



NORTHWOOD HOUSE CHARITABLE TRUST

Report to Cowes Town Council - February 2011

Clearing, cleaning, generally improving conditions in the house and leaf clearing and litter picking in the park continue and the grass has had its first cut of the year. The play area has been fully inspected and only two low priority aspects identified for attention, but which nevertheless are scheduled for suitable action. The fallen branches from the trees damaged in the winds ten days ago were cleared away by volunteers. We are very grateful to the local lady who paid £25 for a load of logs. A tree survey of the whole park has been done and work will be scheduled.

A question – can anyone tell me what colour the Rotunda used to be painted? Blue has been suggested for the ceiling. Or any other parts of the House? We'd love to know.

We have plans to improve the signage on Ward Avenue by bringing it up to date.

We have just hosted two profile-raising events, both sponsored by our in house caterer. The Island Chamber of Commerce was celebrating 60 years of the Minghella Ice Cream company. After a buffet supper for 70, Robert, Gloria and Gioia Minghella spoke and their gorgeous ice cream was offered for everyone's enjoyment. Their mantra is 'use the best, freshest, real ingredients'. Their loyalty to this Island is very strong and they enjoyed the Northwood House experience.

The second was a successful, lively breakfast meeting for 120 businessmen and women to launch the Island's sector of the National Apprenticeship Scheme. Very interesting speakers, including a young apprentice, and an opportunity for organisations to be informed and to join the scheme. GKN was a strong supporter and the High Sheriff chaired and talked of his support for the work of the Trustees. Two excellent occasions showcasing Northwood House. Someone said, 'There's nowhere else on the Island to compare with this.' There are still some folks who think the house is still being run by IWC and in a run-down state, so it's good to bring in the movers and shakers to spread the word that the House is sparkling and in action.

A charity antiques fair is booked for 27 February and there will be a 'Jazz at Northwood House' evening on 5 March – just music from the Gary Plumley quartet, perhaps a drink or two, and a relaxed convivial evening – organised by the Friends in aid of the charitable trust. Tickets only in advance are £12 from the Friends.

Work to promote the house for events continues with interest from across the board. Civil ceremonies are booked and the Registrar will visit shortly to ensure everything is in order. Only the other day I heard someone who should know better say on the radio, 'We don't do weddings any more at Northwood House.' Well, we can offer a very nice venue if he is interested!

Work to bring the kitchens up to standard were progressed by a visit from the inspector who confirmed the work we had done was fine.

Until income from events is created, the car park is our main source of income. Cowes is quiet at this time of year, and, like all the traders, we are looking forward to

the visitors coming. We monitor expenditure very closely and, although the Morning Room has now been refurbished from its Committee Room/dumping ground status, we are not able to complete the room with carpet to bring it into use. A carpet sponsor would be welcome!

We have a new Trustee, Mrs Janet Allan, nominated by the Friends of Northwood House and Park. Her background is journalism and business as well as a long interest in the estate. We must address the range of experience within the Trust and wish to recruit a professional individual with broad financial experience as well as someone with historic building management skills. I am also looking for an assistant – a varied, developing admin role for someone interested in our project, for just a few hours each week.

Our first short term office rental is due to end this week and a longer-term parking agreement is being negotiated, both generating welcome income. Discussions are ongoing with potential tenants for up to 18 months' occupation – the offices are fully furnished with internet access and ready to move into.

A local floral club is discussing the possibility of creating flower arrangements at the house for special occasions.

Cowes Carnival have volunteered to run car parking on the grass during some of the special events in addition to Cowes Week this season. They are well trained and experienced, but it is hard work and some parkers are less than obliging, even when they know the money comes direct to the charitable trust. We are very grateful for this support from the community.

Trustees have received no further information from this Council relating to our requests for short term assistance with funding for specific aspects in the Park. Such support would be extremely welcome and recognised as a contribution by the Council on behalf of the local community.

We continue to develop and update our website, www.northwoodhouse.org. I see in this Council's last minutes, readers are referred to the Northwood House website to read my January report. Our clerk has confirmed that the report is actually appended to each report as a proper record of the meeting. I explained that each new report I make replaces the previous one, so the January report will shortly disappear from our website and therefore including the website reference in minutes is not suitable.

Following advice from our auditor, accounts for the year ended 2009 have been completed and were forwarded several weeks ago to the Charity Commission although we are advised processing them takes time and may not therefore yet be displayed on the commission's website.

We have been approached by a special interest group which wishes to investigate more fully and secure our ice house, which may be very rare. We look forward to knowing more about this apparently Georgian relic.

With the aid of a specialist we have identified ways of reducing electricity costs by about 25% which has to be good news.

That concludes my report.

Ann Thwaites, Chair of the Trustees

9 February 2010