attention of the council. The situation was terrible - the current bins were raided by foxes and contents scavenged and scattered widely across the park, almost daily. This was both an environmental health issue and an unsightly blight. It also cost the council money in the time and manpower it took to collect it. The committee agreed that fox-proof bins were required to resolve this problem as long as people disposed of food packaging and waste, and that the council should be reminded.

ACTION

Notice board - this was another old chestnut. The Council had agreed that the Friends would have a noticeboard in the Sadlers Ride car park area. Initially The Friends group offered to get the Noticeboard made to match other EBC noticeboards but the council turned this offer down. This year the Group was disappointed to be told by the council that the Friends would not be consulted about the siting of the noticeboard as Council officers knew best where it should go. In the event, nothing has appeared. The committee would like to be involved in choosing the best place for a noticeboard, and to be able to use the noticeboard to help inform park users.

ACTION

Illegal moorings - this was a worsening problem with boats on the Hurst Park towpath upstream of the Ferry landing and on the old Wharf opposite Platt's Eyot, moored up for weeks on end. AF had been contacting an officer in the Environment Agency but was told that the Agency was not certain the land was in its ownership. However, the agency had in the past admitted in public that the land between the towpath and the river was under its management and responsibility. It was agreed to pursue this issue as it was a situation that could only deteriorate. Already there was dog excrement and bags of household waste, scavenged by foxes and crows. It was noted that the Met

Police were now taking enforcement action in London Borough of Richmond against illegally moored boat owners. The situation at Hurst Park was likely to worsen still further as boats from Richmond sought new moorings. It was noted that unless there was enforcement action against these illegally moored boats the situation at Hurst Park could deteriorate rapidly. AF agreed to pursue the Agency. Other members had contacts and it was agreed to pursue them all. Hampton and Molesey Riverside Trust was also actively pursuing the Agency. Elmbridge officers had said that they were not in a position to take action as this was not council-owned land. The secretary hoped to be able to raise the issue at the River Users' Group on 28 November 2013, where enforcement was on the agenda as an item, and would report back.

ACTION

Follow-up: Carl Walters and Jim Overy (EA officers in this Thames area) attended the RUG8 meeting on 28 November and informed us that they do put notices to move on the boats on a fairly regular basis, but they say it is simply a cat and mouse game: the boats move a few meters upstream or down, and return. Imposing fines was very difficult, costly and labour intensive to make them stick. The intention now was to be able to impose fixed penalty charges, as local authorities and police forces do on the road and for parking. This would make it quicker and simpler to impose fines and make them stick, and it would mean the illegals would have to pay - the one thing they never wanted to do. The EA officer said he had spoken to ministers and that there seemed to be no resistance politically to this move. Local people might be able to hurry it along by lobbying their MPs to press the Home Secretary, both individually and as a group so there was significant people pressure.

ACTION

Events - park users on the database had been asked to feedback following the recent regatta and the responses had been collated and sent to the council; there had been no reply thus far. It was agreed to do this from now on each time a major event was held. It was also agreed to emphasise to the council that events should be notified to the Friends in advance for inclusion on the Friends website - the recent Hampton School regatta was not. It would also be useful to have fuller information as some of the summer events have become noisy and disruptive. There were two or three particularly disturbing events with loud music all day and a noisy compere shouting down a highly amplified microphone the entire afternoon. It was agreed this kind of very loud noise was not appropriate for a peaceful riverside park, and to ask the council about the conditions it stipulates on the licences it issues to hirers. Noise nuisance and the importance of being neighbourly were issues that should be covered. The volumes last summer were at levels to trigger complaints, but were under the auspices of a council letting.

ACTION

From the feedback the Friends received, the November 2013 Hampton School regatta seemed to have been managed much better than previous years. Two issues came up, one was the lack of taping off for areas, which was done in previous years, to protect planting and bulbs and prevent some areas being overused and turned into a quagmire. The bund around the Sadlers Ride car park, usually taped off, was used for boats, trailers and crews with little consideration for bulbs and plants planted there by the Residents' Association. The second issue was the signs, which were attached to trees with steel staples and had not been removed after the event. The committee felt there should be a sign-off for tidying up after events.

The committee expressed concern about the spring bulbs on the Meadows side of the Car Park at the next regatta (February 2014) as that area is often used as a car park, at a time when the bulbs are starting to grow. This should be noted by the council and that area of the Hurst should remain closed to vehicles.

ACTION

Dog poo - the problem continues without improvement. HP had raised it with officers at Elmbridge and had promises from them to visit the park and take action against regular offenders. It was agreed that members and all park users could be pro-active by gathering suitable information for statements. This would include the time and place of the offence, descriptions and the car registration (where possible) of the dog owner. It was agreed to follow this up and report back. An attempt had been made to put the issue on the public and environmental health agenda, especially as much of the excrement was found between the car park and the children's playground. Surrey County Council now had responsibilities for public health and attempts had been made to contact the new Health and Wellbeing Board, but with no response forthcoming. Cllr Mallett (SCC, Molesey) had not been prepared to take the issue up with his county colleagues but advised the group to make their own contacts, even though this had been attempted without result. The group agreed to persist!

ACTION

Follow up: a response had been received from Michael Gosling, chair of Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Board, that was not particularly helpful. It would be pursued further now there was a direct line established to the SCC councillor. Following HP's contact with EBC's Environmental Health, two officers had visited the Hurst and talked to dog walkers, including a regular offender, who claimed to always pick up after his dogs. The officers reported that the dog walkers they met were fully supportive of picking up and properly disposing of dog poo and welcomed the appearance of the officers. This was not always the case and the officers had been pleased to find this level of support at Hurst Park. The officers also noted information about dog walkers walking with more than four animals, and the long term and regular use of an

area of the park for commercial activity. It was agreed to use the web site to inform park users of contacts and how to report where they felt it was needed.

Decaux Toilet - An alarm in the toilet has been going off regularly during the summer and the high and continuous shriek had been left sounding, sometimes over a weekend. It had been difficult to find out who was responsible. It was noted that this was an old APC, and often not in working order. The Friends had reported it to the Council and to Decaux but it still took some days to get the alarm stopped.

Dead trees - there were a number along the towpath and there was a question about their stability. It had been confirmed by Kew that the riverside trees were affected by Honey Fungus and that it was spreading. Five large trees were now dead. There was concern that there was no management of riverside trees, presumably the responsibility of the Agency. It was noted that the council had dumped a lorry load of tree shavings on the riverside in this same area of dead trees, following felling of a large section of a big tree near the car park. It was agreed the council should be asked whether this was a new management approach as it was something that had not happened before.

ACTION

Follow up: Agency officers accept ownership of some of Hurst Park's river edge land; the rest, which is not registered, they are currently bringing into their ownership (this from Carl Walters, RUG8 meeting, 28/11/13).

6. Any other business

The group would need to organise an AGM in the New Year, with an appeal for one or two new committee members.