

## **ELSEA PARK COMMUNITY TRUST ANNUAL REPORT 2011 / 2012**

### **Overview**

The year 2011-2012 marked a watershed in the extent of the Trust's property ownership. At the end of the year we took transfer of the Centre @ Elsea Park and the green areas, including the linear park and the play park, from Kier Homes. Undoubtedly this has had an impact on the Trust's responsibilities and operations. Tremendous progress has been made in successfully planning for the opening of the Centre but the workload involved means that some other issues have not been progressed as quickly as anticipated when we held last year's AGM. In this short report we outline what we have achieved and where we still have work to do.

### **The Centre**

We took over the Centre on 23 March 2012 and opened for hire at the start of June 2012. In preparation months of planning, covering matters such as furnishing, licensing, hire charges, terms and conditions, cleaning and caretaking arrangements and so on, were essential to ensure that we opened for business properly prepared.

The planning activity paid for itself with the success of the Opening Weekend when over 600 residents came to the two days of entertainment and fun.

The Centre now has a wide range of activities for all living on the Park on every weekday and there is increasing demand for hire for private social events. Early on the Board decided that all Elsea Park residents would benefit from a 25% discount on the hire charges. Details of weekly activities are available from the Centre or from our website.

### **Resident Involvement**

The success of the opening weekend is directly attributable to the effort and enthusiasm of volunteers who are residents of Elsea Park who gave their time willingly and freely in the meticulous planning for the takeover, equipping, and opening of the Centre and in helping in so many ways on the weekend.

Residents continue to be involved through an Events Group which has the role of promoting events and activities, such as Quiz nights and a party on New Year's Eve, which give real meaning to the word "community" at the Centre.

The Events Group has initiated a drop-in session on Wednesdays which is free-of-charge to all residents.

### **Communication**

The Elsea Park website [www.elseapark.co.uk](http://www.elseapark.co.uk) is updated from time to time, and gives general information about The Trust and The Centre, including a schedule of regular activities and details of social events being organised by the Residents' Events Group.

Minutes of Annual General Meetings and Extraordinary General Meetings have been available for download from the website for several years, and the minutes of board meetings held since January 2010 have recently been uploaded. Monthly budget and expenditure reports will also be published on the site, and the August report is now available for download. Minutes of board meetings and the monthly finance reports presented at them will, in future, be uploaded approximately six weeks after each meeting is held.

You can also find us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/Elsea-Park-Community-Trust](http://www.facebook.com/Elsea-Park-Community-Trust)) and Twitter @elseaparktrust. The expectation for a volunteer to set up a web forum did not come to fruition and it was decided to use a Facebook page as a message board.

In the past year we have published and delivered newsletters at more frequent intervals. Now the Centre is open we are reviewing the newsletter format but intend to keep to frequent publication

## **Finance**

The budget for 2012/2013 is enclosed separately and the audited accounts will be available under separate cover. The Trust's financial position is healthy. At 31 March 2012 there are reserves of £247,363 (draft accounts) but this figure has reduced with the equipping of The Centre. The Board believes that at the moment it is necessary to retain high reserves to fund such things as the full equipping of the Centre (dependent on need), future maintenance provisions, both for the Centre and estate management, and to underwrite the early years of operation of The Centre. It will always be necessary to maintain a healthy reserve to cover unforeseen expenses.

The Board decided to encourage the use of direct debit payment by making it free of charge. This has been a popular decision with the number of residents paying the annual charge by direct debit increasing by around a third to over 300 direct debits from 1 May 2012 this year.

We have improved on arrears recovery over the year. At 31 March 2012 arrears were £31,750, a reduction of over £17,000 compared to the previous year end. Arrears are pursued through a number of reminder letters with County Court action being used the ultimate sanction. Owners cannot sell their property until any arrears are cleared.

## **Transfer of Land**

Over the past year, The Trust has accepted the legal transfer of the majority of the green space within the areas of The Park that have already been developed, including Linear Park and all play areas that were owned and controlled by Kier Homes. Little progress has been made on the transfer of land from other developers on The Park.

The Linear Park and associated play area was taken over in the Spring, early in the growing season. The preparation and the weather conditions combined to effect the growth and appearance. The Trust and Kier have agreed that remedial works take place and the maintenance period be extended over both areas until they are fit for purpose. Similarly any dead trees on the Pollards will be replaced.

The Trust has declined to take ownership of the Fountain Ponds until it is provided with specialist advice about their design and operation.

## **Business Plan**

This is an area where we have not made progress in the way we anticipated at last year's AGM as other priorities have had first call on our time. Our intention is to hold a residents' workshop in the near future so that the plan can be developed and published by 31 March 2013. Details of this process will be advised at the AGM.

## **Green Issues**

At last year's AGM we announced that we were obtaining competitive quotes for the installation of solar panels (PV) on the roof of the Centre to produce income for the Trust under the Government feed-in-tariff together with savings on the Centre's electricity bills. We selected an installer, local company Lark Energy but the Government unexpectedly announced a reduction in the tariff level. In view of the uncertainty it was decided not to proceed with the installation as it was no longer felt cost effective.

In the light of the Government reduced payments the market changed nationally. In the Spring Lark Energy made the Trust an extremely good offer on installation at around a third of the cost in the Autumn, at around £11,000 rather than £30,000. The tariff income is less but from its installation at the end of May 2012 the panels have generated over £500 in income plus savings on electricity used.

The Green Transport Fund has been subject to consultation and a new plan is to be worked up.

## **Kier Homes**

The Trust continues to liaise closely with Kier Homes. As well as regular meetings we forward a weekly log of issues raised by residents. Kier have introduced residents surgeries since we moved to the Centre and these are to continue.

Angela Bailey

Chairman – Elsea Park Community Trust