



Friends of Mirrlees Fields & Mirrlees Fields Action Group

## Annual General Meeting

28 November 2013

### Chair's report

1.	<p><b>Committee update</b></p> <p>Following last year's AGM, Jim Gilligan, Wendy Postma, Bill and Sandra Crofts and Phil Butcher regularly attended Committee meetings throughout the year. Meetings continued to be held bi monthly with additional 'task group' meetings arranged as necessary in between. Meetings are now being held in the Shady Oak, off Ringmore Road. Sincere thanks are again extended to Gordon Hutchinson of Friends of Great Moor Park who allowed use of the pavilion in the park.</p> <p>A number of Committee members also stood down for personal reasons or time pressures meaning they were unable to commit to Committee activities. Committee would like to thank Geoff Taylor, Carol Condliffe, Gail Escott and Phil Butcher for all their hard work and support to date, and their continued support going forward.</p> <p>All Committee roles were allocated amongst Committee members and, subject to election at AGM, no Committee roles are looking to be filled. Committee stands at 12 members and as such, no additional members are sought although nominations will be accepted and discussed.</p>
2.	<p><b>Planning issues</b></p> <p><b>Boundary fence:</b> Council is still to decide on the retrospective planning application. Council unlikely to reject.</p> <p><b>Amendment to housing development – additional houses:</b> Committee agreed to not oppose this change of use.</p> <p><b>Original housing planning application progress:</b> The old factory has now been demolished and the site is being remediated to better attract developers. No developer as yet has been identified. Following sale of land to a developer, detailed planning application process will follow. MFAG will watch closely and comment where necessary. Footpath improvements as required under the S106 will not happen until development starts.</p> <p><b>Warehouse construction planning application (old):</b> Trees that form part of the landscaping scheme linked to construction of the new warehouse facility and that have been damaged recently are to be renewed in line with a planning condition.</p>
3.	<p><b>Members' issues</b></p>



	<p><b>Assault on fields:</b> MFAG had a meeting with a PCSO with regard to an assault on the fields. The PCSO reported that the Police were aware of the person who made the assault, that it had been dealt with by them and the family of the attacker and that he was not to be allowed on the fields again.</p> <p><b>Public Rights of Way petition:</b> A member approached Committee with a request to help support an application for additional public rights of way (footpaths) to be granted across the Fields. Currently there are only 3 entry points onto the fields, and two public foot paths which traverse between them. After consultation with a number of stakeholders, including the Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), and a lengthy discussion at Committee, Committee voted against supporting the application at this time. MFAG remains focused on the long term goal of a sustainable future with public access to the entire fields as one open space. It was felt that additional (fixed) footpaths could, potentially, have a negative impact on any future plans that reflect these objectives.</p> <p><b>Fence issue:</b> A member continues to have an issue regarding the erection of the boundary fence. This issue has been investigated by MAN and Council Planning Officers. Committee agree with the findings of these investigations and consider the matter closed.</p> <p><b>Boundary trees:</b> A request to MAN to remove a tall tree along the boundary fence was made by a member. MAN have deferred any tree works, or granting permission to others to undertake tree works, excepting to any trees that pose an immediate risk to health or property, until CWT has developed a land management plan. This plan will highlight those trees which should be removed for legitimate ecological reasons.</p> <p><b>Factory lights:</b> Factory lights have recently been illuminated throughout the night despite them historically having been switched off at around 8pm since March 2010. This is a new 'recurring' issue which will be followed up further.</p> <p><b>Dog mess:</b> A perennial problem. However, signs put up by Committee have seen a reduction in the amount of dog mess or 'poo bags' hanging in trees on the fields. Committee recently put up 'Thank You' posters in light of this. Committee also continues to develop links with the Association of Professional Dog Walkers and the Council to further address this issue. A project to highlight the issue, using fluorescent stock spray, has been approved by MAN.</p>
4.	<p><b>Other activities</b></p> <p><b>Great Moor Juniors:</b> MFAG were asked to guide staff and pupils from Great Moor Junior School around the fields. Topics of interest include governance and community engagement, geography and history. A process is being developed which should see permissive access granted to school parties for the purpose of these visits.</p> <p><b>Hazel Grove Gardening Club:</b> MFAG and CWT have been asked to present to Hazel Grove Gardening Club, for a voluntary contribution, on their activities and local ecology.</p>



5.	<p><b>Communications update</b></p> <p>The two key areas of focus for 2013</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) widen awareness of the Fields, the work of our Group and the current situation with regards to potential planning/development</li> <li>b) continue to develop a positive and productive relationship with MAN representatives, including their PR contacts</li> </ol> <p>Through events on the fields, and attendance at local events in the community (Flowery Fields Allotment Open Day and Hazel Grove Carnival) we have increased our email distribution list by over 50 members. We have over 150 Facebook Group members and have gathered answers in their hundreds to recent MFAG consultation work. Events on the fields reached circa 300 people in terms of attendees - many of them visiting the fields for the first time. This awareness has been raised without the use of local press or paid advertising, focusing instead on existing email distribution lists, social media, word of mouth and a Newsletter Drop of c.1200 to local residents surrounding the fields.</p> <p>Additional awareness has been raised with local counsellors due to our successful application for funding from the area committee fund for short term footpath improvements and matched funding to a longer term 'spatial plan' with regards to the future look and use of the fields. MFAG are due to report back to the Area Committee Fund in 2014 detailing how the funds have been used.</p> <p><b>Key areas of focus for 2014:</b> With the MAN Brownfield site going to open market, CWT's active involvement in grant applications and involvement with the site and continuing local public interest in MFAG (and perhaps charity recognition) 2014 will be a busy year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand Consistency – throughout all of our materials (digital &amp; paper, internal &amp; external). Visual representation, wording and key messaging all aligned. Quarterly newsletter to be maintained, but re worked to reflect style of new website, and make the most of its digital format (limited and requested printed copies will still be available).</li> <li>• Digital Presence - renewal of the existing 'mirrlessfields' website (fresh, modern, interactive, links to key stakeholders etc), change in structure to the Facebook group (akin to a 'business' page where people can 'like' you and we can post as MFAG (not individuals)</li> <li>• Local presence – Seek to further increase our local presence and role as a community group. Achieve through more field based and fund raising events, liaison with local press, PSCO contacts, engaging local business', schools, sports clubs and other voluntary/community based groups</li> <li>• Consultation Output – working closely with CWT to share results of consultation work, next steps and activity on the fields (eg footpath improvements)</li> </ul>
6	<b>Fundraising</b>



	<p>We have generated over £1,300 in fundraising activities, all of which has been allocated for projects.</p> <p>Sources of funding include the Stepping Hill Local Area Committee, Hazel Grove Carnival and from the recent events held on the fields.</p> <p>Other grant opportunities exist but success would be limited at the moment due to the lack of a spatial strategy and clear vision for the site (which is being addressed through the funding that has been secured to date).</p> <p>The current status of MFAG also is a barrier to attracting further funding. Charitable organisations and 'Friends of' groups are better placed to secure external grant funding.</p>
7.	<p><b>Events and consultation</b></p> <p><b>Mirrlees Eco Walk and Bat Walk:</b> Both of these events formed the central point of engagement for the 'Community Consultation' element of the spatial strategy for the fields which MFAG was to fund (with other elements match funded by MAN and CWT). Permissive access was granted for the purpose of these events.</p> <p>The Eco walk was a great success with approximately 120 people attended of which about 30% were children. £54 was raised from this free event.</p> <p>The bat walk had been a resounding success and one of the main things that had been noticed on the night was how much children and 'first time field users' engaged in it. Approximately 160 people helped to raise £360. This underlines the interest in the fields and peoples' willingness to pay for interesting activities.</p> <p><b>Other events - Hazel Grove Carnival and Flowery Field Allotments open day:</b> Not intended to be an opportunity to raise funds, attendance at these events proved useful in extending the Community Consultation to a wider demographic.</p> <p><b>Consultation output:</b> The general consensus from respondents to the consultation suggests there is little appetite for much in the way of 'development' of the fields with a strong emphasis on respecting, maintaining and enhancing the 'natural' feel of the fields.</p> <p>The outputs from this consultation are currently being incorporated into a Spatial Strategy document / land sustainable land management plan, incorporating evidence from a new ecological survey funded by MAN, which is being produced by CWT at their expense. It is expected that this Spatial Strategy will be completed at some point in Spring.</p>
8.	<p><b>Relationships with MAN and CWT</b></p> <p><b>MAN:</b> Following the challenging AGM last year, which underlined the strength of feeling of the local community, MAN instigated regular meetings between MFAG Chair and</p>



	<p>Communications Officer and with MAN's Company Secretary and PR Consultant.</p> <p>The relationship is positive and continues to develop well.</p> <p>The contents of this Report have only been made possible by the continuing progress in terms of the positive, active relationship with MAN. Bi-monthly face to face meetings with open agendas allow member issues to be brought to the table, as well as receiving regular updates on progress or activity on the fields.</p> <p>In addition to these meetings, regular email and phone contact between all parties is allowing ongoing progression to items raised at the face to face meetings, and for pressing matters which rise in-between meetings to be addressed. There remain issues that cause disagreement, but these meetings and contact allow them to be talked through.</p> <p>MFAG are still yet to meet new UK MD of MAN but hope to do so soon to continue to develop the effective and proactive way of working with the company.</p> <p><b>CWT:</b> Following MFAG's invitation to CWT to participate in discussions with MAN, MAN are in the process of becoming Corporate Members of the CWT.</p> <p>CWT bring ecological expertise, self sustaining land management knowledge and volunteer management skills, all of which are needed to actively manage fields on behalf of MAN. MFAG however provide the community link CWT need to encourage volunteers and members and ensure that local ownership of the management of the fields (in the future) is generated.</p> <p>MFAG is also key in representing a community focus to support grant applications that CWT may wish to pursue to fund additional activities and projects on the fields.</p> <p>This tripartite arrangement is currently working very well however there remains opportunity for other stakeholders and organisations to participate in ongoing discussions where they bring complimentary skills and expertise.</p>
9.	<p><b>Future of the fields and activities</b></p> <p>Volunteers are being sought to help deliver a foot path improvement project in January, which MAN support. A programme of activities will also be developed to continue to maintain high levels of interest in the fields and the activities of MFAG.</p> <p>Long term, the objectives for MAN and MFAG remain the same stays the same. With no long terms aspiration in retaining the green space, MAN remains committed to bringing the green space into public use to benefit the wider community.</p> <p>The spatial strategy, part funded by MFAG, CWT and MAN is being produced to help inform how this might happen and is expected in quarter 1 of 2014.</p>



<p>The working relationship between MFAG, CWT and MAN to implement elements of the spatial strategy is a trial or first step towards this aim of greater autonomy in relation to management of the fields.</p>
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