

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

RECREATION, LEISURE & OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE**REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN**

I am delighted to be able to present my first report as Chairman of the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee, to the Annual Assembly.

Firstly, if our technology works, we are trying something different this year and you will see to the side a slideshow of your recreation facilities and projects we have been working on.

I hope you will join with me in congratulating my fellow Councillors and all of our staff on the work they have done for residents in the town.

Where do I start? Again, this year we have moved steadily forward on a number of fronts to achieve good management of existing facilities and enhancements to those that are under our control.

You will probably have seen in the local press that we have brought back some of the allotments in Hightown Road into use again. As part of that, we have also introduced mini-allotments. They are not quite as small as some people think and measure about 6 metres by 4 metres. They were designed for those people who don't have a great deal of time or any garden, but still want to produce their own vegetables. Also, there are older people who simply cannot manage a large allotment and, indeed, have no need for the amount of food you could grow on an ordinary allotment. I am pleased to say they have been an outstanding success and the experiment has been copied elsewhere and received national publicity.

Our allotments continue to be well maintained by allotment holders, but where any do not respond to encouragement to improve the level of good husbandry, tenancies have been terminated to allow those on our waiting list and desperate for an allotment to get the opportunity to grow their own. A new pest control service to keep rat infestation down at Long Lane has also been introduced.

Last year I reported that we were awaiting the 'green light' to start on the construction of the new road to allow us to extend the cemetery. The road has now been constructed, and the bare soil re-seeded. That extension will take a while to settle down, but the Council's forward thinking will mean that we are unlikely to run out of burial plots for some long time.

Our ground staff continue to maintain the cemetery, and indeed the closed church yard in the town centre, to a remarkably high standard. I congratulate them on their achievements. Unfortunately, due to vandalism, we have had a number of occasions when we have had to close the toilets at the cemetery. They are now closed overnight and at weekends. This is simply because when they are left unlocked, they are vandalised and it can easily take two of our ground staff all Monday morning to clear up the mess and carry out any repairs that are necessary. I am very sorry, but it is a fact of life that some people do not treat other people's property, even at cemeteries, in an appropriate manner.

The ten acre field at Long Lane continues to be well used and provides some of the best playing surfaces for football for many miles. Regrettably, we have still not been able to buy additional land, as the farmer is unwilling to sell, even though we have offered substantially more than agricultural value for that land.

It has been a year of ups and downs at Carvers. The drop-in continues to be very successful and the full internal refurbishment at the Cricket Pavilion has been completed. In addition, as a result of the grant from County Councillor Steve Rippon-Swaine, we have also been able to install a new access from the main gate at Carvers through as far as the skate park. This also gives much better access for the disabled.

Our proposals for a new slide, because the current one is coming to the end of its useful life, and additional equipment in the skate park, are being frustrated as a result of suppliers having too much work! But rest assured, both are very much on line and we are hoping that the skate park equipment will be installed in the next few weeks and the new slide not long thereafter.

I have had mixed comments about the Bickerley and the surrounding area.

On the one hand, I received compliments about the standard of maintenance of the main part of the Bickerley. Over the past five years, we have steadily enhanced the grass cutting and removed much of the undergrowth that marred its usage and appearance. On the other hand, despite the fact that the vast majority of people told us when we consulted on the Town Plan that they wanted better access to the river and the countryside to the south of the Millstream, we are getting cries of vandalism when we actually implement schemes. The current scheme for the Danny Cracknell Pocket Park will achieve everything that the vast majority of the public told us they wanted to see achieved in that part of the town. We are creating a quiet, peaceful area for public and wildlife. We are providing good views across the water meadows and, for the first time, an access for the disabled right down to the Millstream. Yes, in a construction period it does not look like the final product. But please give it time. If, when the work is done, and the new growth from the existing shrubs and new planting doesn't appear, we will return and carry out more planting. For the record, all of the works in that area have been submitted to and agreed by Natural England, who are in fact contributing £10,000 towards the overall costs.

Thanks to County Councillor Steve Rippon-Swaine who has allocated some additional funds, we are also improving the appearance of the bridge across the Millstream to the Avon Valley Path. The current scaffold pole appearance of the bridge will be replaced with a much softer wooden appearance, but we are not touching the footpath surface of the bridge whatsoever.

Whilst on the Bickerley, you may have seen reference to the 'Raymond Brown Nature Reserve.' Our original discussions with Natural England indicated that we could have very good access to that area of land for most of the year. Subsequent communications have suggested that the period that the public can use that land will be much reduced. We are continuing our negotiations with Natural England, but we sincerely hope that we will be able to open up the area later this year.

In both the Danny Cracknell Pocket Park and the Raymond Brown Nature Reserve, there will be Interpretation Boards which will explain what we can all see in and around those parts and how we can help to protect and enhance the environment generally.

And, finally, can I again thank my fellow Councillors and all of the staff for their wonderful support throughout my term of office and for the way in which they have gone about the Council's business to manage and deliver recreational facilities for all of the people in Ringwood.