



NORTHWOOD HOUSE NEWSLETTER: DECEMBER 2011

TRUST MATTERS

Details of the proposed new governance are currently with the Charity Commission for its consideration.

Negotiations continue with Park Court about land wrongly occupied by them, but are unfortunately being delayed by their internal reorganisation.

We are currently preparing details of some aspects of Northwood Park where financial assistance from Cowes Town Council would be especially welcome in support of this Cowes community asset and much-used open space.

We have been informed that an application for Village Green status for the Park has been lodged with the Isle of Wight Council. Independent advice received by the Trust is that Northwood Park cannot be a Village Green because its dedication and user since 1929 does not fit the scheme of the Village Green legislation. If this matter should be proceeded with after initial vetting by IWC it will inevitably involve the Trust incurring legal costs as we have a fiduciary duty to oppose it. As Cowes Town Council will also be aware, opposing the application will inevitably involve the diversion of Trust funds and Trustees' time from the House and Park. It is ironic that a misguided application should have been made at exactly the time when the Trustees are in communication with the Charity Commission trying to put in place a future structure which will secure the Park for local enjoyment. We hope the Council will support the necessary legal opposition to this application.

We are continuing to seek clarity on all supply contracts entered into by the Isle of Wight Council and have had significant success in achieving better deals for the Trust. Some bills, on investigation, turn out not even to relate to Northwood House and Park. Unfortunately, some weeks ago the Isle of Wight Council cancelled one emergency phone line without notifying the Trust or giving us the opportunity to take over the line at no charge; this is being dealt with. A lot of work was done by the Finance sub-Committee to put a budget for the year

1.10.2011–30.9.2012 in place including a substantial maintenance budget. Our accounting processes have been reviewed and we are now operating a SAGE system, with provision for accruals as opposed to simple historical convention accounts on Excel. Our volunteer book-keeper has been invaluable in getting the SAGE system up and running. The Board has re-confirmed the appointment of our Auditors for another year and they have been given instructions to conduct an audit of the 2010-2011 accounts. The main source of income for the Trust is the Park Road car park; income from this source is currently exceeding that received last year, and, indeed, in previous years when under the management of the Isle of Wight Council. Bookings for events in the House are growing as people realise that the House is in good shape and open for business, with five stylish Grade II* listed rooms that can cater for groups from 10 to 180 and its licence for civil ceremonies.

THE HOUSE

Listed Building consent has now been given by the Isle of Wight Council for the creation of a disabled toilet; and as part of this development, the existing toilets in the House will be upgraded. These are both long overdue improvements which have had to await funds and permissions.

The Christmas lights have been a cheering sight for users of the Park and we propose leaving the colourful ones in the upstairs window during the rather dull months of January and February. The purchase of these lights was made possible by a generous member of the community.



EVENTS

The Christmas dinner parties attracted at least one visit from Father Christmas, and groups

large and small enjoyed David Rogers' superb food and then danced off the calories to a disco. The Trustees took a table on the last night and enjoyed celebrating 'one year on' before having a holiday from business like most other people. We understand that AAC will be offering similar parties again next year and everyone is encouraged to book early for the date they prefer.



A reminder that the Motor Neurone Disease Association will be holding their annual antiques fair in the House again on 12 February from 10.30am-3.00pm.

We also plan to begin to offer tours of the House this year, telling the story of the Ward family and their design, occupation and withdrawal from the House and showing visitors some of the areas not normally seen by the public. Interested groups should email us on trustees@northwoodhouse.org.

THE PARK

This is a summary of our latest news update on activity in the Park; for the full report go to www.northwoodhouse.org/park



Throughout the summer the park has been kept in a very tidy and well-maintained state, as many users have been kind enough to comment. This is

thanks in large part to some dedicated volunteers – in particular Paul and Carol Hope and Brenda and Gordon Martin-Dye – who have helped with planting and maintenance, co-ordinated by Janet Allan and Philip Thwaites with car and trailer. The herbaceous border was cut back last autumn and this summer as a result it put on a wonderful show. The large flower pots will have to be cleared soon and prepared for next season. Help would, as always, be very welcome.



The Trust has a professional contract to mow the grass on an 'as-needed' basis, and with effect from the New Year this contract has been extended to include all hedge-cutting

and strimming in the park to avoid expensive wear and tear on our equipment.



Disappointingly, the tennis nets and posts are deteriorating through weather and continuous use, and the Trustees may have to consider reducing the number of courts available in 2012 while repair and maintenance are carried out. A number of new posts and nets will be

needed and we would welcome offers of sponsorship – nets cost approximately £95 each and pairs of posts also cost £95.

However, as always the biggest task has been collection of dead leaves which are put into piles to rot down in the collection area behind the Rotunda car park or, more recently, behind plastic fencing below the play area. A very small group of volunteers meet regularly on Wednesday and Saturday mornings to do this job and it would be nice to have some more help. Come and join us at 10am for a couple of hours – it would be greatly appreciated. Please contact Janet Allan on 295612 if you can offer some non-strenuous gardening time.



Work on the trees continues, subject to budget restrictions. Regular users of the Park may well have noticed that the trees are better maintained, with regular pruning and lifting by our skilled and dedicated tree surgeon, Dave Budden.

Unfortunately, honey fungus has been identified in a number of tree-stumps; this is a widespread problem across the country and is almost impossible to eradicate, but at present it is only evident in the many rotten stumps in the Park. It is planned to remove as many of these stumps as possible, but this is a major task requiring significant effort and we must call on volunteer assistance.



CAR PARKING

Last month I announced that the Trustees have reluctantly decided that parking in the Rotunda car-park is to be subject to a charge

for the first hour. This first hour has been free since the Trustees took over and made the rather costly improvements – in particular white-lining and drain clearance – and made the area available for visitors to the Park; previously all the spaces were being occupied and emergency access blocked by parkers with no interest in the House other than to be able to park free and for long periods. I have had discussions with some of the more significant users who understand and support the need to stop the free parking, and I have assured them and all users that all income will be used to maintain the Rotunda car park. The wear and tear on the tarmac surface will cost a significant amount to repair; we are very grateful for the recent help from a kind supporter to patch the worst holes, but a complete resurfacing cannot be put off indefinitely.

With effect from 30 January 2012 the charge for the first hour will be 50p; other charges will be unchanged and notices alerting people to the change will be displayed by Euro Car Parks. All charges in the Park Road car-park will remain unchanged and 5- and 7-day quarterly and annual permits continue to be available from enquiries@eurocarparks.com or by phone on 0207 563 3000.

COMMUNITY HALL

Some new users are booking the Hall – we are currently in discussion with a group of roller skaters – and our regular users continue their use. For the third year running a group held a New Year party there, had a great time and left the Hall in a very good clean and tidy state. Hiring the Hall is good value for an excellent and versatile space, with a good kitchen area, plenty of room to move, cloakrooms of course and convenient adjacent parking in the Rotunda car park. Anyone interested should contact the Trust on trustees@northwoodhouse.org or Ginnie Gledhill direct.

AND FINALLY ...

The end of the calendar year is a good time to thank my colleagues and all those people who support the work of the Trust in word and deed. The commitment of all those people is surely the clearest indication anyone could hope for that we are indeed working hard to improve, maintain and create a sustainable future for Northwood House & Park, and are succeeding in that aim. I thank them and encourage others to join us.

Thank you for your interest. I would, as always, welcome any comments.



3 January 2012