



Friends of Farthing Downs & Happy Valley

www.friendsoffarthingdowns.co.uk

A voluntary group helping to
Enhance, Promote & Protect Farthing Downs & Happy Valley

Newsletter No. 24, Winter 2019

Dear Members,

Happy New Year!

We are delighted to be able to begin this first newsletter of 2019 with some good news. As members will be aware, we have for some years been concerned with the future of Happy Valley – it was agreed at the 2017 AGM to become an official Happy Valley Friends group and to change our name to Friends of Farthing Downs & Happy Valley.

Our concerns had deepened when in 2016 Croydon Council commissioned a survey of six of Croydon's parks, one of which was Happy Valley, as part of their 'Ambitious for Parks' project. The Friends responded to the survey with a submission which included: the need for promotion of the site to encourage visitors; a purpose built/refurbished office for the Warden; engagement with schools; replacement and enhancement of the facilities (the trim trail and play facilities for children) and better access and signposting. But more importantly we emphasised the unique nature of the site as a haven for wildlife and that the title of Happy Valley Park was misleading – Happy Valley is not just a park like the other five, it's a nature reserve. Tyrens, an Urban Design & Infrastructure Consultancy, were commissioned to carry out the survey and last year they published an excellent report and a first rate major document on Happy Valley providing a starting point to address issues outlined in our submission. However, the question outstanding was how and when were projects proposed in the report going to be implemented?

So, this year we invited Councillor Oliver Lewis, Croydon Council's Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure & Sport, to our AGM to give an update on the project,

Happy Valley
Parks Vision, Design Plan, 2017



following the survey results, in a presentation entitled '**Moving forward from Masterplanning**'. Referring specifically to the future of Happy Valley, Councillor Lewis reported that Natural England is currently in discussions with Croydon regarding a proposed declaration that Happy Valley should become a **National Nature Reserve**

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(NNR). The NNR would also include Farthing Downs, Coulsdon Common, Kenley Common and Riddlesdown. Allan Cameron, Head Ranger Coulsdon Commons and Andy Bernard, City of London Superintendent, both present at the meeting, confirmed the City's close involvement. The National Nature Reserve declaration is one of the highest for open spaces, along with Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – a designation which currently applies to Farthing Downs and sections of Happy Valley – and recognises the importance of a site for wildlife, geology and accessibility for people to experience nature. Cllr Lewis also reported that from February the management of parks and open spaces will be taken back 'in house' by Croydon.

If the declaration is made later this year, then it will be a partnership project between Natural England, Croydon Council and the City of London which will give opportunities for engagement with schools, community groups and visitors. There will also be opportunities for Friends groups to be involved with the proposals for designs of new pathways and vista points in Happy Valley and support projects through applications for funding and grants. Monitoring, not necessarily environmental, could also involve residents, graduates and postgraduates. Councillor Lewis stressed the importance of local knowledge in future proposals which include: renewal of the Happy Valley trim trail and a new natural play area for children. All very promising.

The Chairman then introduced Kelvin Shewry the Live Well Department Manager responsible for the Active Life Styles Project which includes overseeing play provision and management development. He agreed that there had been a delay in implementing the Master Plan but that there is no intention at the current time of carrying out all the suggestions and projects resulting from Tyrens survey. Kelvin also explained that some projects will take longer to provide. The poorer health of people in the north of the borough is a continuing concern and the 'Live Well' team are providing support for those who want to give up smoking, lose weight and improve their general wellbeing. As part of this project Croydon is focusing on providing outdoor gyms and a program of free activities, including weekly guided health and nature walks, in areas of most need.

Questions from the floor were mainly concerned with future protection of Happy Valley and funding for projects and their future maintenance. Councillor Lewis assured those present that there are no plans for development on Happy Valley, which is protected by Green Belt and Metropolitan Green Belt status, SSSI designation (in sections) and has a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme grant from Natural England for the protection and encouragement of wildlife. For example the new trim trail could be rebuilt on its former site in a field which is not an SSSI. Turning to funding, Councillor Lewis felt confident that funding will be available from revenue which will be enhanced from capital projects such as purchase of The Colonnades and Croydon Park Hotel and the future income these capital items will raise. However, there is no easy solution and he believed that the working partnership will help and that the NNR declaration will provide a platform for extra funding through grants. Councillor Lewis assured those present that all projects will proceed with input from knowledgeable partners.

Summary by Pauline Payne

Leith Hill - No Drill



If you are concerned about proposals to drill for oil in Surrey you will have been pleased with the news last September that the Forestry Commission was not renewing the lease to Europa Oil & Gas for drilling at Bury Hill Wood (also known as Holmwood) off Coldharbour Lane at Leith Hill. The oil company was planning to open an oil well on the much loved beauty spot within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but this has now been abandoned.

A local Coulsdon resident has been involved with the Leith Hill Action Group – A Voice for Leith Hill (www.voiceforleithhill.co.uk) which for the last ten years have opposed the operation. The modus operandi of the action group was: publicity – stalls, letters, leafleting, research, knocking on doors, printing information, press releases, videos and photographs; and: finding funding, providing transport, attending planning meetings, commenting on planning applications, networking, training people, Legal Observation, workshops and events, artwork & music and occupying the site. It makes you feel exhausted just to read this list. Congratulations to the group for their success of which they cautiously say ‘The Hill is Safe – at Least for Now’.

Drilling for oil or fracking is very controversial. Despoiling of the landscape, (usually open countryside), unknown effects on the environment (earthquakes), additional effects of heavy transport and disruption for those living nearby all need to be taken into consideration. But additionally and most importantly, many would argue, that the consequence of taking more hydrocarbons out of the ground is to release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Many would further argue that the funding for such projects would be better spent on source of renewable energy. Could we see drilling for oil in Coulsdon – who knows!



STATION GARDENING PROJECT

Over the winter the team have continued to tidy the flower-beds and rake off leaves – removing about twelve large bags from the southern end of platform 1. We are looking forward to the spring and will be concentrating on planting new larger containers with colourful summer bedding plants. The new containers will be near to the platform entrances and it is hoped that this will bring some cheer to commuters while construction of the new bridge, due to start this year, is underway.

We are pleased to get back to the gardening project, following a nine month suspension of work due to health and safety concerns, but there is a large amount of catching up still to be done. Platform 2 north has always had a problem with Mare’s Tails, which is difficult to remove. Also encouraging plants to grow in the thin narrow beds has been a challenge. These, plus the uncertainty of exactly where the new bridge will be, as you can imagine, are giving us a few headaches.

Cane Hill – Views and Trees

by Maureen Levy

As most of you are aware the Cane Hill development of 677 houses and flats was approved by Croydon Council in 2014 and the progress on the development cannot be missed as the developer works towards completion of the scheme.

Always visible were the Water Tower and Chapel as well as the old administration building. These are to be retained and developed by a Heritage developer. The Water Tower will be converted into a single house, with a single-story extension containing a living room and garage. A three-storey modern extension will be attached to the administration building, which will be divided into fourteen flats. It is still not clear what the chapel will be used for, but it seems likely that it will include offices and a café with the interior of the Chapel being preserved and turned into a multi-functional space.

Within the planning permission were Conditions for ***tree planting and screening, landscaping and the laying of footpaths***. The permission also specified suitably protected local views to and from the site. The developer had to deliver replacement tree planting to mitigate the loss of existing trees, some of which were TPO protected, alongside the delivery of wider landscaping improvements and an on-going Tree Management Strategy. Many trees which were initially to be retained were found to be diseased or dying from strangulation by ivy and as a result were removed but only on the condition that they were replaced in addition to the agreed planting.



The developer has, and is, replacing trees as can be seen from the above views from and towards the site. However, the screening trees will take some time to become fully mature and it is likely that some houses will always be visible through the trees, especially during winter.

As part of the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy Project, which was launched in 2015, an appeal was made to all fifty-three Commonwealth nations to contribute areas of indigenous forest to be preserved in perpetuity to mark Her Majesty’s lifetime of service to the Commonwealth. As part of the project Chris Philp MP, representatives from local Residents’ Associations, Barrett’s and David Wilson Homes attended a tree planting ceremony. On a cold and damp December day six UK sourced saplings were planted including: Hazel, Silver Birch and Rowan. Footpaths are being installed with new steps and many wild flowers such as Pyramidal Orchids are beginning to surface as the grass settles back after all the disturbance.



NEWS In Brief



Farthing Downs Ditches Lane: The work on the renewal of the road side ditches on Farthing Downs (from the Downs Road entrance to the car park) reported in our Autumn newsletter has been completed. The work was quickly and efficiently carried out during December and January under the watchful eye of volunteer archaeologists. The bank, which had become so eroded it had all but disappeared, has also been reinstated using the spoil from the ditch. The aim of the

restoration is to keep both the Ancient Scheduled Monument and wildlife safe from uninvited vehicles, but it is also slowing traffic. Just in case you're thinking that you will have to take your life in your hands to cross the new barrier you will be pleased to hear that there are occasional small gaps with levelled grassed 'bridges' to let you through. The question now is: 'how will the cows cope'?

Volunteer Hedge Layers needed: Kenley Volunteers will continue hedge laying on Hilltop on Kenley Common over the winter. If you are interested in learning a countryside craft, the hedges are being laid in the traditional South of England style: hazel stakes and binders are used to hold the hedge sturdy until the re-growth stabilises the hedge to enable it to stand alone. Hedges are completed in "chains" (22 yards or 20.1168 metres if you must) which is the traditional unit of hedge measurement. Please contact 01372 279083 if you would like to join the team.

New Way Marker for Farthing Downs: The Friends project to renew the worn iconic sign at the Folly on Farthing Downs is progressing. A company has been chosen and following a site meeting proposals for the new sign have been agreed. While the overall design will remain the same the height will be increased by about a foot to discourage vandalism, the lettering will be deeper cut into the wood in a V shape before filling with white paint to increase protection against weathering and the base of the post will receive a protective coating of preservative. Advice is that the post should be sanded and oiled annually to extend its life. Many thanks to Councillor Margaret Bird for arranging a donation of £750 from a Council grant to meet half the cost.

Just a reminder – Please keep dogs on a lead near sheep: The City of London reported another attack on one of their sheep in November. They are reminding dog owners to keep dogs on a lead around sheep at all times. Anyone witnessing a dog chasing or attacking livestock should call them on 01372 279083 immediately so that the animals can be quickly checked for injuries. It may be fun for Fido, but it is terrifying for the sheep and often fatal.

Looking Ahead

Article by Graham Lomas for the Surrey Hills Society



By 2029 – nine years from now – 73K more people will need housing somewhere along the Downs, a rise of 9 percent. By 2038 – twenty years hence – the number will reach 110K; 13 percent growth from now. Equivalent to the present size of urbanised Sevenoaks. Comparative figures for the London conurbation are 11percent and 17 percent – North Downs communities are increasingly integrated economically with the metropolis: big in and out movements of workers between the boroughs and with London – 27,000 going each day from the seven London boroughs to the GLA, and a further 26,000 to Central London.

Built-in growth arises because the UK is seventh in world industrial output, sixth in services, sixth in the overall size of the economy and fifth as an exporter of goods, services and income. The UK (and the southeast especially) also ranks world seventh for immigration. While London today may stand only 31st in world city size, the UK's density of population is over four times the European average; ours only exceeded by Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. We are forecast to overtake Germany.

This is the background against which the housing crisis along the Downs and the wider southeast has to be resolved. It is well to remember that AONB's National Parks, greenbelts, and regional plans had their origins in the darkest days of WW2. Six very able people – Beverage, Abercrombie, Barlow, Uthwatt, Scott and Reith were given their head to think the unthinkable. They were judges, economists, professors and businessmen (Brexit please note!). Their seminal reports made the post-war work of Attlee, Bevan and Silkin much easier. Major reports on social insurance, London planning, employment, land valuation, rural development and new towns helped get Britain off its knees. Done with minimal manpower

Cries to abolish greenbelts “just build out to the M25” and “let the market rule” takes no account of the fact that industry and commerce invariably crave a framework of infrastructure that help them plan their business. Such muddled thinking finds refuge in arguing both that brownfield sites will solve all housing need (it won't), and that London and the wider southeast will just have to live at higher and higher density – ‘superbia’ (the replacement of semi-detached and detached houses to provide more homes) will magically replace ‘suburbia’.

A way out of this impasse has to be found. The last in-depth review of greenbelt was 25 years ago. Its 270 page report having listened to much opinion, concluded greenbelts were effective. But made no attempt to consider population growth, development land costs, local against sub-regional needs, business expansion constraints, pollution from longer distance travelling and stoking up of ‘Nimbi’ attitudes. It is time to put this right.

Explore the Surrey Hills: A new walks booklet compiled by the Surrey Hills Chairman Chris Howard ‘*Walks for all Ages*’ – twenty walks ranging from 2 – 6 miles includes local area. You will need good walking boots and refreshments. The booklet is available on line from Bradwell Books or Surrey Hills Society shop.

LOOKING BACK OR SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

by Pauline Payne

View of the Quarry (now Ullswater Estate) from Cane Hill:

The watercolour is by Ethel Hall, daughter of James Hall owner of Hall and Company Ltd who operated the chalk pits and lime kilns both here in Coulsdon and at Merstham. Ethel and her sisters Elsie and Jessie were all noted artists. By 1864 the Hall's entire lime-burning business was carried out in Coulsdon when they gave up the lease at the chalk pits at Merstham. The lime kilns and hydrating plant, which were shut down in the early 1960s, continued for a while as a depot before it became the Ullswater light industrial estate. Ethel painted this image of the chalk quarry from a location on Cane Hill in 1923. The recent photograph, as close as we could get to the original position, shows how urbanisation has changed the scene. Open fields and grazing sheep have gone being replaced by housing and an urban forest, the quarry becoming almost invisible.



View of Cane Hill from Farthing Downs:

Upper photograph taken in the spring before demolition of Cane Hill Hospital began in 2008, lower photograph taken in January this year.



Events Diary 2019

So far the following events have been confirmed.

'Remarkable Trees of Surrey': Wednesday, 27th February: Old Coulsdon Centre for the Retired, 7.15 p.m. for 7.30. Liz Ramsay will give an illustrated talk based on her booklet of the same name. Liz's talk includes detours further afield to look at some amazing trees and their stories. Not to be missed. All are welcome.

Spring Quiz: Saturday, 4th May: Cameron Hall, Congregational Church, Canons Hill, Old Coulsdon, CR5 1HB, 7.00 for 7.30 p.m. Join the Friends for a joint FoFD&HV and East Coulsdon RA social and fundraising evening. Quiz Master Mark Cooper. Tickets: £12.50 for teams of up to 8 include fish, chicken or vegetarian supper, soft drinks, tea and coffee. Email: paulinepayne@btinternet.com

Orchid Walk through Happy Valley: Sunday, 9th June: Meet Dominic North, Happy Valley Countryside Warden in the Farthing Downs Car Park – time to be advised – for this 1½ hour walk to learn about the rare wild flowers and orchids which grow in Happy Valley. Please wear suitable footwear and clothing. To book (essential) please email: paulinepayne@btinternet.com or phone 01737 554449.

Annual Bat & Moth Night: Saturday 29th June, 9 p.m. We begin the evening with coffee and buns and a talk through Gill's previous night's catch before visiting the moth traps. Please wear suitable footwear and clothing as it can be cold on the Downs. Gill will bring her bat detector. This event is not suitable for children under 8 nor for dogs – sorry. To book (essential) please contact: paulinepayne@btinternet.com or phone 01737 554449.

Old Coulsdon Village Fair: Saturday 6th July: Grange Park, Old Coulsdon 12 to 4.30. Visit the Friends stall at our favourite event of the year. The Friends stall will include: exhibition, information, leaflets and souvenirs. For further information please visit Rotary Club of Coulsdon Manor website.

Autumn Quiz: Saturday, 28th September: Cameron Hall, Congregational Church, Canons Hill, Old Coulsdon, CR5 1HB 7.00 for 7.30 p.m. As the evenings draw in join the Friends for a joint FoFD&HV and East Coulsdon RA social and fundraising evening. Quiz Master Mark Cooper. Tickets: £12.50 for teams of up to 8 include fish, chicken or vegetarian supper, soft drinks, tea and coffee. Email: paulinepayne@btinternet.com or phone 01737 554449.

Annual General Meeting: Wednesday, 6th November, Centre of the Retired Old Coulsdon, Grange Park (in the park opposite the Tudor Parade) 7.30 pm, with guest speaker. Members, guests and local residents welcome. Refreshments will be available at 8.00 p.m., followed by the AGM. For further information please email paulinepayne@btinternet.com or phone 01737 554449.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Please see our website for FoFD&HV Data Privacy Statement.