

2019 was a very busy year for us – much of it very good for the Heath and everyone that uses it.

Byelaws

You will know that we've been looking at updating our byelaws. They were last updated in 1989 and use of the heath has changed since then. We have now got DEFRA's agreement for a consultation process. We as conservators are not as one on the bylaws. We need time to work out, using a consultation process, what, if anything, needs changing. We will then hopefully make a presentation at an open meeting at which you will be able provide feedback and your ideas for us to consider.

Car Parking

Over the last year we have looked into car park charging. It would have been very easy to implement and could have raised a lot of money. After consultation and thought, we chose not to implement charging and instead will be setting up a voluntary system that will enable people to donate and receive a sticker for their car to show they have done so.

We widened the car park entrance to make it easier for traffic coming in and out. We'd hoped the resurfacing would have prevented potholes for longer but the heavy rain hasn't helped. We are getting the holes filled.

Site maintenance

We managed a fair bit of grazing. Not as much as we wanted though, due to a number of incidents. As a result, the grazier has decided not to extend his HLS agreement and we need a different solution for future years.

The volunteers continue to do good work battling scrub on the site, aided by 3 tree poppers. Funding for two of these was received from the Friends and from the Rotary club and we are extremely grateful. The volunteers are currently working on Church Hill to try and reduce the bramble and hawthorn that shade out the pasque flowers.

Leases and permits

We have agreed a new lease for the Therfield recreation ground allowing TRAKSA to seek funding to replace their aging pavilion. Royston Cricket would also like to bring cricket back to the Heath, we have started discussions with the Sports Club and Rugby along with the Cricket Club to help make that happen

We have also agreed a new lease for the Sports Club, giving security of tenure to allow Toby Snowdon to undertake extensive renovation.

Mitigation

Everyone is increasingly aware of the growing footfall on the heath in terms of the number of people using the site to walk or for sport. It puts huge pressures on the Heath's ecology and is an increasing issue for the people who use the Heath.

Here is what we are doing to address this:

1. We are working with NHDC to produce a Heath Mitigation Strategy which will form part of their Local Plan. This might take the form of greenspaces in their new developments as an alternative to the heath or developers paying money towards the upkeep of the heath.

2. Natural England have agreed to fund most of the cost of producing a Management Plan for Heath as part of a Countryside Stewardship Feasibility Study. This will lay out what needs to be done to manage and protect the unique ecology of the Heath along with getting the right balance to ensure the best of recreation and conservation for generations to come.

Tenders were issued last year. In agreement with Natural England, we will announce the successful contractor in due course.

3. Golf buggies – we have agreed to contribute £1000 towards the cost of a geofencing system for the golf buggies. It will enable us to control where the buggies can – and cannot – be driven, so we can keep them out of sensitive areas thereby reducing the areas that are adversely affected by them.

Going forward

We've also got a very long 'to-do' that includes:

- Setting up a donation system – we are now registered for Gift Aid
- Running a 'Heath Day' with all the clubs having a chance to talk to people about what they offer and providing a chance for people to get advice and information about the site too
- Reinstating the meetings of representatives of all heath users, so they can all get together in one room
- Getting the dog bins in the right place and hopefully reducing associated costs
- Maintenance work on some chalk paths
- Working with the Friends to produce an information board for Church Hill

Hopefully we can move forward with all these projects over the next year and together we can all help to improve this wonderful part of England.