



PARK LIFE

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TOWN PARK USERS GROUP

View From The Chair

There is no doubt that the most valued feature of this town of ours is the Town Park in general and Pets corner in particular. This fact was established by a very comprehensive survey that was conducted for the council some time ago. And yet, it is unfortunate that most of our citizens do not realise just how large it really is and that it stretches from Harlow Mill lock and along the river Stort to Burnt Mill lock plus the area around



Photo: Tony Batrick

the water-garden, etc. Our Town Park is one of the finest in the country and we are proud of it – described by many as the jewel and lung of the town.

The Town Park Users Group has one main objective and that is to ensure that never again are parts of the park sold to developers in order to raise capital for other projects. It happened with the Moorhen and if it was not for many ordinary citizens' direct action, the showground area would have gone too. The fight is not over! The powers that be now propose to sell the area containing the swimming pool to private developers to build a hotel. I am sure that this proposal is against the wishes of the vast majority of the citizens of Harlow, and they really must support us in our attempts to prevent further erosion of our most wonderful and lovely lung of Harlow.

Of course we all recognise that the council has no option but to develop some areas of the town, but it would be pure vandalism for it to continue to take the easy option and steal YET MORE of our most precious park! Remember that every inch sold is lost forever. We will fight tooth-and-nail not only to retain it for future generations, but to improve it still further. Harlow is destined for considerable development in the future and recreational land will be at a premium.

The Town Park Users Group is a group of people of all ages who work together with a common commitment to advise the council on the development and improvement of our park. The group is facilitated by the council and enjoys a close working partnership with the relevant council officers. Some members have a wealth of knowledge on such important subjects as wildlife, green issues, recreational requirements, etc. I am encouraged by the way that a cross section of citizens are working together in a completely non party-political way to support our park in a friendly and objective way. We need much more of this, don't we? Any resident can attend our meetings and, as Chairman, I can assure you of a warm and friendly welcome.

Bob Malster, TPUG Chairman

Bon voyage...

THE TPUG would like to wish Dave Clayton, former acting-head of the Parks and Landscapes Service and a stalwart friend of the group, a long and active retirement. Dave's dedication and commitment was self-evident and greatly appreciated by TPUG members. He leaves behind a legacy of hard work and careful thought which will hopefully ensure that the Town Park continues to be a haven of beauty, peace and pleasure, an emblem of civic pride for all the people of Harlow. Thanks, Dave, and safe and happy sailing.

Cuts "no cause for concern"

EIGHT members of the TPUG met with Doug Patterson, Harlow Council's Chief Executive, at the Town Hall on March 14. Concerns were raised that a 10 per cent cut in the Parks and Landscapes budget and proposed job losses among grounds maintenance staff would seriously impact on future work in the park. Mr Patterson said the decision to slash spending by £360,000 a year was a regrettable but necessary one, assuring members that no detrimental effects would be felt as a consequence.

Orienteering Course Launch

There is now a revamped Permanent Orienteering Course in Harlow Town Park. It is open to anyone of any age and can be enjoyed at any level of fitness or experience, from the complete beginner to the experienced orienteer. You can cover the course at any time, at any speed, in any order, on your own or with friends or relations. No equipment is necessary, other than a pen or pencil – all you need to do is to buy a map-pack from either the Sportcentre, the Swimming Pool, Harlow Outdoor Pursuits Centre, or Spurriers Café. The cost is £1 and includes a simple instruction sheet which has a grid to fill in with the letters you find at each checkpoint.

At 11:00am on Saturday June 8 the course will be officially opened by Noel Thatcher MBE, Harlow's Gold Medal winning Paralympic athlete. On this day only, map-packs will be on sale in the School Lane car park, near the Greyhound pub, from 10:30am until 12:00pm.

TEN-17 radio will be there, as will the local papers.

A special type of orienteering event, called a "score event", will also be available from 11:00am onwards. Each point on the course, or "control", will be worth a certain number of points, and the aim of the event is to score as many points as possible in 45 minutes. The top three in each age group (up to 11, 12-18, 19-45, 46 and over) will be announced on TEN-17 and in the local papers. Children under ten must be accompanied by an adult. You can start at any time from 11:00am to 12:00 midday.

Enquiries to: Colin Flint, Northgate, 5 School Lane, Harlow CM20 2QB. Tel: 01279 414785. Email: flintscan@aol.com.

Further details may be found at: www.chig.org.uk

Pets Corner News

Following the tragic death of Copper in a road accident earlier this year, a replacement horse has now been acquired by Pets Corner staff. Pearl, whose registered name is Diamond Obsession, is an eight-year-old grey Irish Draught horse, standing at 15.3. hands high.

Another new arrival is four-year-old Eliza Doolittle, a British White cow, and her calf Echo, who will join the popular Town Park attraction in June. The rare breed is classed as a "traditional", i.e. less than 1500 registered animals.

Pets Corner's Essex Pig herd has grown following the purchase of two more gilts as companions for Fergie.

Since the lifting of the restrictions imposed during last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease, it is good to report the return of more volunteer staff to Pets Corner.

"Free Market" Gardeners?

At the last TPUG meeting on May 9, we were informed of the devastating cuts which are to be imposed on the Parks and Landscapes Department.

Undoubtedly, such cuts can only lead to an inferior service. Yet, interestingly, this meeting immediately followed the local council elections in which all of the parties pledged in their manifestos to "protect green spaces".

To obviate the effects of these cuts town-wide, some green spaces will be tended by local residents as an extension of their gardens, some areas will be left to grow and then be cut by farmers, and many areas will be changed to more manageable plants or simply grassed over.



This, however, is less of a problem than the proposed cut in the workforce and reliance upon temporary employment in the summer months. The experience and knowledge gained through many years of employment with the council will quite literally be thrown away, as many committed frontline staff are faced with redundancy, and much of the responsibility for the upkeep of our park is handed over to an unknown quantity in

the shape of inexperienced casual contractors.

Such a move marks a significant shift to a privatised workforce under which standards will fall. At the same time, apparently in order to make the remaining workforce "more efficient", there will have to be some considerable investment in new machinery. Surely the finance for the purchase and maintenance of expensive new tractors and other equipment would be better spent on maintaining our existing highly skilled and experienced team of gardeners?

Finally, we are told that even this is an interim proposal, as within the next five years the council will be seeking "partnership" to provide the service. This is another way of saying that someone else will do the work, someone unelected by us, someone who is not accountable through our local democracy. As such, it marks a further shift away from public provision in the Parks and Landscapes Service towards total privatisation.

Our park faces the prospect of being vandalised by these proposals and residents should re-awaken the spirit of the HOOP campaign and let the new councillors hear their voice of disapproval.

Bob Delbridge/Tony Sullivan

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Park Life is published by the Town Park Users Group. Anyone wishing to contribute articles, features or photos to the next issue should send them to: **48 Rivermill, Harlow, CM20 1NS** or via email to: dean.weston@ntlworld.com by deadline July 31, 2002.