

**Record of the Public Meeting of the Friends of Hurst Park
Thursday 24 January 2013, St Paul's Parish Hall, East Molesey**

1. Welcome

There was a welcome and introduction from the Friends' working group and thanks for an attendance by about 50 people.

2. Presentation to the meeting

Mr Ian Gayton, Parks and Recreation Manager for Elmbridge Borough Council, spoke to the meeting about Hurst Park and Meadows, classified as a Strategic Area of Open Urban Land. He welcomed the formation of the Friends Group which he said would help the council in managing and enhancing the area and improve communication with local residents using the park. He pointed out that Elmbridge benefitted from having Countryside Officers expert in caring for the natural environment. He emphasised the importance of the park, particularly the rare grassland and flower meadows areas which featured some unusual soils and species amidst great diversity. He answered questions from the floor. Various issues were raised as follows:

Spread of ragwort: this species had value for wildlife, particularly insects and moths; there was to be an updated management plan that would include actions and species that could help diversity in the meadows.

Meadows: In response to a question from Mr Gayton, there was general agreement from the meeting that an extension of wildflower habitat would be welcome, especially as it was becoming increasingly rare.

Hurst Meadow Minor: The value of Little Hurst Meadow was something to be noted; as wet grassland it was a highly unusual habitat and it required careful management if it was to continue to improve. Also the wet areas on the larger Meadows area was a natural attribute of the site and valuable in adding to habitat diversity. These shallow water-filled areas were unusual, when once dewponds had been an essential feature of a rural landscape.

The woodland areas: The copses were growing increasingly tangled and these could be better managed to enhance wildlife and improve access for people. It was important that they did not spread uncontrollably, which would reduce the value of the grassland habitat. The objective was to control the dominant species and, in time, to encourage native species and replace imported cultivars. This kind of management needed well-briefed volunteers. There was a hope that some would come through the Friends; there were others in the Lower Mole Project, already trained, prepared to work with us in the meadows.

Threats: the prevalence of tree fungus in the area was causing some trees to die, and there was nothing that could be done to change this process, which was a natural one, other than planting of different species.

Paths: the council was doing some work on the circular paths in the Meadows area; a resident raised the state of the path linking Hurst Park Estate, near the Tescos entrance, with the riverside.

Basketball Court: residents confirmed that this was well used, often by mums with toddlers on bikes and scooters as a safe place to ride and play, as well as for basketball games. Mr Gayton informed the meeting that he had instigated a programme of replacing hard standing for such areas with a green coloured surface; there was agreement that this would be a great improvement in the park's landscape; some vegetation on the river bank side would also help to give a more rural feel to the views. Screening the hard standing areas might be negotiated with the Environment Agency. As part of the Agency's programme of works at Molesey Lock, which required an enclosure on Hurst Park, planting could perhaps be carried out as a quid pro quo.

Slipway: there was some debate about a proper slipway at Hurst Park, rather than the current launch facility for small boats. The proposal had been made over many years by various organisations. Notably it featured in the Thames Landscape Strategy Management Plan and had gained popularity. However, there were fears expressed that a full slipway with a free car park might attract overuse, a collection of trailers left behind for the season and wide-scale usage by motorised boats. It was generally agreed that a full slipway had to be considered with possible consequences taken fully into account. There were slipways at Sunbury and Thames Ditton.

Litter, dog-fouling and anti-social behaviour

There was discussion about making the rules stick as there was little or no enforcement. The assembly was clear they wanted to see wardens able to make fines. This would send out a strong message and help reduce antisocial behaviour. The use of barbecues, not permitted in any of the borough's parks, was another clear disregard of the regulations relating to the area, and again something that should be enforced. Litter came in many forms - someone had dumped ivy on a bumble-bee bank, which needed to be removed. Ian Gayton said it might be possible to target effective action/presence in light of intelligence, and that it would be useful for residents and users of the park to feed back through the Friends in this regard. Contacts for security would be published on the Friends' website.

3. Officers for the Working Group and adoption of constitution

A constitution (published on the website) was adopted. The working group present agreed to continue: Alison Frawley, Paul Gossage, John Inglis, Addy Johnson, Hilary Powell, Jill Sanders. The invitation for others to join was left open.

4. Appointment of Chair

John Inglis agreed to Chair the organisation and its meetings for one year; from the floor, Mr John Fitzpatrick offered his services as Treasurer - warmly accepted. Jill Sanders agreed to act as Secretary.

5. Discussion about the park - progress reports on:

Registration as a new town or village green:

There was nothing to report; Surrey County Council had written the previous day with the information that the matter still rested with counsel and a report and recommendations were awaited. Cllr Ernest Mallett, County Council Division Member for West Molesey, said that he was of the opinion the registration was a non-starter. As a member of the planning and regulatory committee, which would determine the application, he felt it had very little chance of success because of existing covenants on the area.

Nature Conservation Designations

Work was in hand. Base-line studies had to be carried out to determine the value of the habitat and whether or not it was improving. A brief note from one of the botanists involved in identification of the flora had indicated the area was considered of significant ecological value and that conservation status should follow as work was carried out. It was hoped to have the area designated as both a Local Nature Reserve and as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest.

Our allocated officers:

Dave Page (Countryside Management) and Matthew Almond (Parks), have been allocated to manage Hurst Park, working with local residents and users of the Park through the Friends' Group. The Working Group thanked Elmbridge for the allocation of the two officers. It was agreed that it was a park of different halves and landscapes and both approaches - wildlife and amenity - would be of great benefit.

Elmbridge Borough Council

There were inevitably financial constraints but also possibilities of other funding on top of revenue allocated annually for upkeep and capital expenditure, should it be agreed by the council. There were possibilities through self-help and close working with volunteers, other funding for projects in the future, and a relationship with Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Green Spaces Project, which had been established by the Friends. Mr Gayton emphasised the

importance of the democratic element that came through the Friends Group, and people power.

Cricket

In response to a member of the audience who raised the subject of young people playing, Mr Gayton said that they had not been forgotten; the council was working with East Molesey Cricket Club to create a cricket table at Molesey Hurst Recreation Ground.

Communications and feedback

The assembly was reminded that the Friends, through the website and email database, was in a position to act as an efficient interface with EBC. With information from officers and regular progress reports through newsletters and on the website, and with input from local people, park management could be improved with the addition of real-time intelligence.

Dates for a walk-over with conservation officer: From Dave Page

To meet interested residents and walk round the site discussing issues. Suggested dates:

Thursday 7th Feb 10.00 am, Wed 13th Feb 2.00 pm, Sat 2nd March or Sunday 3rd March 10.00am. Further dates can be added and advertised on site.

6. Request for hands-on volunteers

Several people signed up for a separate database and will be contacted.

7. Any other business

Funding the organisation:

Several people had made donations which had enabled the Friends to continue its membership of the Open Spaces Society, book the church hall and lay on refreshments. Donations were also made towards the cost of the evening by some present. Funding had also been required for hosting the website and the website domain name, which had been met by members of the Friends' working group.

Future meetings

There were suggestions for further public meetings with speakers to include Dave Page, the Environment Agency and representatives from other local groups.

Working together

The point was raised that there were several local organisations for the Hurst Park area. It was agreed that they could derive mutual benefit from working together. The Friends, with a sole focus on the park and meadows, would be in a position to complement the work of the Residents' Associations and the cross-riverside Trust. Mr Gayton reported that the Friends of Hurst Park was the first such group to form for a borough park and that the focus and non-political nature of the Friends were important factors.

8. Tea and coffee

It was heartening to see many stay on and meet up over refreshments.