

NORTHWOOD HOUSE CHARITABLE TRUST
Report to Cowes Town Council 8 June 2011

The period of consultation has now come to an end and responses will be studied and consolidated. It is disappointing to read in the response of CTC to the Consultation and in the local newspaper comments that apparently Cowes Town Council wishes to support a Village Green application relating to Northwood Park. The Trustees are satisfied on legal advice that this is wrong in law. They also consider it to be irrelevant in the Northwood House & Park context when the Trust exists precisely to make the Park available to the residents of Cowes. This could distract the funds and attention of the Trustees at this crucial time. The Council is advised to seek proper legal advice before supporting such a course.

On the subject of the CTC response to our consultation document, which is the first time such detailed information has been circulated so widely, it is my personal view that it is disappointing that members continue to be so negative and that they have failed to truly embrace the invitation to put forward positive and reasonably worked out proposals. We will be studying all of the responses to the Consultation carefully, including that from CTC, applying the criteria that we need to find a sustainable future for the House and Park.

An Open House was held on the afternoon of 22 May when about 300 people visited the house and took tours of some of the less well known parts of the House as well as the fine public rooms. Amongst those who visited were our Mayor and our MP. We also opened up for people to view the House on 29 May when Cowes Carnival Committee held their Picnic in the Park. All About Catering opened the Tudor Bar and the Community Hall offered refreshments, provided by a team from St Mary's and the Friends. A welcome event and a successful family day.

Work continues on the fabric of the House, concentrating on the exterior and kitchen areas. In response to a request from a recent meeting with Older Voices, an extra hand rail has been installed outside the Community Hall and the lighting improved.

Flora has been cleaned up and her niche repainted. I contacted Love Lane School who were responsible for arranging restoration some years ago, and we hope this might lead to an interesting link with a local school.

In the Park we have been assisted by volunteers, including two excellent CDG young men on a six week arrangement, as well as a first visit from the Green Gym. It is clear that dealing with leaf fall all year round will be an everyday task. Overdue and urgent tree maintenance work has begun by a trained specialist. Neighbouring properties were informed. Because of the Park's conservation area status, work on trees can only be carried out with the permission and under the direction of the Tree Officer of IWC.

Following earlier professional advice, some flower beds in the garden around the House have been turfed. Other beds have been planted for the summer but will be redesigned later for best effect. Volunteers, supported by the Friends, have replanted the tubs around the exterior.

Trustees would like to develop the old pitch and putt area above the bowling green to be a dog free area suitable for families to picnic and we are currently seeking a sponsor to fund improvements to the fencing.

Arrangements are being made to assist the High School by agreeing short term timetabled use of some tennis courts during the day, as well as with two other organisations which will promote the game, perhaps with a view to developing more organised use of this facility. Courts will continue to be available for general use.

Users of the Park have told me that they enjoy being able to find a parking place in the Rotunda Car Park, now that parking is controlled and the first hour is free. It's good to see the Park enjoyed by so many people and use of the Park Road car park increasing. Car park

income to the Charitable Trust considerably exceeds receipts generated before IWC handed over management to our professional operator last November.

Regular meetings are arranged with our security men to ensure that suitable arrangements for the House and Park are in place and protocols followed.

We have accepted a generous offer from a Cowes resident of an excellent piano which we hope to take delivery of shortly. Another resident has undertaken to take care of maintenance costs. We hope it will open the door for musical events to be held in the House.

Charity Parking organised by Cowes Carnival Committee will be available for Cowes Week 2011, as well as for the NatWest Island Games, and plans are developing with our in-house caterer and interested parties for Cowes Week as well as for events into the Autumn and next year for the House and Park.

We are delighted to welcome Jo Ferguson to work on a four month plan as Administrator to the Trust. Work continues to clarify electricity and water charges and supply and to ensure good administrative procedures are followed. Meetings and discussions have been held with advisors on fund raising and grant applications.

Recently we received an outline business proposal from Camelot Group which will be given full consideration. However, we are advised by the Charity Commission that currently we are not in a position to progress such expressions of interest as we have to agree significant changes to the Trust itself due to the withdrawal of the Isle of Wight Council as the beneficiary. You will recall that the original purpose of the Trust was to provide municipal offices so the purpose of the charity has to be amended. Camelot's outline proposal will be brought forward when our trust structure permits.

One reason for my resignation from Cowes Town Council was the unsatisfactory position about perceived conflict of interest attaching to a Councillor also acting as the nominated Trustee on the Northwood House Charitable Trust. I believe this may have been evidenced earlier when Councillor Wells resigned as the IWC nominated Trustee. More recently as you all know I was excluded from Council discussions relating to Northwood House and not permitted to hear what was said by my fellow members although I was the only Councillor with full and complete information. Members may not know but early in my time as the Council's nominated Trustee I attended training courses to help me fulfil the role of Trustee properly and I have taken advice on the interest issue, which I shared with the Council, albeit my representations were not accepted.

The situation I was working in was wholly unconstructive and I sincerely hope that my no longer being a Councillor will remove that obstacle to worthwhile communication. I am willing to attend meetings where due notice of relevant issues is being discussed to give my input. Other trustees have also volunteered to assist the Council in this manner.

I wish to assure you that, as the Council's nominated Trustee, I will continue to carry out my role to the very best of my ability until the end of my term of office which is September 2013. My recommendation would be that in future the Council does not nominate a trustee from amongst its members.

While a Member I introduced a monthly report to the Council, on a number of occasions in writing. How would members wish me to continue to report to the Council? There is no obligation in the nomination process for any reports but I am content to continue to report in writing if the Council should wish this. Please confirm the date by which the Clerk needs to receive my report to allow for circulation to Councillors.

Ann Thwaites
1 June 2011