

Clare Castle Country Park (8th September 2013)

Progress on the transfer of the Park from Suffolk County Council

It now looks as though the transfer of the Park will not take place until around the end of the year. This revised timescale is due to two main reasons

- the legal work that needs to be carried out before the Park is transferred from Suffolk County Council is, almost inevitably, taking longer than we had hoped.
- an independent survey of the whole Park (buildings, green spaces and water areas) is being carried out on our behalf. This will provide a much better idea of the operating costs of the Park in the future which in turn will enable us to establish how that expenditure might be funded.

These are both key elements of the 'due diligence' process which we have always made clear must be carried out to our satisfaction before the Park is transferred. While this is frustrating for us all it is important that all matters of this nature are carried out properly so that, as far as possible, we are not faced with any nasty surprises once the responsibility is ours. It also gives us more time to set ourselves up before we take on the management of the Park.

Water level in the 'New Cut' (the part of the Stour that flows alongside the Park)

Although neither the Town Council nor the Trustees-elect are parties to the problems associated with the low level of water in the 'New Cut' (despite what was erroneously implied in the recent edition of Focus) both groups have been applying strong pressure for the matter to be resolved. It was only quite recently that it became clear that many of the outstanding issues regarding the transfer of the Park were likely to be resolved. It was not until then that the Trustees-elect were in a position to apply any more pressure than that which an individual could apply. However having reached that stage we made it quite clear we were not willing to take on the responsibility of managing the Park unless the water level was maintained at the levels of 2-3 years ago. In mid August I attended a meeting set up by John Collecott that included, amongst others, Peter Phillips (for the Town Council) and representatives of the Environment Agency and Suffolk County Council. At that meeting a proposal was made that might have resolved the matter but it has subsequently transpired that it had some negative aspects. Consequently, alternatives are being investigated. While we have no direct powers, and can only apply pressure, we, as potential Trustees, are as committed as anyone for the water in the New Cut to be maintained at an acceptable level and are doing all we can to ensure that happens. This is another frustration, and a time-consuming one, and I hope that we can help it to be resolved in the not too distant future. All we ask from you is your patience and understanding.

The future

In order that we do not compromise the future by anything we do now, we need to think about what the Park might look like in the long term (25-50 years) as well as what we should focus on in the next five years. We have therefore had meetings with English Heritage, the National Trust, Access Cambridge Archaeology, Dedham Vale and Stour Valley AONB and a consultant who has considerable experience of working with English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). As a result we have decided to apply for an HIF 'Start-up' grant (maximum £10,000). This will enable us to call on a number of specialists to come up with a number of options, while at the same time working with the Trustees-elect and others to develop their knowledge and understanding of the way we can make best use of the heritage assets in the Park (and this includes the environmental 'assets'). We hope this can be completed by January 2014.

Trustee-elect

Derek Blake has always made it clear he would stand down as a Trustee when the initial building works had been completed. (Current estimated timescale of this would be mid 2014). We therefore needed to find someone who would take on the specific responsibility for the History & Education opportunities in the Park and become a Trustee. Richard Smith (Emeritus Professor of Historical Geography and Demography and Emeritus Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge, and Chairman of the Clare Historical and Archaeological Society and The Ancient House Museum) would be an ideal person to fill that role and the Trustees-elect are delighted he has agreed to join us with immediate effect.

Logo

Many thanks to those of you who put forward ideas for the logo. These have been passed on to two professional graphic designers who have generously offered to come up with their proposals free of charge. We hope to be able to publish a number of options before a final decision is made.

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