



THE PRIORITY

Newsletter of the Friends of Priory Park & The Green

Issue No. 12
November 2003
Web: www.fopp.org.uk
Email: info@fopp.org.uk
Membership total 536



Goodbye to all



PRESS RELEASE - 19 November 2003

Funding Gap too large

Dudley College announced today that their plans to develop a world class and innovative training facility at Priory Hall in Dudley would not go ahead.

College Principal, Jeanne Harding said: "the funding gap is just too large for this project to go ahead in its present form. However we will be looking again at the proposals and will be investigating different sites. This project would have provided much needed jobs and training for local people but issues surrounding the renovation of listed buildings and the need to ensure any new build was sympathetic to the environment have caused the costs to rise above available resources."

Councillor Les Jones, Lead Member for Economic Vitality at Dudley Council, said: "the project included proposals to upgrade the existing registry office, improve training and conference facilities for the council, as well as provide much needed refurbishment to the existing listed building and gardens. Dudley Council will continue to work with the college to look to provide a sustainable and high quality training facility elsewhere in the borough."

Shadow Lifts from Priory Hall

We congratulate Dudley College and Dudley Council on their decision to abandon their proposals for siting THAT Academy in Priory Park.

Although the press release makes significant play on the funding gap, it is obvious the strength of feeling of FoPP members and the local Community had to be taken into account and did have a significant input into the final resolution. A substantial amount of money has been abortively spent on this project which would have had considerable impact on the Park and its buildings had it been so used.

We now hope that the Council and College can work with FoPP and the community to bring about real and lasting improvements to our Heritage Site.

FoPP wishes Dudley College every success in their aspirations for a catering Academy in Dudley at their new chosen site, and while doubt has been cast on future funding for the Park we would seek full cooperation from the Lead Member for Economic Vitality at Dudley Council in supporting FoPP bids to English Heritage Parks Lottery Funding for project and restoration/preservation of Priory Park and its listed buildings

Arthur Weston -Chairman FoPP



Ross Cranston QC our local MP is quoted as saying "The proposal as it was formulated was not acceptable. It didn't take into account the need to develop Priory Park in accordance with community wishes. However, there is scope for the College to develop its THAT academy proposal in a different way. It would bring much needed jobs into the community and also enhance skills in Dudley."

Comings and Goings

Park Watch Gradually we are moving towards implementation of a Park Watch scheme. A joint operation between the Police, FoPP and Friends of Mary Stevens Park will see the carrying out of a project similar to that which already operates in neighbouring boroughs.

The expected commencement date is April 2004 with a high profile launch.

Future Skills The joint efforts of both FS Dudley and Green Care continue to show a remarkable turn around in the fabric of our Park. The opening up of the view as one approaches the Park from the College is particularly striking. By the removing of the overgrown shrubs along the roadway shows the Priory Ruins in all its glory. Well it will when the scaffolding is removed from what was the East Window. Serious deterioration of the stonework, first identified by FoPP and DMBCs works department some months ago, is now being rectified. This is a joint cooperation with English Heritage to ensure that the restoration is carried out sympathetically and in keeping with the original masonry. FoPP's role apart from pressurising all parties did include advising the contractor of unlimited supplies of materials available within the Wrens Nest area.

FoPP supports other worthwhile causes

Three members of FoPP took part in the Heart of Sandwell Cycle Ride (a very modest 12 miles) on Sunday 28th September - a sponsored ride on behalf of the British Heart Foundation. We raised about **£150** in total - not a huge sum, but we hope that it will be useful. So why at Sandwell? Well, as in some other respects, Sandwell seems to have a much more positive attitude to cycling than Dudley, and regularly hosts rides. Although I'm involved with Dudley's Cycle Forum, I'm not aware of any such cycling events around here. M.F.H.

Membership

Our Membership figures continue to increase and recently we passed an important milestone with the enrolment of our 500th. Member.



Welcome to Mrs Aileen Jones of Maple Road to whom we presented a box of chocolates and tickets to our Christmas Social. Mrs Jones commented how pleased she was with the work being done by FoPP, particularly the Halloween Night, which diverted lots of children from "Trick and Treat" which she felt was potentially dangerous for unaccompanied youngsters.

Letters



Priory Road

... I promised to let you have some early photos of Priory Park and these are the first ones I have come up with. All the people were art students (myself included) at the Art College which then, in the late 40's, was in what is now The Art Gallery in St. James's Road. These were taken around 1950. Best wishes Cliff Randle.

Thank you Cliff, I'm sure this will bring back memories. Anybody recognise the faces? More please. Ed.

News

New Committee Members

Welcome to Phil. and Sharon Blatchford and also Harry Fleetwood, who have recently been elected as Committee Members. All three are well known to the local community and will bring much needed expertise to our cause.

New Homes

An order has been place for a dozen bird boxes and plans obtained to build some bat boxes, all of which will be placed at strategic locations within the Park. It is intended that this project will go forward with the help of local schoolchildren and that they will take ownership of these items

Christmas Cards

These are now available; last year's best seller has been reprinted together with two excellent black and white studies of the Ruins covered with snow. These are quality photographs and are a wonderful way of reminding friends who perhaps are along way away of past times in Dudley. Last year some were well received by ex pats. In Australia.

Carol Concert

Wednesday 17th December 7-9pm.

A repeat of last years event but with a more traditional flavour. Again we will have music and choirs from the local schools and temporary illuminations to the Ruins.

Refreshments will be served.

Christmas Social

Friday 28th. November 7.30pm till late.

In view of the popularity of this event we moved the venue and doubled the number of tickets. Our second annual social will be at Priory House Social Club with a Buffet, Bar and Live Music. We are still anticipating a good attendance so get your tickets early.

SOLD OUT

Fright Night in The Park



Dare to be scared

As darkness fell on All Hallows Eve, crowds gathered in the Park, where adjacent to the Pavilion our Marquees had been erected and decorated with all the trimmings for a really good haunting. They were about to experience terrifying visions and gruesome sounds - the **Priory Park Ghost Walk**.

The event was organised as a joint project between FoPP, St Francis's Youth Club, Priory Community Association, Neighbours News and the Detached Youth Project. Mandy Winning (our Detached Youth Worker) was kept busy making masks and was ably assisted by members of Neighbours News, who also helped with the walks.

St. Francis's Youth workers escorted groups of around 30 in turn around the Park and en route told spine chilling tales of mass murders and foul deeds by the Grim Reaper who just happened to appear at the appropriate moment and set off echoes of very loud screams. Further on in the Arbour a Witches Coven had appeared overnight (*with three of the most hideous old crones I have ever seen Ed.*). Much chanting and casting of spells had the desired effect and everybody quickly moved on. Lighting props and sound effects made for a spine chilling event, but the biggest shock had to be the number of people attending the event, we estimate 250 - 300 were scared!! Following the Ghost Walk, 200 young people moved to the Duncan Edwards pub. for a Halloween Disco organised by the Community Association, with prizes for the best costume. FoPP wish to thank all who helped organise and participate in the event, it again highlights the growing Community spirit in the area, and what a valuable asset we have in Priory Park.

J. Alderman-Rowe



Opening up new vistas

Another excellent photograph by Mike Hessey of the clearing of the shrubbery along the Broadway first shown on our website on the 20th of October. With an almost daily update this is another example of how news of the goings on in Priory Park are transmitted world wide instantaneously. Mike comments how clearance of the undergrowth makes the area look much better and should help to discourage some of the anti social behaviour.

www.fopp.org.uk



FoPP meets the new College Principal



Fopp Committee members had an opportunity to meet the new Principal of Dudley College-Jeanne Harding on Friday 3 October. We welcomed Mrs. Harding to Dudley and the beautiful area surrounding the College and at the same time drawing her attention to FoPP's aims for our Park while clarifying our views on the proposed THAT Academy. It was made quite clear the belief of all the Friends was that there was no place for this development within an area which is historically for the enjoyment of everybody and particularly the people of Dudley. In turn Mrs Harding advised us that a complete review of the project was being undertaken including a re-examination of alternative sites. A promise was made that a report would be available by mid November. All in all an extremely useful meeting and it is hoped that a special relationship could be developed which would be of mutual benefit to both parties.

Events have somewhat overtaken us since this article was written. However we have decided to retain it as it still has relevance in as much that FoPP would wish to continue to foster a close relationship with the college which we feel sure would be to our mutual benefit. Editor.

Kids Corner

As mentioned elsewhere we have now a Junior Section with already more than 30 members. Most (but not all) attend Priory Primary School and close contact is being maintained by our Schools Officer - Julie Banner. A notice board has been set up in the school to enable information and views to be exchanged **It is hoped that some budding Junior Reporters will be able to supply us with items for publication.**

Happy Birthday

November James Banner, Rhiannan Lovell, Sarah Jane Pennells, Hannah Knowles, Kalita Patel.

December Bethan Lovell, Jack Pearson, Holley Lovell, Bradleigh Cooper, Erin Lovell, Bethany Middleton.

Armillaria Mellia*



It was with great sadness that three of our most mature beech trees were felled during October. Probably forming part of the original planting by the world famous Landscape Architects T. H. Mawson, which would make them more than 200 years' old, they will be sorely missed.

Identified as having various fungal diseases by the Borough Tree Preservation Officer-Mark Chester there was no alternative but to have these magnificent specimens removed.

We must however look to the future and FoPP have already contacted DMBC regarding their replacement. Surprise, surprise, we are advised that they have no ongoing tree reinstatement programme and no money is available for their replacement!

It seems that will have to stump (sic) up the money by



other means. Any generous benefactors please contact FoPP.

*Armillaria mellia (honey fungus).

Operates by invading the vascular system, the tree is killed before it decays. It responds by shutting down and starves itself. Classic symptoms include crown dieback and black bootlace rhizomes. After killing tree the heartwood decays. The disease can spread to nearby trees and it is necessary to remove and destroy roots. (*DMBC please take note. Ed.*)

Mark Chester