



CHISWICK HOUSE FRIENDS

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2006

Patron: the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire

Charity No. 289907

This was Chiswick House in the 20's!



This historic aerial photo of Chiswick House, dating from about 1928, and kindly supplied by English Heritage, shows not only the two side elevations to the House that are evident from later photographs, but also a complete building development on what is now the lawn in front of the café. Do any of our readers know anything about these buildings?

Lottery Project News

March has been a very busy month, as well as a rather cold one. There has been considerable activity in and around Chiswick House and Gardens as well as a great deal of debate about the regeneration programme.

Following January's news of the Heritage Lottery Fund's approval in principle for £7.9 million for the first phase of the restoration of the grounds, and a stormy public meeting in mid-January, the Chiswick House and Gardens Trust embarked on a series of consultation meetings with local residents and users of the House and Grounds.

The first meeting on February 27th addressed issues of roads/tracks and traffic within the regeneration plans. It looks as though the Trust has found ways around the need to put a new entrance gate in Park Road. There was also much mention of the 'peace and tranquillity' principle, which we welcomed, as we did the Trust's determination to keep unnecessary traffic out of the grounds. The level of events proposed for reaching the business plan goals did not look excessive to anyone, but see below under Management.

At the 27th March meeting, there was a further presentation of the Business Plan, with an active discussion and range of challenging points put to the panel. The proposal for integrated management of the House and Gardens was the one that found most favour with those present.

The Friends Working Party

In January, following our November consultation with you all, we set up a small group to look at the Lottery issues in more detail, inviting members of the Trust to come and talk to us about the reasons behind the various aspects of the bid. We now feel we understand these much better, and can take a more detailed position than before.

Here is a brief report of our findings. We divided the bid into nine main topics:

1. Overall context of the bid

We asked ourselves if the tone and set-up of the project is properly balanced between conservation, restoration and the need to raise money? Should we be concerned about the House – as the Georgian Group is – or only about Phase I?

Our own members have supported our view that there should be more emphasis in the project on retaining the essential peace and tranquillity of the site. There is no explicit reference on the Trust's information boards, but there is (after much pressure from us) a somewhat cursory reference in the Q&A section of their website:

Q "Will peace and tranquillity be retained in the park?"

A "We are fully committed to maintaining the principles of peace and tranquillity at Chiswick."

We have noticed recently that the 'peace and tranquillity' phrase is now used a good deal more by members of the Trust in what they say and write. It looks as though our banging on has borne fruit! We shall continue to push this one, and also to encourage clarification of what it means, though this appears to be happening anyway at the consultation meetings. For instance, people are now looking at issues such as traffic, commercial events, weddings and parties, concerts and so on from the point of view of 'how much loss of the peaceful atmosphere is tolerable for this event...?' – this is the angle we want.

Regarding developments of the House (mainly next phase), we are very definitely 'on the case' and, with our Advisory Group, will press for appropriateness and sensitivity.

2. Restoration

(are the right things being restored and in the right way?)

a. Conservatory – do we support total rebuild or is there some lesser practicable repair? We have been convinced that total rebuild is the only realistic option. Obviously, great care around the camellias is paramount.

b. N Wilderness – do we want full proposed restoration, i.e. restored and gravelled paths, re-aligned left hand allée, replanting etc or do we want it to be left wild and largely as it is? **Our position is to agree present proposal, eg path tidy, re-aligned allées, tree and plant work, with the exceptions that:**

- the northern perimeter path will become vehicle-way (acceptable for small site vehicle only), but should be gravelled not tarmacked
- path restoration should not be done with a view to always keeping people to paths; the woodland area should allow free-ranging everywhere

c. Trees, paths, terrace, rosary etc – we understand that having removed unsafe, diseased and scrub trees, the additional major trees to be removed will be equalled by additional trees to be planted. **Our position is to agree this provisionally.** One of our trustees is keeping a particular eye on detailed proposals.

3. Management (security, presence, flow of funds between HLF, Trust and contractors). Nothing obviously contentious here, so **we support the plan as it is.**

With regard to commercial events, many people (including you our members) feel uneasy about the frequency and degree of intrusion of such events, but it is difficult at the moment to quantify this or put forward controls.

We feel the best option is to get ourselves on to the management review group meetings on a regular basis, and exert influence in this way. We have opened a discussion with the Trust about CHF having regular review meetings with them – say every 3 months – with the same format as our present CIP and EH meetings. This could be an appropriate forum for dealing with most of our ongoing concerns.

4. Access, vehicle-ways and traffic

This topic was the other one aired at the February 27th consultation meeting, in considerable detail.

- a. Access** – it now seems unlikely that the Park Road new gate will go ahead. Two other options for emergency vehicle access were offered at the meeting – access as at present (no ha-ha extension), and making a new entrance through the yard and along the path to the Deer House. Opinion in the room seemed to be divided – we strongly support the first option.
- b. Traffic** – in general the plan is to keep all but disabled visitor cars out, which we applaud. Park service vehicles would have access all over the site, but would be small (electric?) and controlled. Deliveries mostly to the yard, but hints that café deliveries would need to be direct. Emergency and back-lawn events vehicles as in a. above. Full complement of speed dips needed.
- c. Vehicle-ways** – the only contentious new vehicle-way is the so-called 'one way system' in front of the café, routing House and marquee service/delivery vehicles past the café and out along Dukes Avenue. We have spoken out strongly against this, as the vehicles would be in full view and close to the new playground.

In general, our position is to approve of the Trust's plans for traffic, with the exception of the 'one way system'.

5. Car-parking

The strong feelings around the proposed option of using the northern half of the walled gardens seem to have dissipated since the Trust re-presented at the Feb 27th meeting the appearance as being of 'a grassy orchard'. Even if 100% grass cover proved impractical, some kind of grass-woven slab solution would probably work. Given the need for more parking, this seems a good compromise.

Our position is to support the Trust's proposal for 'a grassy orchard'.

6. Use of walled garden

The Trust's current proposal is for about three-quarters of the southern half of the walled gardens to be under cultivation, presumably by the Kitchen Garden Group. This is an improvement on previous plans showing only half under cultivation. ***Our position is to press the Trust to reach a compromise acceptable to the KGG.***

7. New Café

This is perhaps the most difficult area of the restoration, with issues around new / rebuilt, informality, dogs, children, location and so on. Our mandate from you, our members, is to press for the new café ***'to continue to serve local customers in the same informal and inexpensive way that the present one does'***.

What we have done is to work with The Trust in producing a questionnaire specifically on this topic. Copies will be distributed to the public in general; however, we have arranged for one to be enclosed with this newsletter so that we can separate out the views of CH Friends from all the other views. We are also seeking your opinion on a question not included by the Trust – should the new café be a replacement for the old one, or should the old one be kept for informal local community use and a new one be provided for more formal and smarter use? We can see the pros and cons, but would like your views specifically.

So please fill in the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us by the 10th April. Also write on the back any comments you have on the positions outlined here in 1 - 9.

8. Dogs

The Trust plans to add new dog restrictions, such as on-lead rules around the House. Of the problems stated, we believe that a) dog-mess and sticks on lawns are hardly likely to be eased by the use of leads, and b) harassment by dogs of young families are rare events that could be addressed through better awareness by owners.

This is a really a separate question from the Lottery bid and is to do with the management of the site. ***Our position has always been to oppose further restrictions. Please tell us if you support this view.***

9. Other

- a. **Sports facilities** – we should encourage appropriate sporting activities, e.g. cricket, football and track events on the hockey pitch. On this subject, it is regrettable that the proposed loss of the southern end of the hockey field (to make way for artist's studios etc in the yard) has already led to the Saturday morning children's football club relocating to Dukes Meadows, losing not only the revenue from the hire but from café use by the 100 or so people involved each Saturday
- b. **Toilets** – many members have mentioned this, but renovation is already part of the bid
- c. **Cycle ways** – it is proposed to allow cycling on tarmacked and gravelled roads & (some?) larger paths – we tend to agree as some use is already de facto.

Recent Events

Restoration projects in hand

As reported in the last newsletter, the Wolfson Foundation has generously funded various projects in the grounds:

The Obelisk: conservation of the Obelisk and Gateway, resurfacing and improved drainage to the Obelisk circle and surrounding paths, replanting of the Yew hedge and adjacent soft landscaping continues in the area by the Burlington Lane gate. This is expected to be completed in April/May. **The Sphinxes:** these will be restored to the main gates and are currently being cast by sculptor Trevor Proudfoot in Cliveden. **The Camellia Shrubbery** to the south of the formal gardens has been cleared and new planting has begun. **The Education Building** in the Stable Yard: building work is in process.

The Goose Foot Volunteers have made a huge contribution to the House, Grounds, Conservatory, Camellias, Kitchen Garden, Cricket and Park Watch over the years. Any Friends who would like to offer help and become more involved in activities in the Park should make contact as follows:

The House – as a guide call Ricky Pound on 020 8995 0508 or at ricky.pound@english-heritage.org

The Grounds – as a guide or as a Goosefoot volunteer email Adrian.Cook@cip.org.uk

The Kitchen Garden – contact Karen Liebreich at info@kitchengarden.org.uk

Cricket – Derek Hill at www.chiswickandlatymer.org

Park Watch – a re-launch is now planned, with the first meeting in May, further details to be published

Friends – volunteers on an irregular basis to assist with events, admin etc – secretary@chfriends.org.uk

Toddlers' playground: this Friends project, inspired and led by Amy Barclay, to raise money for a Toddlers' playground, has taken a big step forward. The plan is to build a small play area for toddlers near the café, replicating features of Chiswick House and Grounds on a mini scale. Local parents organised a fundraising Funday in May 2005 and since then trusts and companies have been contacted for additional support. This February the Onyx Environment Trust generously awarded the project £15,000 of further funding. Discussions are now taking place with LBH council about starting the build.

The Kitchen Garden celebrated its first birthday on 5th March in great style. Over 1,000 people turned out to 'Plant a pea', 'Make a mobile', 'Create a cow', eat cake (**see cake stall below**) and admire the new herb garden. During the past year over 700 children have been involved in developing this garden.



The Camellia Society hosted visitors to the Camellia House where historic early 19th century camellias were in flower. The Camellias growing here form one of the earliest collections in Britain and probably the oldest surviving large collection anywhere in the Western World. Jane Callender and Herbert Short took visitors around the conservatory and explained the history of the conservatory – 'a magnificent hot-house, with a conservatory for flowers, the middle under a cupola. Altogether it is 300ft long' (from Miss Berry's Journal – 1813) and 'the House is camellias from end to end, and the effect of their thousands of red and white flowers, self, and striped and mottled, is one that cannot be forgotten' (Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener, 1874)

Looking ahead

Chiswick House The House will re-open on 1st April with eight new paintings being integrated into the permanent collection in the Red Velvet Room. These include a Rubens oil sketch of the Assumption of the Virgin, the first time it has been on show to the public.

During Sundays in May there will be fascinating tours of the house to celebrate the arrival of further paintings, including the newly discovered Rubens as well as the

mystical symbolism of the house. Normal admission applies – Adult £4, Child £2, Concessions £3, Family £10.

Cricket The Chiswick and Latymer Cricket club runs 5 senior Saturday sides and 3 senior Sunday sides. It runs a Colt section in Chiswick House Gardens on the cricket field for children over 8 years old – Under 13s and Under 11s. [Under 15s are classed as Adults]. Outdoor training practice commences on Saturday morning 22 April at 10 – 12 noon and extends weekly until the end of July. Children over the age of 8 years are welcomed. There is a charge of £20 for the under 9s and £40 for over 9s to cover costs. Coaches with cricket experience and helpers will be warmly welcomed to help with coaching and training.

Forward Calendar

- 1 April House re-opens
- 17 April Easter Eggs trail for children with 'yummy Easter prize'; 10am-5pm
- 22 April Cricket begins
- 24 April Talk at the Chiswick Memorial Club, Bourne Place on recent historical research on CH&G by Adrian Cook, Development Manager
- 7, 14, 21, 28 May Chiswick House tours 2pm-5pm
- 7 May Spring Garden 1-5pm. Tulips, alliums, narcissi and other spring bulbs planted in the Kitchen Garden last year should be flowering
- 22 May Noon – 2pm mothers/children consultation
3 – 4 pm walk round for evening consultation
7 pm consultation – dogs, trees, management
- 13 June Chiswick House Friends AGM in the House: Evening event – timings to be confirmed
- 18 June 1 – 5 pm Garden Art Day: various art activities related to the Kitchen Garden
- 26 June Testing of access for disabled in House
- 28 June 7.30 pm Opera – Mozart's *Così fan tutte* on the north (rear) lawns. This year there will be seating, and picnicking will take place prior to the event & in the extended interval. We have sent you flyers for ticket applications. No planes flying over, we are promised!
- 6 July Talk 7pm at the House for Friends: 'Recent Historical Research at CH', by Adrian Cook
- 16 July 1 – 5 pm National Garden Scheme in Kitchen Garden. Admission £1, proceeds to charity
- 17 July Presentation of revised audience devt plan
- 28 July 9.30 pm Bat Walk. Meet at car park, Hogarth Lane. Charge £2 for adults, £1 for children.
- 6 Sept Friends' Summer Party in the House. Evening event, time tba.

Published by the Chiswick House Friends

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