

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2024



Carols in the Park—The Big Sing. Picture David Gaylard.

The only constant is change.

2024 will be a significant year for the Trust.

Richard Bull, who has been Park Manager since 2011 will retire at the end of May. Quite simply, Richard has been the go-to person for all operational matters since his appointment and of course his departure will leave a huge hole at the Trust. We have been planning for his inevitable retirement for several years and have started to implement a long-standing plan. Of course, the Trust has evolved considerably over the years, and we have achieved an awful lot in a relatively short space of time. We've concluded that we now need additional capacity in the paid

team as 'hands-on' Trustee support can only achieve so much. This involves some minor changes to the organisation which will increase slightly in size.

The first appointment was Sarah Shah, who joined us in the Autumn as our new Administration and Finance Officer. She works part-time and is already making a significant impact to our operations.

Our attempts to recruit two new members of staff for the outside team fortunately came to fruition and we are now delighted to welcome Lee Allen and Mark Eldridge to the Trust. We are very pleased with how things have turned out and believe that we have now established a firm foundation to build upon.

Did you know?

Highfield Park Trust is on Facebook and Twitter. Join the conversation.



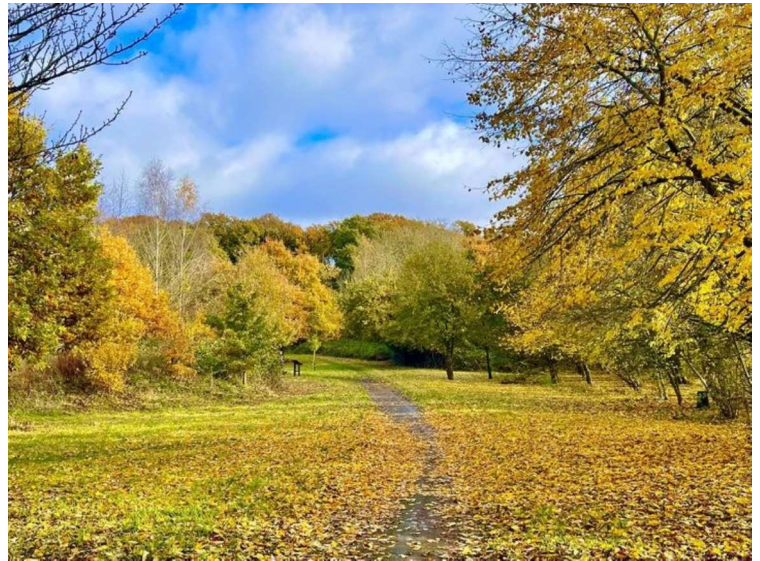
Our intention is to recruit a new Chief Executive in the very near future and this person will lead the Trust through the next stages of its development.

Unfortunately, we also now have to say goodbye to Sue Gaylard and Nicky Rogowski.

Sue stepped down as a Trustee at Christmas having served the Trust for more than twenty years. There have been many notable events during this time, including very popular walks, talks and exhibitions. Barts in Herts, Forty Four Hospital Workers go to War and the very recent Memories of the Hospitals and the Park. She has conducted more than 100 interviews, including meeting with Philomena Lee and been able to inform several relatives about their forebears' hospital experiences. She tracked down the lost painting of Hill End and has overseen the creation of an amazing archive that the Trust now holds. Although it's sad to see Sue step back as a Trustee, she intends to continue with her work, but in a less formal capacity. Every cloud and all that!

Nicky will leave the Trust in January having worked in the outside team for two years. Always cheerful, it was a delight to work with her and we wish her well in her future adventures.

Despite still being short-handed during the Autumn, the Park has looked fantastic and it is a credit to everybody involved in its upkeep. Special mention must go to our regular volunteers, who do an absolutely amazing job in all weathers. This doesn't mean that everything is perfect, because clearly it is not, but overall we are very pleased. We received several comments on the work undertaken around Winchfield Wood where the area was cleared of brambles, which will encourage new growth and flowers that will in turn help support butterflies.



Autumn Colour around Winchfield Wood. Picture David Mooney.

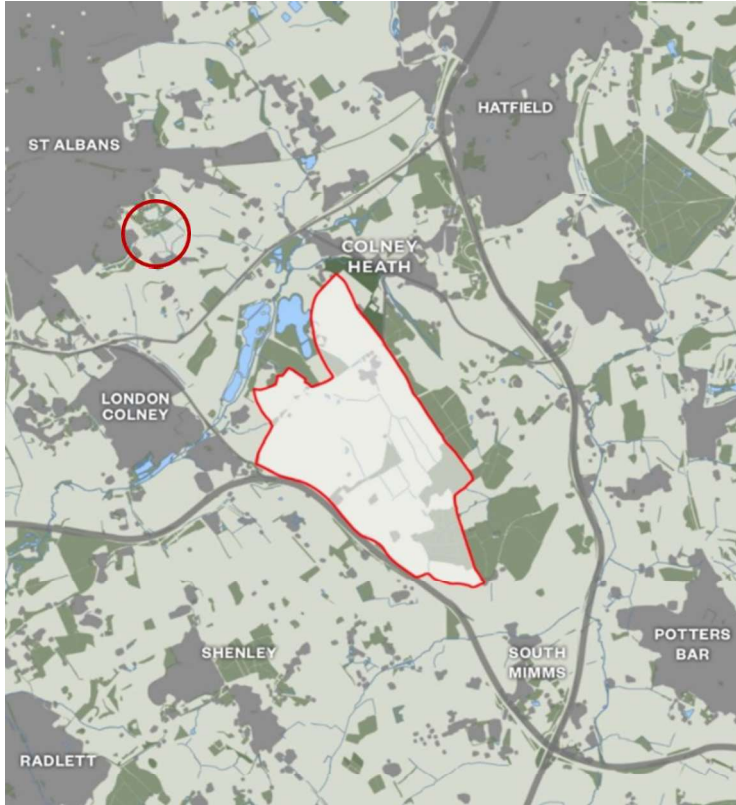
YMCA Departure

As you may now be aware, the YMCA has decided to break their lease for the Highfield Park Centre and will leave by the end of September 2024 at the latest. The news was not unexpected as we were aware that their other gyms had been shut in an obvious move away from the health and wellbeing space. The property is now being marketed and we remain hopeful of finding another tenant shortly. This is obviously an important issue for the Trust, but we are now looking forward to the start of another chapter. Hopefully we will have more news in the next newsletter.

Local Plan Update

In the medium to longer term change seems very likely to the south and southeast of St. Albans.

You will recall my disappointment with events of the summer when Highfield was omitted from the draft Local Plan. Thank you to everybody who responded and took the time to register their thoughts on the SADC website. You were heard. To move things forward, at the end of November we met with officers from SADC and our district councillors and had a very



Highfield Park circled and potential site of Bowmans Cross

positive discussion. It is clear that the omission was an error and it was fantastic to be able spend a few hours informing all attendees of our many achievements and ideas for the future.

Let me start by explaining the context, which maybe is not quite as positive. It is estimated that Hertfordshire will require an additional 100,000 new homes in the next ten years or so. We know that Hertsmere Borough Council were previously advocating the virtues of Bowmans Cross, a new garden village that could ultimately link Colney Heath with Shenley. Although these proposals were previously withdrawn, there appears to be mutterings that the concept is about to be rekindled. 'People have to live somewhere', I have been told. We also know that the A414 between Harlow and Hemel Hempstead is an important transport link and, according to Hertfordshire County Council, 50% of the new homes could be developed along it. Slightly closer to Highfield, there were

proposals to build on some of the land adjacent to Highfield Farm, although I have not been able to find the relevant proposals or determine the exact positioning online. These plans have not progressed at the moment, but it seems logical from the above that it is only a matter of time before they are. At some point Highfield Farm is also likely to be affected. The area is currently 'safeguarded' in the HCC minerals plan, which runs until 2041. The consultation for this has now closed, of course.



Position of the Rail Freight Terminal courtesy of St. Albans Times

And finally, we have the new rail freight terminal, which is estimated to generate an extra 220 HGV journeys every hour around St. Albans. My understanding is that a decision on whether a judicial review can now occur will be made in early 2024.

To cut a very long story short, we are probably going to see our little part of Hertfordshire change significantly in the coming decades.

Around 2017 the Trust was approached by Colney Heath Parish Council, who made us aware of the Bowmans Cross proposal for the first time. They asked us to consider plans for enlarging the park as a buffer to all this potential development as we are perfectly situated to do so. **This is important.**

Since then Trustees have discussed several options, but the new Local Plan has enabled us to formalise our ideas and, as a result, we made a comprehensive submission as part of the recent SADC consultation.

We discussed how the park could be extended towards the A414 over the next fifty years. Nothing is going to happen immediately but if the Trust does not lead on this, then nobody else will. Our current role is to ensure that appropriate discussions are occurring and they are.

The additional land would allow us to create new woodland, meadows, parkland and amenity facilities. Our ideas are bold and imaginative and include the creation of a new lake, similar to those created on the other side of the A414 in London Colney. We would also like to explore whether it would be possible to facilitate a permanent home for Butterfly World 2 and undertake a serious conservation project.

Not only would an enlarged park improve opportunities for recreational enjoyment but it will also provide good quality habitat for wildlife and increase biodiversity.

Many of the ideas are not new and can be found in the original Watling Chase Community Forest Plan developed in 1995. Little did we know!

At this point it should be stressed that none of the above is within our immediate gift. The land is owned by Oaklands College and Hertfordshire County Council, both of whom are aware of our thoughts. We will need to build further operational resilience and new funding streams. As now, an enlarged park will need to be sustainable over the long-term.

We would love to hear your thoughts on our ideas of what Highfield Park could look like in 2075.

The complete submission can be found on our website or visit the SADC website and search on Draft Local Plan. Please let us know your thoughts by writing

to us at admin@highfieldparktrust.co.uk in the first instance. At some point in the not-to-distant future we intend to formally consult with you again, since our last survey was in 2019. I will confirm arrangements in subsequent editions.

2023 ended with a lovely team meal attended by staff, trustees and volunteers. Running the Trust takes a lot of work as there are always so many things occurring in the background, that never get reported. The following day we held our first 'Carols in the Park' event with St. Luke's Church. All involved were very pleased with the number of people who attended and we have received so many positive comments since. Plans are already afoot to repeat this year.



Wassailing in January—Picture David Gaylard

More details for our 2024 programme of events will be released in due course, although we have already kicked off with a tremendous 'Wassailing' on twelfth night.

Let me finish by taking this opportunity to thank everybody for their support this year and to wish you a belated Happy New Year.

Enjoy the Park!

Tim Abbott

Chair of Trustees, Highfield Park Trust.