

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER



Daisy Cooper MP visited Highfield Park in late July. Pictured with Richard Bull, Park Manager, Joe Gray, Chair Park Management Committee, Jamie Day, Trustee and Tim Abbott, Chair Highfield Park Trust.

Reasons to be cheerful ...

Well, it is fair to say we did not see that coming. The Spring newsletter was written and about to be printed when the pandemic hit, and it all seemed completely irrelevant just two days later. Although we published it on social media and the website, we decided against further distribution. Since then the Trust has received some disappointing news and of course a few unexpected challenges along the way. But, despite all of these, we are greatly encouraged by the tremendous messages of support and the amazing level of help that we have received. So many people do care about the park and I would like to say a whopping thank you to all, on behalf of everybody at the Trust.

Let me start with the bad news. Early in the summer we made yet another grant application in respect to the repair of the main pathway running from the Village Green to Hixberry Lane and once again we were turned down. I have said before that the Trust has worked hard to become financially independent, but all the effort in building the new Visitor Centre has been offset by the loss of the aerial mast income. Where we were hoping to be able to pay our own way, we are still in need of third-party support for our larger capital projects. We will keep trying and are already thinking about our next approach.

The pandemic has affected our income, but it could have been so much worse. Our rents and investment returns have held up well and again we would like to

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thank everybody concerned with this. But, we have been unable to hold our revenue generating events and of course the Visitor Centre meeting room had to be shut, just at a point when bookings were beating even our most optimistic of forecasts. Both will come back in the fullness of time, but it means that we are not anticipating being able to achieve our normal £15k of savings that we need for capital projects this financial year and this will hurt us in the future.

As you will be aware, we furloughed our ground staff when the Prime Minister asked for people to stay at home. Richard continued to work and was able to cover a lot of ground, but of course, some jobs fell behind and it was at this point that several residents stepped forward and took responsibility for the maintenance of an area of the park. What a great job they all did! I would like to mention the efforts of Andrew, David, Joyce and Peter and Sylvia in particular.

Once the restrictions were eased, we started to see more and more people in the park and although most were very welcome, incidents of anti-social behaviour and littering increased. Step forward the 'Highfield Wombles' who regularly turned up to clear the mess left by thoughtless individuals the previous night. This was in addition to the regular litter pickers, who are the unsung heroes of the park.

The Trust engaged extensively with the police, local stakeholders and politicians and things culminated in a very worthwhile meeting at the end of July where several very tangible actions were taken.

Also in late July, the Trust welcomed Daisy Cooper to the park for the first time and although it was a very quick visit, she was very supportive of our work and has promised to assist us as necessary in the future. It was lovely to meet her and share our ideas for the future, of which there are many.

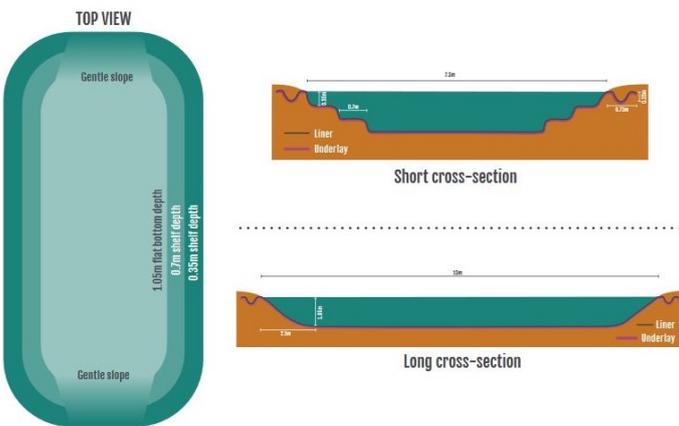
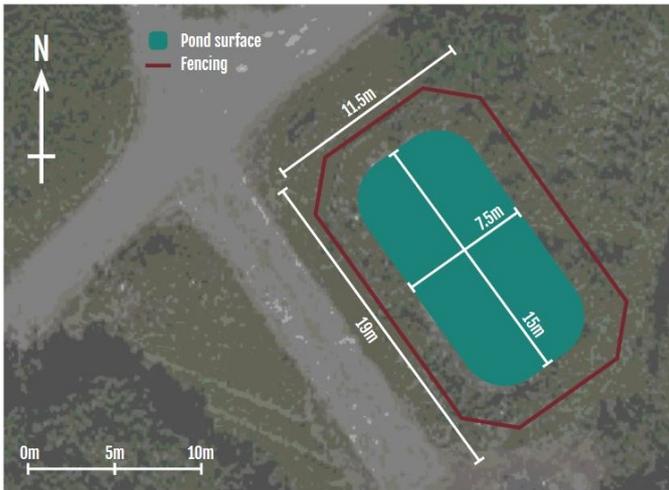
Early doing lockdown, Barry, our newest recruit joined Richard for a month, but then decided that the job wasn't really for him and he returned to his previous role in publishing. We have subsequently waited a few months for things to settle, but we thought it was important to recruit a replacement and we are now delighted to say that Tom will shortly join James and Paul, who have now been back at work for several months.

To my mind, this is what makes Highfield special. The fact that so many people know and can interact with our ground staff whilst walking in the park helps build that sense of community. So many people stop me and say how nice the team are or refer to a conversation they have previously had with one of the them.

Tom will join us in early September and although only a young man he brings a wealth of countryside management experience with him. He has a degree in Environment Science and previously worked as a landscaper at a company specialising in biodiversity assessment and habitat creation. He has also volunteered for the RSPB. Please do make a point of saying hello to Tom and welcoming him to Highfield.

His skills will be extremely useful as we have several exciting projects that we are now keen to pursue.

The most advanced is improving the allotment pond, which we have been discussing for a couple of years at least. We have recently been helped by a local resident who has made a significant financial donation that has helped us to make a solid start. For this we are, of course, very grateful. Having taken some specialist advice earlier in the year, we have decided to create two ponds. The first being a 'sacrificial' pond for dogs. This is now quite a common practice designed to keep dogs away from the main pond, which will be dug a lot deeper and re-lined.



It will serve one purpose and one purpose only and that is to help improve biodiversity in the area. Again, it will be fenced and we are intent on creating the best natural environment we can.

In our last newsletter I talked about how we set our priorities annually and the targets we set ourselves for this year. For obvious reasons we are now behind in several areas, but we are working hard to catch up, as circumstances allow. If you recall, at the end of last year we undertook a survey to better understand what park users required from us. The results from this process were used to build the priority list for this year, although it will take us time to work through these and develop a really joined up strategy that serves everybody well in the long-term.

There were both conflicting requirements and big-ticket items in the list, so it is not straightforward.

In some cases, we need to discuss options with specialists and hitherto it has been very difficult to engage with them all. I will return to the progress we are making in subsequent newsletters.

Meanwhile, Sue Gaylard, a long-standing Trustee has continued unabated in her quest of historical knowledge relating to the two former hospitals.

After the outstanding success of our “Barts in Herts” talk last November, the Trust was asked to repeat the talk for Fleetville Diaries, a local history group, in February. Both events were attended by former Barts’ Hospital Nurses who were able to give Sue valuable information to add to our archives.

The whole “Barts in Herts” story is a fascinating piece of history with Rainsford Mowlem and John Baron, the pioneering plastic surgeons of the day, working at Hill End Hospital during the Second World War.

In early May, the Trust was then contacted by Mr Oliver Allon, after he read a post on our website about the work of John Napier, who had trained at Hill End during the war years. Mr Allon is a doctor working in the plastic surgery department in Bristol Royal Infirmary and is researching John Napier, who had an interest in treating peripheral nerve injuries of the hand – the same specialism as Mr Allon. Hopefully, a new chapter awaits!

In other news, the Trust was extremely proud to report that in early June, the Visitor Centre had won another prestigious award. This time, we collected the RICS Social Impact Award in the Land and Rural category for the East of England. A fantastic achievement and now the third prize it has won. I believe we now move to the English finals, although I have no further details at this stage.



Apple Day - YMCA Community Gym Sunday 4th October — 10am to 2pm Giant Apple Day Treasure Hunt (Recommended £5 minimum donation per family)

The social media response to the 'foxnapping' of Freddie the Fox was quite amazing with several people stating that they would be prepared to fund a replacement, should Freddie not be recovered. Fortunately, he was, and after a few weeks of recovery in Fox Hospital, he should be back in the park and saying hello to his many young friends by the time you read this!

We have had a long-term ambition to create a sculpture trail and in anticipation of not finding Freddie, we started to research some alternatives. To cut a long story short, we found a wood carver in Sussex, who sold us three new sculptures paid for by Trustee Kevin Barnes and his wife Pauline, a donation from St Albans Tour Guides and Trustee Dreda Gordon, who is also a County Councillor, from her locality budget. These new additions will progressively be added around the park. The woodcarver indicated that he would be prepared to visit us and create a bespoke sculpture from a dead tree. This prompted Sarah Graham, another Trustee, to invest several evenings in setting up a Facebook donate button and then launch our first ever direct appeal.

At the time of writing, we have raised over £800 from this venture, which is an incredible achievement and will secure a bespoke carving in the Woodland Garden.

All surplus money will be to help fund the

allotment pond, another very worthwhile project.

We were also pleased to receive several cheques and credit transfers with messages of thanks from people who have appreciated the park in recent months. Again, thanks to all.

I should now close with a comment about Apple Day, which is now our single biggest fundraising event of the year. Again, at the time of writing, we are still intending to hold an event, on **Sunday 4th October**, but due to social distancing requirements it will be unlike any previous Apple Day.

The event will start at **10am**, when we will be launching our **Giant Apple Day Treasure Hunt** from the usual venue of the Sunken Garden, outside the **YMCA Community Gym**. This will be a family Treasure Hunt, with things to find across the entire park. If you solve the puzzle, you will be entered into our prize draw with a chance to win some (modest) apple related goodies.

You will still be able to buy our juice, cider, tote bags, pencils and anything else we can think of! We will also have various displays showcasing the park and our work more generally. It will be a great opportunity to ask questions and engage with us on anything you think appropriate.

Please do support us if you can, it is important this year.

Enjoy the park!

Tim Abbott
Chair of Trustees, Highfield Park Trust.