



## CALLING TIME ON OUR COMMONS?

*The 180 acres of Commons help to make Chislehurst special: a well-loved and much-used community facility. But a reduction in council funding poses a significant threat to the upkeep of the land unless new funds can be raised.*

A common cliché is that towns and villages in Victorian times were communities, but are now merely places to live. Further, travelling now through outer London the towns one sees are simply names on a map, there being no visible difference between one town and the next.

Those who live in Chislehurst, however, have the good fortune to live in a village which is plainly distinct from its neighbours. This is because Chislehurst has at its heart the 180 acres of Chislehurst and St Paul's Cray Commons. As a result of the Commons' preservation as open space and woodland, urban development in Chislehurst has been restricted, with much of the village remaining in a semi-rural setting.

Chislehurst may still be regarded as a community which could be recognised by its Victorian members. Many of its institutions remain, and new ones have developed, so that Chislehurst residents can still connect with each other. In this process the Chislehurst Society plays its part. But, again, the Commons feature prominently. They are the setting for the May Queen ceremony, for the Rotary's Summer Fair, for the Big Draw in September, and for the Chislehurst Chase.

Many readers will know that in Victorian times the Commons were thought of as part of the heritage of the residents of Chislehurst. But it transpired in the 1880s that in truth the Commons were neither owned nor controlled by the residents, and instead belonged to the Lord of the Manor. In the face of the rapid degradation of the Commons through tipping, excavation and encroachment, an energetic group of Chislehurst residents secured, with considerable foresight, the passing of a private Act of Parliament, in 1888, aimed at preserving the Commons for future generations.

This Act placed the management of the Commons into the hands of an elected body of volunteers, the Trustees, and gave the Trustees various powers to regulate and protect the Commons. There were however two significant things the Act failed to do.

First, the Act left the ownership of the Commons with the Lord of the Manor. That remains the position to this day. The Commons are not owned by Bromley LB, the Chislehurst Society or the Churches. In effect they are private property which the public have a permission to resort to

Second, the Act failed to make provision for a secure source of revenue: while providing that the Trustees would be elected by the Vestry (at the time the parish meeting and, in effect, the local electors) and at the same

**The Trustees  
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an appeal to  
Chislehurst  
Residents**



*Rush Pond on Chislehurst Common, now full of water, courtesy of a bore-hole sunk by the Trustees of the Commons, financed by the Chislehurst Society. The Trustees need access to funding to continue important work like this on the Commons.*

time contemplating that their income would be a precept on the local rate, nevertheless there was no express provision to ensure that result.

The upshot was that for over a hundred years the local authority, ultimately Bromley LB, provided voluntarily the whole of the necessary revenue. Ten years or so ago this changed, when we had the last round of local government expenditure cutting. Since then the Trustees have had about half their income in the form of a voluntary grant from Bromley, with the bulk of the remainder coming from public spirited members of the community in the form of donations.

With the dramatic pruning of public expenditure at present going on, the Trustees are set to lose about a quarter of Bromley's contribution: with a budgeted expenditure of £100,000 per annum, most of which comprises direct costs of looking after the Commons, the Trustees are facing a shortfall of some £15,000: that there will be at least that shortfall is already certain, the remaining question being only whether it will be much greater. Once the position with Bromley has become definite, the Trustees plan to make an appeal to Chislehurst residents aimed at covering this shortfall.

It will be of concern to readers that should the Trustees be unable to plug the gap, the outlook for the Commons is grim: there is a real danger the Commons will be lost to us in anything like their present form. If the Trustees are unable to continue, and in the face of insolvency they would be well advised to step away, it will then be a question of whether the Commons are left with their owner, the Lord of the Manor, to exploit, or whether Bromley has the statutory powers and is willing to commit the resources to intervene.

## A WARM WELCOME AT ACTIVE AGE CENTRE



At Chislehurst Active Age Centre, Age Concern Bromley provides a warm and welcoming environment where people can enjoy a variety of affordable social, learning and healthy lifestyle activities in the heart of Chislehurst. Open between 9.30 a.m. and 2 p.m. from Monday to Friday, it is a great place to meet friends and enjoy a freshly cooked lunch or simply a snack and a hot drink in the WiFi cafe!

Age Concern Bromley aims to promote and celebrate the social benefits of digital inclusion for older people. The beginners and improvers IT courses ensure that people are offered opportunities to learn new skills that can help them stay in touch with friends and family, and to maintain their independence.

For people who want to improve their fitness there are gentle chair-based exercises. For the more artistic, there is a weekly Art Class run in partnership with Bromley Adult Education.

A nail-cutting clinic, Clip It, is held at the Active Age Centre on Tuesdays, while on Tuesday afternoons the Garden Room Dementia Café is aimed at people with dementia and their carers. Age Concern Bromley is committed to enabling all older people to maximise their choices, retain their independence and maintain their quality of life through the provision of services, activities and support, including:

- Community Volunteers' Time Bank
- Computer classes
- Employment & Opportunities 50 +
- First Check Point – home-maintenance service
- Fit for Life programme
- Floating Support – housing-related support
- Hospital aftercare
- Information and advice
- St Edward's Day Centre
- Shopping service
- Support planning and brokerage
- Nail-cutting service

*To find out more about all Age Concern's services including those at the Active Age Centre, or to discuss volunteering with Bromley Age Concern, please ring 020 8315 1850, or e-mail [info@acbromley.org.uk](mailto:info@acbromley.org.uk). Bromley Age Concern looks forward to hearing from you!*

## HIGH STREET TRADERS' FORUM

This is an encouraging and fairly new initiative, started by a High Street business owner, as a 'trader to trader' forum: an open discussion group for local businesses. It has been far too long since local business owners have been actively engaged in trying to influence the way the High Street appears and operates, and it is refreshing to have an active commerce group in Chislehurst again, particularly one that is a fairly spontaneous enterprise resulting from direct business-to-business interaction.

Run under the aegis of the Chislehurst Town Centre Management Group (CTCMG), the forum is an opportunity for local business owners/operators to meet together and, with representatives of the Council, the Police, CTCMG and the Chislehurst Society, discuss concerns about, and aspirations for, the High Street.

These are pretty free-ranging meetings and the topics raised, which are many and varied, are candidly discussed. The meetings are not minuted in the formal sense, but Lorraine McQuillan, LB Bromley Town Centre Manager, produces a set of meeting notes.

Major issues to come from recent meetings include:

- *the spate of High Street robberies, some with violence or armed, during December and January*
- *the anti-social behaviour of school pupils at bus stops and the Burlington Parade car park*
- *the general decline of the High Street environment and ambience and the wish for future improvements. (This is a discussion topic that will continue with the Chislehurst Society executive committee.)*

The Chislehurst Society and CTCMG will continue to work together and actively support this group wherever we can.

## HIGH STREET FARMERS' MARKET

There are now advanced plans for a regular farmers' market in Chislehurst on the currently vacant development site to the rear of 12 to 16 High Street (from Cafe Nero to Wesson's estate agents). **The first of these monthly markets will be on 16th/17th April, and then on the third Sunday of each month.**

With access from both Queens Passage and direct from the High Street, and free local off-street parking on Sundays, this could be an ideal venue for such markets. If the monthly farmers' market is successful it is hoped to bring more events to the same site.

This initiative is being actively supported by Chislehurst Town Centre Management Group and London Borough of Bromley.

## FRIENDS OF THE RECREATION GROUND

The New Year has started with lots of activity in Chislehurst Recreation Grounds and there is a lot more to come!

Following a competitive tender and design process, and with the financial support of the Chislehurst Society, the Friends Committee agreed the plans for the new playground in January and is delighted that



*Children from Red Hill School who were involved in the bulb-planting at the Rec last November*

work has now commenced. It is anticipated that the playground will be ready by the end of April, when building of the new scout HQ in the park is due to commence.

Other features are being planned, including a tree seat around the oak tree and a fitness trail, for both of which the Friends are seeking grant funding. The Friends would like to thank Bromley Council for the lovely new circular path behind the ditch and shall be organising a planting session here shortly. The developers of the Ravensbourne site have kindly agreed to donate the benches and bins left behind by the college, so the Friends hope to install those shortly.

There is a busy schedule of events, which can be found on the Friends' website (see below), including a mobile farm, nature events, tree identification and bulb planting.

The Friends are looking for people who can spare time to help organise events, who have expertise, or who just care about our local community and want to make a difference. If you would like to join the Friends, go on their emailing list, or just have your say, they will welcome you with open arms!!

*The Friends' website is [www.focrg.org.uk](http://www.focrg.org.uk), or contact [Alison.Stammers@btinternet.com](mailto:Alison.Stammers@btinternet.com)*

## EVENTS AT SCADBURY PARK

Friends of Scadbury Park meet on the third Saturday of every month at 10.00 a.m. at the TrEE Centre to carry out conservation tasks throughout the Park and welcome any volunteers of all ages and ability, we are advised by Keith Burns.

Guided walks and talks include *Wednesday 18 May* – a two-mile stroll through the meadows looking for Wildlife. Meet 10.00 a.m. *Wednesday 15 June* – stroll through the long grass to see what the Burnett Moths are doing. Meet 10.00 a.m. Two miles, *Wednesday 20 July* – is it a Harlequin or a ladybird? Join us for a stroll through Scadbury meadows and woodland. Two miles.

## EVENTS AT SCADBURY PARK (CONT.)

Workdays include *Saturday 19 March* – Hedge maintenance (Old Perry Street Car Park), *Saturday 16 April* – Family Day with Friends of Scadbury Park, doing light conservation work either clearing unwanted growth around young oaks in Area 5, ‘The Larches’, or Bramble Bashing in ‘Fallen Oak’ Meadow. Phone 01689 826535 for details. Meet at the TrEE Centre 10.00 a.m. *Saturday 21 May* – Ancient woodland ground-flora survey in Littlewood, Bank Shaw, Park Wood, Alder Valley and Section I of the Butterfly Transect, *Saturday 18 June* – Woodland furniture repair (fence, bench, gate, hand rail repairs), *Saturday 16 July* – Hedgerow survey.

## LOCALISM, TOWN PLANNING AND CHISLEHURST – BOB NEILL WRITES

In light of the Localism, Town Planning and Chislehurst article, which featured in the Winter Edition of the Chislehurst Report, I thought it would be apposite to outline what the government is seeking to achieve through the planning reforms it is introducing. I would encourage all those with an interest in such matters to explore the Communities and Local Government website....

As readers will know, the present planning regime involves processes that are excessively centralised, complex and confrontational and the system suffers from a democratic deficit.....

Residents in Chislehurst have told me on countless occasions that they feel powerless to influence local decisions, that they experience consultation fatigue and that they are alienated by the confusing array of planning documents and guidance. The changes that we are introducing will go a long way to tackling such grievances....

We feel that development should not merely be accepted by the local community, but should actually be led by it. Our proposals to introduce locally grounded plans, an increased duty to consult before an application is submitted and powerful incentives to reward sustainable growth will mean that communities, finally, have a meaningful voice in the whole process.....

It is crucial to note that the provisions within the Localism Bill will not stifle development. They will, in actual fact, provide the certainty and confidence that developers and businesses need to take forward their plans for growth.....

Although these changes won't happen overnight, I am absolutely confident that the reforms we are taking forward via this landmark piece of legislation will make a huge – and tangible – difference to the residents of Bromley and Chislehurst.

I welcome input from anyone with an interest and expertise in these matters, so please feel free to get in touch. As ever, constituents in Bromley and Chislehurst are welcome to email me directly at: [neillb@parliament.uk](mailto:neillb@parliament.uk)

*This is an abbreviated note from our MP. The full note and links are on our website.*

## ROAD STEWARDS

Since the last issue of Chislehurst Report, the following Road Stewards have reluctantly decided to retire: Mr Ian Mendel (Ravenshill); Mrs Madeline Gardner (Croft Close); Mrs Julia Dean (Elmstead Glade); Mr & Mrs Michael Caldwell (The Glebe, Bishops Walk and Manor Park Road); Mr Richard Piddock (High Street); and Mr R. Slaughter (Ingleby Way). The executive committee extends the Society's sincere thanks for all the help and support that these members have given to the Society and to the members they have served. We wish them all well for the future.

At the same time, we welcome four new volunteers who are joining our Road Stewards: Mrs Kay Coombs (Ravenshill); Ms Lesley Reed (The Glebe and Bishops Walk); Mr Derek Nash (High Street) and Mrs Pauline Clift (Hillview Road). We also wish to thank existing Road Steward Ms Margaret Pearce, who has kindly agreed to add Nursery Gardens to her Woodhayes round.

There are several roads with Society members with vacancies for Road Stewards: Elmstead Lane odd numbers from 41 to Walden End; Manor Park Road; Elmstead Glade; Croft Close; Marlings Close; and Ingleby Way.

If you would like to assist for all or part of any one or more of these roads, or would just like to know what is involved, please contact Keith Heselden, membership secretary, on 020 8467 5503.

## PUBLICATIONS – AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

	Price
Bookmark	£1.50
Chislehurst DVD	9.50
Discover Chislehurst	12.00
Francis Murray of Chislehurst*	10.00
French Imperial Family	3.50
Heritage Map	4.00
Historical Walks	3.50
In Trust for Chislehurst	3.00
Kemnal Road (new edition)*	8.50
Pure Aerated Waters	3.00
Scadbury Manor	1.50
A Walk from Sidcup to Chislehurst, along the old road	4.00
For King and Country – The Men of Chislehurst who Fell in the Great War*	9.50

\* denotes publications produced independently but promoted by the Society, and from sales of which a donation is made to the Society.

You can contact the Chislehurst Society by phone: 020 8467 0900 or email: [membership@chislehurst-society.org.uk](mailto:membership@chislehurst-society.org.uk)

By post: PO Box 82, Chislehurst, Kent. BR7 5TT