



## NORTHWOOD HOUSE NEWSLETTER 1 NOVEMBER 2011

### TRUST MATTERS

Following the public consultation exercise, we continue to work towards redefining the structure of the Trust and discussions with the Charity Commission are ongoing.

In carrying out its function, the Charity Commission have made an order discharging the Isle of Wight Council as Custodian Trustee (they no longer wished to have that role) and replacing it with the Official Custodian. They have confirmed that in the current circumstances (the Isle of Wight Council's withdrawal from all interest in the Trust and Northwood House & Park) the 2002 Scheme is not fit for purpose as a modern Charity, and have agreed that changes should include formation of a Trust Company. They have met with representatives of Cowes Town Council and the Committee of the Friends of Northwood House & Park. The Trustees are currently drafting Articles which we intend should include provision for local people to become Members of the Trust Company at an annual subscription and have a say in the election of directors and the affairs of the charity in accordance with a new Scheme and Constitution. All of these matters will be going out for consultation in due course.

Once the new Trust set up is in place, we intend to register for Gift Aid which will enable us to claim back 25p in the pound from all donations made by UK tax payers.

We shall shortly be taking steps to have the accounts for our first year of operation audited. Preliminary management accounts indicate that by dint of huge amounts of volunteer labour (including countless hours by the Trustees and Advisors) we have coped reasonably in our first year, although we still have some unsettled matters. The Charity has recently put in a lengthy complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman concerning actions by the Isle of Wight Council, including the unsatisfactory manner in which it confused its own affairs with those of the Charity.

Liz Mackenzie, the Trustee nominated by Cowes Community Partnership, stepped down at the end of her four-year term and was formally reappointed for the next four years despite objections from the committee of the Friends of Northwood House and Park. Liz has

long experience of the Trust as well as considerable relevant professional skills and I am delighted she has agreed to carry on.

Our advertisement for a part-time Administrator produced 64 applicants and the selection process will be managed by our Trustees with professional experience in HR. In the meantime two or three individuals are adding some aspects of the Administrator role to their normal responsibilities.

We have recently been contacted by someone experienced in the preparation and carrying out of conservation building projects, including creating bids for funding, and hope to benefit from her skills and interest in Northwood House.

### THE HOUSE

Projects include progressing our application to create a toilet for disabled people and three days' dirty work for two getting the wiring in place for electrical contractors to complete to provide extra heating and improve safety. Remedial action on windows and outside plasterwork continues – notably on the Park side of the Rotunda walls. A vast improvement, thanks to the regular volunteers and the good weather.

We have plans to purchase suitable second-hand chairs to increase the numbers we can seat comfortably, as well as a frame for the piano to allow it to be moved from its safe storage position for use elsewhere in the House.

### EVENTS

Talks continue regarding Northwood House hosting the weekend celebrations next May of the Town's link with Poland and its warship, the Blyskewica. We are delighted that the Boudoir Grand Piano we have on long loan is an attraction for this and for other events; for example, plans are underway for a musical extravaganza – more news about that shortly.

Bookings for Christmas Parties, catered by All About Catering, are coming in and plans are in being made to decorate the House.

### THE PARK

The Park is for everyone to enjoy and dogs under control are welcome, but recently there

seems to be far more dog dirt left uncollected by owners. Whether on the paths or under the trees it should be cleared up. It is horrible for everyone, including other dog walkers who have complained, and not good for other dogs, so we will be making an effort to ensure owners clear up after their dogs and keep them under control. Suitable bins and warning notices are all in place so there is no excuse. A member of the public has informed the Dog Warden who will monitor the situation.

Near the Community Hall, stonework has been damaged and stolen recently which has been reported to the Police and to our security guards.

We like to work with the community where we can and have recently responded positively to a request from Cowes Enterprise College for some gardening space. During the coming year students will cultivate an agreed suitable area as part of their curriculum.

We have established a regular Wednesday and Saturday morning working party which has brought some new faces to the Park and made an impact on the falling leaves, keeping the paths clear. People can just turn up – it's more fun than going to the gym and it's free, with all equipment and coffee and biscuits provided. The large trailer lent to the Trust has been a great benefit. These contributions release funds for necessary professional help – for example in hedge cutting.

The loos in the Park have been prepared for the winter and we expect to open them again in spring, as usual. The tennis nets will be removed and repaired during the winter.



More tree work has been approved for action and will be carried out as funds permit. We are planning flower bed maintenance for the winter – volunteers

are responsible for the excellent displays this year – special thanks to Brenda Martin Dye and to Mrs & Mrs Paul Hope who have been planting daffodils. The rose bed near the loos is not thriving and is high maintenance and will be turfed when funds permit.

### **CAR PARKING**

When the Trust took over responsibility for the two car parks, the Trustees decided to manage the Rotunda car park so that visitors to the Park and House could use this area for short-term parking. It was previously

usually fully occupied by non-payers with no interest in the House or Park who parked for days or weeks. We therefore had to pay for



the access road to be yellow-lined and the parking area white-lined at a total cost of over £1,400. For the first year of operation parking for the first hour has been free of charge (parkers take a ticket from the machine) and users have welcomed

the fact that they can now find a parking space when visiting.

Unfortunately, increased use is wearing out the surface, which had already been patch repaired. Now that we have a year's operation and an understanding of the actual income generated compared with the maintenance costs of a car park which has many movements each day which slowly but surely wear out the tarmac, the Trustees have, with regret, agreed that a small charge must be levied for the first hour (though other charges will remain unchanged). We hope this will help to fund the repair costs which are already looming. We have been quoted £10,000 to tarmac the parking area but hope that in the short term, patching will be sufficient which is estimated at £3,000. Cheaper 'fixes' (Coldlay) are just temporary and short-term.

The Trustees and all our volunteers have given hours of labour to bring back to life the House and Park, and it seems only fair that those who use the car park should pay something towards its upkeep, thereby releasing funds to support the House and Park.

### **COWES WEEK 'PARK & WALK'**

The Trust was very grateful for the work done by Cowes Carnival Committee who ran the charity parking during Cowes Week and the Island Games on behalf of the Trust once again. In spite of an agreement with the Isle of Wight Council for the Trust to make a charge, most visitors to the Island Games refused to pay and I have informed their Chairman. The Trust made a donation to Cowes Carnival Committee in recognition of their work to provide an efficient and friendly service and raise significant funds for the Trust. Numbers were down this year, partly resulting from the Isle of Wight Council's decision to allow the Southern Vectis 'Park & Ride' scheme to run from the Showground on the Newport Road. Considerable congestion was caused and traffic to and from Cowes was delayed. Why people would want to park and take a bus from there when they can park inexpensively in Cowes itself and take a short

walk to all of the Cowes Week events is a mystery to us, and this contributed to the reduction of income suffered by the Trust this year.

### **PLAY EQUIPMENT**

Replacement swings for the two damaged ones have now been received. We are very grateful to two families who came forward straight away and between them have almost paid for both – we are only £70 short and donations to cover this would release funds for other work. We are looking into installing some extra equipment on the 'vacant lot' where I am told a see-saw stood until removed by the council, and I would welcome suggestions and donations to improve this children's play area.

### **COMMUNITY HALL**

Although providing a community hall is not part of the Trust's remit, we continue to offer this facility which is suitable for a wide range of uses. It has a permanent ramp access; we have just upgraded the lighting by adding to the low-energy lights fitted by the Isle of Wight Council, no doubt for the best of reasons, but which gave too low a light for most purposes; it is well heated; and there are cloakrooms and a kitchen area opening onto the main hall which makes it especially ideal for children's parties. We have loyal, regular users, but more bookings are needed to cover the running costs. The hourly charge for the hall is only £10 and increased use by local people and groups is vital to our ability to continue to offer this facility. Use it or lose it!

I met the committee of the Short Mat Bowlers who have used the Community Hall regularly twice a week for many years. It was a useful meeting to discuss issues where we can work together and explain what the Trustees are doing. They like the new lighting, installed (again by our stalwart volunteers) since my last newsletter.

### **PARK COURT**

Although discussions with Medina Housing have been delayed by their internal reorganisation, some progress is being made in correct boundary marking.

### **CHURCH LODGE**

As the owner of Church Lodge we carried out emergency repairs required following damage by vandals.

### **THE FRIENDS OF NORTHWOOD HOUSE & PARK**

In mid-October the Chair of the Friends of Northwood House and Park and most of her colleagues on the Committee reported their resignation to the County Press and on its

website. I think their concerns are based on misunderstanding of the work of the Trust in spite of our continuing efforts to inform and work with the Chair, and I look forward to meeting the new Committee members. Meanwhile their nominated Trustee, Janet Allan, and Maggie Ankers, also a Trustee, will continue to be a working link.

We very much welcome the support offered by members and volunteers from the Friends and we will work with them to participate in dressing the windows of St Mary's Church for Christmas.

Thank you for your interest. I would welcome any comments you may have.



31 October 2011