



**WELCOME FROM ANN THWAITES, CHAIR OF TRUSTEES, TO THE PUBLIC MEETING
ON 28 NOVEMBER 2011**

A warm welcome, and thank you all for attending.

Showing on the screen are some images of Northwood House and Park, mostly from our archives – it's interesting to compare them with today's situation after all the painting and renovations that have been and continue to be carried out.

All the Trustees of Northwood House Charitable Trust are present tonight: Janet Allan (nominated by the Friends of Northwood House & Park), Maggie Ankers, David Christie, Ginnie Gledhill, Liz Mackenzie (nominated by Cowes Community Partnership) and me, Cowes Town Council nominated Trustee. Also in the room tonight are Chris Buckett, House Manager, and Philip Thwaites, advisor to the Trust and a significant volunteer – they both deserve special thanks.

The Agenda tonight is brief. First, I have a short update for you. Second will be a summary of the current situation from Liz, and finally an explanation of the future structure and governance of the Trust which David will present. This is the purpose of the meeting and his presentation - including how you might play a part - will take about half an hour, after which we will invite your questions. We plan to end by 9.00.

When the Trustees took over management of Northwood House & Park, the only clarity we had about available funds was the absolute clarity that there weren't enough. As Trustees we agreed that our responsibility was to address health and safety and public safety issues and urgent maintenance. We used existing condition reports on the House and Park commissioned by the Isle of Wight Council, making up-to-date judgements. We also responded to our current insurer's requirements; and with the help of professionals – paid and voluntary – I am satisfied that we are addressing these issues.

In the House itself we have improved the electrical circuitry and heating, cleanliness, decorations, lighting, drains - in the service areas as well as the public spaces. Stopping water ingress has been fundamental, of course. Cleaning and refurbishing the kitchens fit for formal inspection and use and bringing the Rotunda into a good state were important and significant projects.

Outside, window surrounds and plasterwork have been repaired and painted and the garden areas have been prepared, planted and tended. The play area is inspected regularly and recently had a good scrub. The herbaceous border and flower beds have been cut back for the winter after superb displays throughout the summer. Grass cutting by the contractor has been augmented by volunteers who have also cleared away leaf drop. The bowling clubs took over responsibility for their facility and we have opened the tennis courts and maintained them throughout the summer even though it was not possible to charge for public use.

The Park is a conservation area, so any work on the trees must be approved by the Council Tree Officer and carried out by suitably trained personnel. We are working through a schedule, with public safety being the priority, and will soon be able to begin work on preparing a suitable planting scheme.

The Park Road car park is the Trust's main source of income and use has been increasing, perhaps reflecting the fact that our charges are comparable to IWC car parks. Permit holders pay the equivalent of £2.30 to park all day, which is good value and cheaper than the return bus fare from the Park & Ride. Surface wear and tear is a concern as maintenance costs are high. Euro Car Parks do a good job for the Trust in managing both car parks.

Opening up the House for events and promoting its use has required a great deal of time, effort and money, but with support from our in-house caterers, All About Catering, I am delighted to tell you that interest from the public is now resulting in many bookings - 35 events are already booked for 2012. The most recent event was a musical extravaganza, organised by Landon Sounds last Friday. If you weren't here I can tell you that you missed a really good evening with lots of variety (and very tasty canapés!).

Even the Park is being brought to life with various events held and plans being developed for next year.

Trustees have also worked on organisational matters – preparing and submitting accounts, organising budgets and Trust structure. We have just appointed an experienced administrator which is great. Ginnie updates our website – please look at us on www.northwoodhouse.org for up-to-date and accurate information.

Although helped in many ways by advisors and supporters in the community it is the Trustees who bear the legal responsibility to act always in the best interest of the Trust. We have been giving all our time, skills and energy towards that for the past year, and I want to thank colleagues, advisors and supporters for the contribution they have made to this great project.

That's enough from me. Now we get to the main purpose of this meeting, and I hand over to Liz for an explanation of 'how we got here'.

Ann Thwaites

28.11.11