



## NORTHWOOD HOUSE NEWSLETTER 1 OCTOBER 2011



We are now one year on from the date the Isle of Wight Council finally handed over every aspect of managing Northwood House and Park to the Trustees.

It has been a very challenging year, and one in which we have found out a great many 'unknown unknowns', including the true costs of running the House and Park. The Trust continues to seek better value across the board. For example, we succeeded in bringing the insurance bill down by some 25%, due to improvements carried out by the Trust and having a one-year history to reassure would-be insurers. Some costs are unavoidable: for example, the marriage licence is due for renewal in six months' time, at a cost of £1,250. Other costs include providing better, cost-effective heating and repairing potholes in the Rotunda car park. Health and public safety and water ingress issues drive our schedule of work. Our budget for the year beginning 1 October 2011 is almost complete and protocols agreed for effective management.

### THE HOUSE

Volunteers have continued work on accessible plasterwork and windows and the Rotunda ceiling has been finished. The kitchens are now fully functioning. Urgent maintenance work continues and quotes are being obtained for work required before winter strikes.

We must generate worthwhile income for the Trust and to this end All About Catering are now promoting special Christmas parties for groups of all sizes. Recently we hosted the Chamber of Commerce AGM and lunch, and bookings for future events are filling up the diary. We are negotiating with a local business to rent office accommodation and have also met a potential user of other parts of the House.



We have received satisfying letters of thanks from people who have held a special day at the House. Their letters are a great boost because everyone works very hard to ensure they have a wonderful day, but they

are probably blissfully unaware of some of things we have to deal with – a recent example was the blocking up of the men's urinals after a celebration, which meant that (thankfully clean) water soaked the carpet all night.

### THE PARK

Once again Cowes Week charity car parking brought a very worthwhile income for which we are indebted to the Cowes Carnival Committee, led by Lynn Hammond. Income was down, but Cowes was quieter and we will improve the signage next year. What is shocking is the refusal of some people to pay the very reasonable charge of £5 for a whole day or £2.50 for an afternoon, and I am sorry that the volunteers receive considerable abuse. The space was also made available for the closing day of the Island Games. The Park Road car park income for September is very satisfactory and much needed. Euro Car Parks staff assist with general maintenance and security.

Recent problems with the drains in the loos in the Park were successfully addressed. Although those loos normally close at the end of September, in the light of such beautiful weather they have remained open into October and will shortly be secured and closed for the winter. The tennis courts have been very popular this season; unfortunately we cannot work out a cost-effective way of charging for casual use (apart from suggesting using the parking machine in the Rotunda as an honesty box) but Cowes Enterprise College paid for exclusive use at certain times over the summer which will help pay for essential net maintenance.



The most urgent tree maintenance work is now complete and permission for the next stage will be sought. Work in the Park is ongoing and apart from professional grass cutting and tree work is all done by volunteers. We plan the work but try to be flexible to take into account volunteers' interests. Tools are provided.

In the play area, the swings damaged by vandals will soon be replaced, sponsored by two local families. There is a space where a see-saw provided by Cowes Town Council some time ago was removed, and we would be delighted if the Council is able to provide a replacement. Parts of this area are becoming slippery and will be cleaned shortly.

Dogs are free to roam in the Park and I'm sorry to say that not all owners clear up after them. We have plans to create a dog-free area beside the bowling green for other people's enjoyment. We seek sponsorship of perhaps as little as £400 to install secure fencing around the area.

A benefactor has generously funded the purchase of a motorised leaf-collecting machine. However, people with brushes are still needed and no doubt you will see volunteers keeping the park tidy.

### TRUSTEES

Following the public consultation exercise, progress continues towards redefining the structure of the Trust. Discussions with the Charity Commission continue and they have confirmed that the 2002 Scheme is not fit for purpose, and that changes should include the formation of a company limited by guarantee. They also met Cowes Town Council and the Committee of the Friends of Northwood House & Park.

Our Administrator came to the end of her four-month appointment and has now taken up a full-time post elsewhere. Her excellent contribution to setting up systems and working on event bookings has been a great assistance to the Trust and we will advertise the part-time vacancy. We have recently welcomed the assistance of a fully qualified book-keeper on a voluntary basis and also someone to assist with marketing and minuting our meetings.

Other issues:

- discussions with Medina Housing about Park Court issues are unfortunately being delayed by its internal reorganisation;
- gas and other safety checks have recently been carried out on Church Lodge, which is part of the Northwood House estate, and the Green Gym carried out some clearing of its garden;
- Gift Aid is being investigated for the benefit of the Trust;
- we were disappointed to see in the County Press that Cowes Town Council have decided to relocate their meetings from the Community Hall for reasons including 'inadequate lighting' and 'poor disabled

access'. I can confirm that additional lighting is now planned and there is a suitable ramp into the Hall. However the loos installed by the Isle of Wight Council are not large enough to accommodate wheelchair users. Plans are in place to upgrade these as soon as funds permit. The Community Hall is available for £10 an hour, has a kitchen with an open hatch and we have a number of loyal long-term satisfied users.

### EVENTS

On 10 and 11 September we participated in the national Heritage Open Days, welcoming



over 150 visitors who enjoyed the tours guided by some of the Trustees and our House Manager with the best knowledge of the history and

layout of the House. The Friends joined us and we all took the opportunity to promote their upcoming fundraiser – a salsa evening on 21 October – and the Christmas Party evenings being organised by our in-house caterers, All About Catering. Bookings are currently being taken for 16 and 17 December, with other dates likely to follow. Why not make up a group of friends? Hear about it on IWRadio, check out our website or see the fliers.

For 2012 plans are progressing to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee as well as the wartime protection given by the Polish warship Blyskawica.

We have on display a charming painting made by a local artist showing a cheery wedding party lined up for a photograph in front of the herbaceous border. Prints can be ordered via the Trust and she will donate a percentage of sales to the Trust. We are very grateful for her initiative. Another local artist has donated a painting of parts of the tulip tree in the Park.

[www.northwoodhouse.org](http://www.northwoodhouse.org) is the official Trust website, where you will find accurate information about our activities. It continues to be updated and also offers an easy contact via email.

Thank you all for your interest.

*Ann Thwaites*

2 October 2011