

Friends of Croham Hurst Woods

Newsletter No1

November 2002

Introduction

The inaugural meeting of this group was held in Emmanuel Church Hall on the 11th November at 7.30pm. It was very well attended, almost 60 people being present and nearly £400 in subscriptions being received. The following officers were elected unanimously.

President-----Lord Croham
Chair-----Mervyn Gatland
Treasurer-----Ted Budden
Secretary-----Ros Sulyak
Liaison Officer-----Cllr Maria Gatland
Working Committee: Alison Shewell, Jeanie Straker, Sandra Underwood, Glenda Johnson, Sheila Harris and Anne Fletcher

Chair's welcome

The Chair made an opening address stressing the vital importance of preserving Croham Hurst for the next generation just as the Victorians including his grandmother had saved it from housing development over 100 years ago.

Councillor's report

Councillor Maria Gatland told us about the initial site meeting she had set up on 15th Oct this was held whilst walking the woods in a party including committee members interested residents and relevant Council Officers. Many urgent issues had been pointed out and plans of action discussed. Great enthusiasm was expressed by all present and many intelligent suggestions made.

Cllr Gatland then reported that the Hurst was on the list last year for downgrading from green belt to metropolitan open land. This would have made it easier to give in to Government pressure to release land for re-development.

She also stressed how important trees were for cleaning the air, which as we lived in a generally south-westerly air stream helped reduce pollution for most of the borough. She said Croydon Council had promised help in training and insurance and we had two very experienced tree surgeons on the committee. One the Chair was also descended from generations of coppicers giving him extensive professional knowledge of all the local woodlands

Grants were available for the work envisaged and also for things like seats and litterbins. She finished by saying the excellent attendance and enthusiasm at the first meeting augured well for

the future size of the group. More members meant more political clout.

Provisional aims

The Chair said young children were no longer seen in the woods because increased undergrowth meant lack of open spaces where parents could easily supervise them.

The path along Selsdon Rd is no longer safe for women or the less able as the growth of saplings on the bank meant it was no longer visible from the road. This was always a path where children and old people could feel more secure walking as they could be seen from traffic and the houses opposite.

He also felt that as a longer-term aim a path should be constructed from woodland materials to provide access to the top for special needs children, adults and the elderly. He is also Chair of Croydon Mobility Forum, which represents all disabled groups in Croydon and would use his contacts to try to secure joint funding for this project

Suggestions from the floor

It was pointed out that the edges of paths were being invaded by Bramble and were no longer strimmed by the Council; Cllr Gatland said she would look into this. The Council's view was that bramble has a five-year life before it was obliterated by tree shade (general derision from floor). It was pointed out there are many fallen trees blocking footpaths, one of the members volunteered to map these and Cllr Gatland promised action though she said it might take two months to get contractors on site.

The head of Croham Hurst Survey Group and representative of Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society said they were currently trying to establish a current footpath map.

Invasive species v Protected and desirable species

There was general discussion led by the various experts in the room about the desirability of various species. It was agreed that the most invasive species like Rhododendron, Buddleia, Laurel, and Privet etc should be severely cut back. Bramble should be cut back but only after consultation with wild life experts to make sure we preserve habitats. The fence on the top, which

was provided to encourage the heather re-growth, was in need of repair in order to continue the process.

The open grassland in front of the old keepers hut should be cleared and reinstated (as should the keeper if there was money available). It was felt we should bear in mind global warming and how this might affect the need for replacement species i.e. Sycamore which was a well-known early adopter (some demurred from this).

Erosion

It was commented upon that erosion had badly affected the woods over four decades but had recently slowed. Chair pointed out that we could all carry bags of stones and leaf mould back to the top, many people said they had been doing this for years, to general approbation. It was also suggested that on their way down they could fill the empty bags with litter.

Friends Group relations to Council

It was strongly emphasised by the Chair and several members that a strong and active Friends Group would wield power to help prevent the Council developing the site under pressure from the Government. It was pointed out that part of the wood had already been first leased and then sold to the golf club in fairly recent history and that another piece of historic woodland near Dulwich was eventually developed despite huge local protests. Minor losses had also occurred through people unlawfully extending their back gardens into Croham Hurst. This was still thought to be going on and the council would be informed of such incursions for prompt action before rights are established.

Cllr Gatland observed that Croydon Unitary Development Plan looked at Croham Hurst in 2001 as a possible site but thankfully rejected development though it is still possible, and development was mooted for the golf course with implications for the woods in the 1960's and 80's. She promised she would remain vigilant and inform the group a.s.a.p. of any future plans. She would also take immediate action on various small problems such as improved signs, removing dumped salt bin, litterbin provision and organising Council co-operation with our litter removal days. Funding for the group's objectives would come through the Council rather than from it and would not therefore be affected by local budget restraints. Any funds we raised should be match funded fairly readily.

Fly tipping

It was agreed that leaflets be distributed to houses facing and adjoining the woods, asking them to report any instances of rubbish being dumped in the woods. Pointing out all rubbish was harmful especially garden waste as it contained the seeds of invasive species. Many offenders were indeed local people who needed to be educated as to the harm they were doing.

Theft of materials

It was observed that many people still thought it was acceptable to carry away bags of stones and leaf mould and even cut bits from trees for their own use. This again needed education firstly by leaflets and then perhaps Cllr Gatland who is a highly qualified horticulturist could give talks to local schools.

Subscriptions

Chair suggested £2 but the floor decided on £10, Chair agreed but added that anyone who felt this was too much should contribute what they could afford, £330 was immediately subscribed and the total is now over £400 with more arriving daily, an account has been set up by the treasurer.

Next meeting

Early February 2003 was agreed, members to be informed of final arrangements.

The working committee would meet on Mon 18th Nov 19.30 hrs at St Pal's Church Hall to discuss first working party, bank account and deliveries.

If you wish to join Friends of Croham Hurst Woods please supply the following

Name

Address

Tel

Email

Subscription enclosed (£10)

Yes

Please tick

No

Cheques payable to *Friends of Croham Hurst Woods*
Send to: Cllr Maria Gatland, Floral House
238 Selsdon Rd, CR2 7AA