

Notes for the online meeting “Friends of Whitewebbs Surgery” Thursday 20th October 14.00

In order that we can make good use of the time available I have compiled this list of issues, concerns, suggestions and background material.

Some items are short term, others are important but may involve interaction with various council departments and outside stakeholders.

You will be aware of the deep concerns that the Friends and users of the Park have over the Council’s plans for the future of Whitewebbs. While not wishing to engage in discussion of these in this forum the possibility of them going ahead in some form does impact on immediate and longer term management plans for the park.

During the period of lockdown and in the period since, Whitewebbs has become very popular as a destination for those who wish to enjoy the open space and countryside atmosphere. The park is very busy and increasingly attractive to a wide range of visitors.

Positive points.

1. The Golf Course has rapidly re-natured. It is barely recognisable as a former golf course. The maintenance regime employed up until April of last year ensured that the course contained a very extensive range of grass species, wild flowers, trees, shrubs and other plants. Even after the long summer heat and drought the flora has fully recovered. We have records of many plants identified as well as birds and butterflies. Healthy young trees have established themselves in most parts of the course. We have referred a number of the more mature trees to the Woodland Trust inventory as they appear to meet the criteria for “notable” or “veteran “ status.
2. The cutting of the grass paths / swathes was well timed and well suited to the needs of park users.
3. The team responsible for emptying the twenty or more rubbish bins and tidying up in the busiest areas has done an excellent job and is to be congratulated. Their work has been supplemented by individuals who collect litter on their daily walks and by the occasional larger scale litter picks organised with the Hilly Fields group.
4. Fly tipping – this has been dealt with efficiently promptly whether reported online or to the litter team.
5. The guides and maps provided by the Friends have been very popular, to the extent that it has been hard to keep up with demand. Of particular interest have been the exploration guides to the Old Course of the New River. This is a notable piece of industrial archaeology in the park which has received little notice in recent years.
6. The response when the toilets have been blocked has been prompt though we are never quite sure as to whom the problem should be reported. The metal framework for the ladies’ stalls is corroded.
7. Successful exercise with Thames 21 to clear one area of Cuffley Brook of Himalayan Balsam – but there is a lot left!

Short term concerns:

1. Preparation for winter:

- a. We suggest that **some litter bins** are placed along the main road through the golf course as during wetter weather more people will stick to this path. It will also make collection easier and more efficient for the litter team in their lorry.
- b. There is a need for a **general litter bin at the Eastern end of the Beggars Hollow carpark.**
- c. **Path access in the western part of the park.** The “meadow” area south of Cuffley Brook becomes increasingly inaccessible once the winter rains start. When major drainage work was done on the golf course some years ago “swales” or drainage channels were constructed in the meadow, draining excess water into Cuffley Brook. **The swales have not been maintained and the paths get flooded.** I am sure that we could raise some volunteers to help clear these swales, subject to permission and guidance from council engineers. The paths are used by a few horse riders and the hooves do a disproportionate amount of damage to the paths in the meadow and in the woodland.
Some paths have been blocked by vigorous bramble growth. Hand tools are not enough to clear this. Brush cutters are needed. Volunteers would be willing to help but would probably not be allowed /insured to use the powered tools.

Other Matters

1. **Conflicting activities and safety.** I have written to Marcus twice about the issue of horse riders using the footpaths and riding across the golf course and had no response. In some instances this riding has been by unsupervised children who have been galloping. There are issues of
 - a. Safety – both for riders and for the public. Once the trees are in leaf from April to October/November lines of sight are very limited on the golf course and even more so in the woodland. This year, more than ever before, there are large fissures in the clay often hidden by the long grass.
 - b. Damage to footpaths. Most users of the park are walkers. There are very few riders and they have access to 4 Kms of bridleway in Whitewebbs. Horses damage footpaths especially as ground becomes muddier.
This is not a new problem – I found reference to the issue being raised with the Council in 1965. The Bye-laws are ambiguous on the issue of horse riding within Whitewebbs.
The Council has repeatedly stated its commitment to footpath access in Whitewebbs. As more people use the park it is important for clarity to ensure everybody’ safety and enjoyment.
 - c. Unrestricted cycling on footpaths and the bridleways raises similar concerns.
2. **Horse riders** have a reasonable expectation that **the bridleway should be usable.** I have walked the bridleway and would consider that most of it is usable. The fencing is in a deplorable state. A few riders have made efforts to tie back or neatly stack fallen fences and clear fallen branches. **Lack of drainage in some sections is a major problem in winter.** The bridleway on the line of the New River between Beggars Hollow and Flash Lane is of particular concern. Rectifying this could increase the drainage problem in the meadow referred to above, making the swale maintenance even more urgent.

When the cattle grid was filled in at the entrance to the Beggars Hollow carpark a few years ago no provision was made for the flow of water out of the car park. In heavy rainfall the water rushes out of the car park and flows down the bridleway to Turkey Brook. **As a result the surface of the Bridleway has been washed away and the path consists of very uneven stone and rock** – I would not like to ride a horse over this, especially as it the area with passing traffic.

Just north of the Aqueduct the ditches at the side of the bridleway have not been cleared or maintained for years. Consequently the main flow of water passes along the bridleway and has cut deep channels in the surface making riding difficult. This is a statutory section of the bridleway.

Lack of proper maintenance by the Council has contributed to the conflict of use experienced by walkers and riders.

3. **Biodiversity, rewilding, renaturing, management.**

The “meadow” area either side of Cuffley Brook to the south of the Ancient Woodland is an exciting example of natural rewilding or renaturing. Less than twenty years ago these were open areas of grass with a few spindly trees. At one time there was a cricket pitch there. Nature has reclaimed the areas with young, healthy oak trees, hawthorns, maples and willows, with a variety of grasses and wildflowers. The open areas abound with butterflies on sunny days. There is evidence of an adder population and the green woodpeckers feed off the yellow ants. Kingfishers are regularly seen along Cuffley Brook. By following a policy of benign neglect we have a beautiful new ecosystem enjoyed by fauna, flora and humans. Some management is needed if a balance is to be retained. If this is not done the area will consist solely of thick brambles and oak trees. As a matter of some urgency we would like to see a **management plan drawn up by key stakeholders** e.g Woodland Trust, Butterfly Conservation Trust, Thames 21, Friends of Whitewebbs and Council Officers. The renaturing is progressing exponentially. A similar process is at work on the golf course. **We would like to see and participate in the monitoring of these ecological processes in Whitewebbs.**

4. **Community facilities in Whitewebbs**

- a. There was no response to my request some time ago for the water tap by the Lake to be repaired. Runners, families and dogwalkers feel the need for this, particularly during the hot summer.
- b. The cubicles in the women’s toilets are in a fragile state due to corrosion of the metal frame.
- c. It seems a terrible waste that the Golf Club buildings in the Beggars Hollow car park are not available for meetings, events, displays and shelter. Are you able to help facilitate this, at least until new facilities are created? There is a strong community atmosphere in the park focussed on the open air café. If the community is to contribute effectively to the maintenance and enhancement of the park, as envisaged in the Green and Blue strategy, some such accommodation is essential.

See attached pdf for details of the meadow area. The document was forwarded to Jamie Kukadia following an onsite meeting with her and Ian Russell earlier this year.