

Report from the Chair

to the Annual General Meeting held on 29 October 2019

It has been a year of great successes on the events front for the Friends of Barnwell Country Park. After our initial huge success with the new venture of the Food Festival reported at the last AGM, our confidence was riding high, and we have organised four events this year. Edward has worked tirelessly to secure funding for all sorts of projects: Tesco and Asda gave money for the Children's Play area, the Co-Op, Tesco and Waitrose together supported the mole run, which is about to gain some new mole sculptures and an information board; Matt and Vikki took reasonably proud possession of a massive chub bench and a 6 foot pike sculpture a few weeks ago.

Edward also won a £50,000 grant for the Park from Augean to put up secure fencing around the compound area and add a couple more containers so that the Park's machinery and tools can be better protected against break-ins and theft. There are still a few odds and ends to be tied up here, not least because the Environment Agency declared the area a flood risk (which it isn't) proposed a much more expensive fence which was hugely over-specified, and insisted on lining the roadside with Leylandiae - when there is already a thick hedge of native trees. This last proved that they had not even inspected the site in person. The upshot with all the delays and extra expense in sending re-applications backwards and forwards, is that time is running out on us, and we need to reassess our resources.

However, back to the events. In June, we had a superb Cider and Sausages Day: Cider came from Lilleys, and the sausages were underwritten by us from Seven Wells: the attendance rather took the cafe by surprise, but overall, it was a great day out.

In July we had two consecutive weekends: our traditional Music in the Park was beset by rain, which really knocked the proceeds, making only £600, especially the sale of beer, but certainly did not affect the joy of the stalwart visitors who sat through the whole day to enjoy the six bands, as well as the beautiful piece dedicated to the Park by Paula Boulton.

We are increasingly focusing on how we can create a wider footfall in the Park, reaching out to those for whom it can be a source of well-being, and part of the NCF grant for Music in the Park was for Hidden Needs. Under this mantra, we welcomed members of the Oundle 660 Club, providing transport for them to get to the Park: for some it was the first time in years that they had been able to access the Park, and it was great that they enjoyed some luck in the red and blue raffle. This is certainly something we hope to increase in the future. Plans are afoot for Paula to bring some of her musicians from Corby, a mix of more senior singers and school children, to perform in the Park in the spring. Edward has been the instigator, inspiration and drive behind these days, and I would like to thank him for his tireless efforts and dedication in putting together such huge undertakings with so little fuss.

The following weekend we welcomed back Anne-Marie and Ross with their traction engines - even more this year, and it was great that Matt and Vikki had the vision to offer them the area beyond the playground for their camp so that they had both greater security, and more

space for their caravans. Cider went down very well here again, and the drivers were extremely generous with their donation to the Park at the end of the Weekend.

Once again, the Food Festival was the star of the show, with 27 superb stands set on the meadow, and cars continuing to pile in right into the afternoon. With the money from the stall, the parking and Angie's excellent raffle, we made £1,700, and I would like to thank Angie very much indeed for all her hard work and determination in seeing this project through.

I could not stop there without thanking Claire for the two Sleep-out nights she has organised. Families come from far and wide to camp in the Park see moths, bugs, bats and stars, and then to enjoy a cooked breakfast before they leave. This is a real education and adventure opportunity for these children, many of whom will not have slept outside, and it is a fantastic way for the family to share an experience like this in a safe and caring environment. Thank you, Claire.

I would like to thank everyone who volunteered to come and help us at these events: even if it is only an hour of parking, it makes a huge difference to those of us who are there all day, and everyone who visits always comments on the number of smiling faces they meet at the Park of people who are there to direct and advise.

There is a huge amount to do with these days, in terms of preparing, getting funding, booking, advertising and keeping the advertising going. We are constantly looking for people who might be able to offer a bit of time, or expertise in helping us out. These are events which we really believe bring communities together, which encourage people who might not know our beautiful Park to come and visit it, and which offer different groups of people all sorts of different experiences and opportunities for improved well-being. I would like to call on all the Friends of the Park, please to consider offering your time to at least one of these events so that we can keep them going.

We said good-bye to our Ranger, Georgia, and wish her all the best of luck with her new role, and were delighted to welcome Vikki Austin, who has a great deal of experience within the parks in Northamptonshire, and who has already had a great impact with my Wednesday school group. Both she and Matt have given time and advice for our events, and we look forward to 2020 and our new programme with them.

I must also thank Mollie and Justin who spend so much time and effort on the website (and in having to remind us to update it!) Mollie sends letters out to the Friends and sets up our news for publication, and Justin keeps everything ticking over and is always there for advice when needed. These are vital jobs for promoting the Friends, and I am very grateful for their support and hard work.

Finally I would like to thank my Committee. They have been outstanding in their time and professionalism this year. We have moved, with Bob's hard work, from a committee to a Charitable Trust, which means we can benefit from Gift Aid.

With the increased knowledge and experience around the table, our meetings are focused, businesslike and effective - and we have Mark to thank for re-inventing our agenda and action point management. Both he and Bob took over from Edward this year, and they have worked tirelessly together to ensure that the Trust is in the excellent state that I feel it to be at the moment.

I include in my thanks Barbara, Angie, Claire and Simon, all of whose knowledge and commitment to the Park are phenomenal. It is a huge privilege and a lot of fun to work with them all, and I am so grateful for their commitment and support.

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