

Chairman's Report.

Welcome everybody so good to see so many people here.

My name is John king I am the current chairman of the Conservators and Therfield Regulation Trust. This has been an interesting year, we have had the enquiry into the deregistration of the Briary lane site.

We have had ongoing discussions with our tenants about rent and new leases, ongoing discussions with Natural England on works to be carried out on the heath and our latest endeavour a Volunteer group, to mention but a few.

As is the case every year we always note how much busier the heath is, and how far people travel to come and enjoy one of the most beautiful areas in North Hertfordshire.

This puts ever greater strain on the heath and its infrastructure the wear on the grass the amount of dog faeces is becoming an ever-growing issue. The increased use of the car parks and subsequent wear is a large and looming cost that will have to be funded in the near future. The need for a full-time warden on the heath is becoming a critical problem for us.

It was with these issues in mind that the conservators started out with the idea to develop the Briary lane site, then invest the monies received to generate an income stream that would pay for a warden and all of his equipment. The benefits that a warden would bring would be the ability to educate the general public on what to see where to go which

parts to maybe avoid if sheep are grazing there, help manage things like car parking on busy days. Currently an issue on busy weekends.

With the benefit of hindsight, the path set out by the conservators who instigated this plan was not the correct one, and one we realise has caused a great deal of friction to the current conservators. We are not blameless we should have taken a better more open approach to this.

With this in mind we are putting together an action plan so that over the upcoming period we can engage better with the public and put better levels of transparency in to our activities. We will be consulting with the public as to how they perceive the heath should be managed. We are continually looking for new sources of income to fund the ongoing conservation work on the heath. On average we spend around £25k on conservation work, this enables us to maintain the heath as it is but for us to make progress and really improve the heath we need to be spending nearer double this. With an increased income we could do so much more.

I know that one of the questions that you want an answer to is the Gladmans planning application on Heath Farm.

Gladmans came to see us last year. The first thing that they asked for was confidentiality to which we agreed.

They then offered us an option agreement on the site at Briary lane which would mean that we would lose control of what happened on the site so we said No Thank You.

At this point they changed their tack and became more hostile to us stating that their client owned Briary lane so we

had to agree to their deal. At this point we again Kindly Declined their offer. They have offered a slightly improved offer but again we have not entered into any agreement with Gladmans. They are legally entitled to put in a planning application using some of our land but it does not mean they have our agreement to do any work as there is no agreement. If we receive a formal offer we will consider it as is our legal responsibility being trustees of a charity.

The Enquiry

We think both sides learnt a lot. We hope we presented our case professionally.

The decision to de-register Briary Lane was the most important decision for Therfield Heath since our predecessors bought the Heath from the Church in 1979.

Once the decision is known we will be able to plan for the future for the best for Therfield and Greens and the people of Royston, Therfield and the wider area.

The Volunteers.

We have long wanted to have conservation volunteers working on the Heath. With Conservator Cynthia Combe we have someone with the drive and knowledge to organize and guide them. To do this properly, with due regard modern policies need to be brought into place, this takes time but we are close to this goal. We look forward to their work on the more sensitive area of the Heath where the use of machines is not practical.

We have worked on those areas of the Heath within our agreement with Natural England and also carried out important work on those areas covered by the Golf Clubs and Robert Law's agreements with Natural England. Their agreements do not cover things like scrub clearance and removal of sheep faeces, these are very important jobs that take up a lot of time and money.

The relationship with the sports clubs who use the Heath and the Recreation ground in Therfield is important to us and we hope continues to be strong. We have every intention of continuing our charitable aims towards sport and all of the conservation work needed to keep the heath in good order. It is a very fine balance that we try to strike between the sporting interests of a large number of people who use the heath and the requirements of the land itself. There are also all those people who just come to enjoy the heath for walks with and without their dogs plus the people who use the heath to improve their health, plus many more uses.

We are planning an evening open meeting in Royston Town Hall on 12th of April. There we will ask all the bodies with an interest in the Heath and Greens to make a report and take questions. The Conservators will also report and lay out their thoughts for the future. They will listen to the public and endeavour to answer any questions.

Every one of the conservators that sits on this committee does it because they love the heath and the decisions that they take are done with the best intentions. May I take this opportunity to thank all of them publicly for their dedication, hard work over the last year and commitment to the

organisation. We are all volunteers our Clerk is the only person who is paid and he isn't paid that much considering how much work he does.

Once again may I thank so many of you for turning up. We are hoping that this interest and engagement with the conservators can continue to flourish. I hope that this can be maintained in the months/years to come and we can move forwards together and build a better environment for everyone.