

Welcome

The year 2005 was a particularly good for *Oakley Park* in that it saw the long overdue improvements to the playground take place. The increase in use of these facilities is impressive with even around 40 children/parents seen there on Christmas day alone. We are hoping to continue the impetus during 2006 by following up with provision of some new facilities for the older children. In this connection we are liaising with your local Councillors who I know are pursuing this issue. We are also writing to Phil Whiting who is Head of Public Spaces, which I believe is a newly created Council department, regarding the enhancements required. We will keep you posted with developments.

We are delighted to welcome Shaun Philips as our temporary Ranger following Elliott's absence on sabbatical leave. Articles from them both are included in this issue.

Treasurers

Many of you will know Paul Barker who has been our *treasurer* for the last ten years. Paul, who is in the course of moving house, although he expects to remain in the Fleet area, has unfortunately decided to step down from these duties. He has been a stalwart of the committee and will be sadly missed particularly for his involvement in the activities we organise in *Oakley Park*. On behalf of *the friends* I would like to express my gratitude for his contribution to our cause.

Lawrence Christer has kindly agreed to take over the treasurer's roles, which is particularly apt as he works for Barclays Bank.

Cheese & Wine Social (Annual review)

Last October I was pleased to welcome Jen Wilson as our Guest speaker. Jen is the Community Warden for this area and has been instrumental, amongst other things, in reducing the amount of graffiti.

I believe those who attended the meeting at The Red Cross Hall Clarence Road found the evening very worthwhile and enjoyable. As usual there was plenty to eat and drink and I can assure you that nobody went home hungry or thirsty. We look forward to seeing more of you there next year and will endeavour not to hold it at half term to further encourage you come.

For those who have not joined us in the past, the evening is primarily a social event for you to enjoy the company of your fellow members. A small amount of time is given over to business to keep you informed of events and projects.

Ron Ayton (Chairman)

Sabbatical

Hello everyone and a belated happy new year to you all.

All the works that have been carried out in the woods this year I feel have made even more of an impact than

previous years. This is because they have begun to link up the smaller pockets of woodland, which over the previous years have been cleared. This has led to the woodland taking on a different feel with it seeming much more open and airy and far more safer for any concerned walkers and neighbours of the woods.

In one of the larger areas cleared of Rhododendron this year, as with last year, wildflower bulbs were planted in the woodland to try and encourage and re-establish the plants back on the woodland floor which the rhododendron and cherry laurel have shaded out over the years. 1000 bulbs were planted and were made up equally with native English bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*) and Wild Garlic or traditionally known as Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*). Paul Barker and his son Joe very very kindly carried out the ordeal of planting all of these so I owe them both a huge thank you.

The other large area of clearance that took place provided us not only with plenty of woodchips to lay on the paths, but also with the discovery of a brick well and some footings of an old building. Intrigued by these structures I dug up old maps of the woodland to see which, if any, old buildings used to be located in the area, only to find that there are no records whatsoever of any buildings in the area where we found the footings.

Puzzled by what they could possibly be I turned to local

archaeologists to help for an answer. Following a site meeting with two of them, suddenly we had three people perplexed by what these structures are. In the end it was decided that a proper 'dig' would be needed to conjure up any answers so at present I am waiting to hear back from them as to when they would like to start so watch this space.

You may recall that in February 2005, the Friends of and a local Brownie group helped erect a number of bird boxes around the woodland. Well on 24th January 2006, Shaun Phillips, and myself went to check each of the boxes and clean out any which needed it in preparation for this years breeding birds. Apart from the obvious success of neither of us falling of the ladders, what we found was brilliant. There was evidence of four separate nests in the boxes with a further box seemingly used by a squirrel as a feeding platform. This may not sound too successful but it means a third of the boxes were used in the first year and considering these boxes are built to last about ten years then things are looking good for the feathered friends of the Friend's of Oakley Park.

As for what is coming up in the next year I am hoping to host a fungal foray or mushroom march as well as do some night-time moth trapping in the woods. Another pond dipping event will be hosted as well as volunteer events hopefully before March and then again after September. However, all of these will have to wait for me to get back from my

sabbatical, which began on 27th January and will end on the 2nd May.

For those who you who are interested my travels will take on working in the Ecuadorian Cloud Forests for a conservation charity as well as seeing many of the sites that South America has to offer. I also plan to see my brand new born niece or nephew (unknown yet) when I stop over in Canada to see my sister, which I am really excited about.

In the meantime Shaun Phillips will be acting as my temporary cover and has introduced himself later on in this newsletter so until May 2nd I hope you all have a lovely spring and begin to enjoy the warmer weather,

Elliott Fairs
Oakley Park Ranger

OAKLEY PARK CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND REFURBISHMENT

**FIRST PHASE
REFURBISHMENT
COMPLETED – AN
ACCOUNT OF HOW WE GOT
THERE!**

Ever since being formed in 1989, the Friends of Oakley Park have striven, with much success, to improve the environment within Oakley Park and its nearby woods. However, one area that it had not been possible to tackle was the children's playground.

By 2002, this area had become sorely in need of

refurbishment. The playground equipment had become old and worn out. The playground floor had become uneven and the site itself was attracting the unwelcome attention of juvenile delinquents.

Initial efforts to locate and secure a considerable but necessary level of funding to pay for refurbishment were unsuccessful. One approach had been to prepare an application for a grant from landfill tax money.

However, by early 2004, it became apparent that any grant from landfill site money would not go far and would take many months to secure, if at all.

Fortunately, a more promising source of funding was identified by Hart District Council Cabinet members Sharyn Wheale and Carol Leversha, namely, capital that had accumulated as a result of contributions from developers of properties in Fleet, so-called Section 106A contributions.

With the support of all four ward members of Fleet Central and Fleet Pondtail, Hart's Cabinet, at its meeting in May 2004, approved the release of capital allocated funding, largely offset by Section 106A contributions. This was sufficient to cover the cost of a first phase refurbishment and improvement plan for the playground used by the under eight years old children, together with the provision of a youth shelter for older children.

Implementation took somewhat longer than

expected due in part to the need to include new CCTV coverage in the scheme. This, together with the youth shelter, needed prior planning permission. The parents of younger children were fully consulted to ensure the new play equipment would meet the needs of younger children. Attention was also paid towards ensuring the playground would be accessible to and could be used by children with disabilities.

Following submission of tenders, a supplier for the new playground was chosen and equipment ordered. As winter gave way to spring, work on the new playground began to take shape and was finally completed in time for a celebration in the form of a Teddy Bears' Picnic that took place on Saturday 25th June in the presence of Hart District Council's Chairman, Councillor Anthony Barrell.

John Pearson - Cllr – Fleet
Central ward
09.08.2005

New Face Around Oakley Park.

Hello I'm Shaun Phillips and I will be covering Elliott for the next three months whilst he is away on his travels, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to introduce myself and tell you all a bit about me.

Firstly I have lived in Fleet since I was seven months old, so I know the local area well

and have grown up using the facilities and woodland at Oakley Park.

I first got interested in conservation at school when I did my two week work experience placement with Waverly Borough Council at Frensham Pond. I then did a volunteer day at Elvetham Heath Local Nature Reserve where I first met Elliott, and I have continued doing regular volunteering with Hart Countryside Service (HCS) for the last three years now.

As well as regularly volunteering I also went to Merrist Wood College for two years after I left school. I left Merrist Wood with a First Diploma in Countryside and Environment and a National Certificate in Practical Habitat Management, as well as a lot of practical experience gained from my volunteering with HCS.

During my three months at HCS I hope to gain as much experience as possible not just in practical side but also learn more in the more formal side such as writing articles like this and leading guided walks and volunteer parties.

I hope to be as much as a help to the Friends of Oakley Park as I possibly can so if anyone has any questions or need to get in contact with me you can do so in a number of different ways. My mobile number is 07919541028 or alternatively you can e-mail me on shaun.phillips@hart.gov.uk or write to Countryside Service, Hart District Council, Civic offices, Harlington Way, Fleet, Hants, GU51 4AE.