

Mere Advisory Board meeting - 18th March 2021

- **The Mere at Ellesmere has remained open throughout the lockdown.** Sites have experienced unprecedented pressure with almost double the number of visitors for The Mere. The behaviour of many visitors has been challenging for staff, with numerous reports of people not adhering to Covid guidance. The safety of staff has also been of concern considering they are required to clean public toilets, empty bins and maintain the play area. Site Attendant, Tim Hunter, has borne the brunt of much of this and, as with Site Rangers Mike Simms and Lee Fraser, has remained dedicated to keeping the site operational for locals.
- **Volunteering** at The Mere has reflected the lockdown status in England. Guidance is now stating that volunteering outdoors is acceptable. The most vulnerable are being discouraged from volunteering until they've had the vaccine. The Boathouse Restaurant and Kiosk have also been responsive to government guidelines and have operated when they could within a tight framework.
- The pandemic has revealed how important green space is to our physical and mental well-being; the demand has proven this. We need to be investing more in **site infrastructure and site management** to ensure visitors and residents living close to these sites are not adversely affected. Basically, too many people are trying to access too little land. Footpaths are being repaired as and when pot-holes become a hazard.
- **Facilities - Swan Hill Depot/Yard** – We continue to consider uses for the Swan Hill depot area that are in-keeping with The Mere. Working with experienced officers within the Property Services Group, we have given consideration to a work / live development with housing above workshops. In addition, we have been in discussion with a Canoe Hire Company with regards to using the current buildings to run outward bound sessions from. The yard is shortly due to be cleared of all material.
- **Public Toilets** - The disabled toilet remains open. We will have to open the Gents and Ladies as numbers increase. These will operate on a one-in-one-out basis.
- **Recycling** – New green recycling bins have been installed around the site and these are now being used.
- **Sculpture Initiative update** – Ellesmere Sculpture Initiative has completed the Eglantyne Jebb memorial garden within Cremorne Gardens. This includes a turf labyrinth, two new sculptures and several information boards between the Bandstand and the Promenade gates.
- **Cremorne Gardens Flower Beds** - The flower beds that run along Church Street wall and to the side of the Bandstand have been cleared ready for new planting. Large boulders from Tudor Griffiths have also been included to add interest in the design. Derwen College have designed the beds and will be putting the plants in over Easter. The money for the plants (£1600) was donated by the redundant 'Friends of the Mere' as a parting gift. In the long

term, Derwen College students will maintain these beds and will have access to site funds if they need anything.

- **Castlefields Car Park** - The car park ticket machine is still in need of a blacksmith to protect it. This is in hand and due imminently meaning we can start charging again soon to bring in much needed income.
- **The Bee Metropolis** is in need of restoration. The pile of wood, drilled with hundreds of holes for solitary bees, has done its job but inevitably succumbed to time. A recently felled oak tree at Nesscliffe will be used to rebuild the pile of wood. Volunteers have begun the process of replanting with nectar rich plants.
- **Penley Woods** - With the demise of the diseased avenue of horse chestnuts we continue to have them felled to form standing monoliths. We have recently planted 10 new trees at precisely 12m spacing as the chestnuts were. We opted for a variety of lime called *Tilia Europea Pallida*, an award-winning tree with a yellow hue, good for bees and should look excellent when mature. We are looking into putting a wrought iron cage around each tree to **formalise this area of Penley Woods**. In addition, we are proposing to edge the path with timber, clear shoreline scrub to open up views and even lay turf along the edge of the path.
- **Proposals for this area also include installing 10 new memorial benches**, sited in front of each new tree. Income from this will pay, in time, for the wrought iron cages. In addition, we have bought in **additional plants** to add more colour and interest to Cremorne Gardens and Penley Woods. These include rambling roses to grow up the standing monoliths, a non-spreading variety of Rhododendron with white flowers, wisteria for near the bee metropolis and geraniums for under the yews by the bandstand.
- **New Kiosk** - Instead of the ice cream pitch in Cremorne Gardens we are considering allowing the seasonal deployment of a kiosk which will serve a broader range of refreshments. In order to do this we are investigating the costs associated with installing services to the location which will be adjacent to the children's play area. We could potentially double the income of an ice cream van and provide a much better experience to visitors.
- **Events & Activities** - All events were cancelled in 2020 apart from Ellesmere Triathlon which, following strict guidelines laid down by newly formed Shropshire Council's Covid Event team, was a great success. Groups are tentatively making arrangements for events later this year after August, when hopefully Covid will have passed. Ellesmere Triathlon is booked for Sun 5th Sep. Oswestry Rugby Club are investigating a charity swimming event and have provisionally booked Sun 19th Sep. The Mere now has two formal swimming organisations who coordinate group swimming on the Mere. Trismart operate every Tuesday evening and new group Swimfinity, operate as and when.
- **Trees** – The Council's Climate Emergency eucalyptus tree which was planted in 2019 sadly died; it happens. A new one has recently been planted in its place. 5 mature poplar trees have been felled along the boundary between The Moors and Moors car park. These will have caused excessive drying of the wetland and their removal will give extra space to the remaining weeping willows. A new management plan for the site is needed and work has

begun. This will require us to commission ecologists to investigate certain habitats on site and provide an ecological evaluation which will inform the management plan. It's a sad fact that over the last 200 years the Mere has suffered the most dramatic loss of biodiversity of any of the Shropshire meres.

- Our County Arboriculturalist, Martin Sutton, predicts that Shropshire is about to start feeling the full effects of **ash tree dieback** this year and we may be inundated with dangerous trees in need of felling.
- **Health of wildfowl** – Visitors continue to feed bread rather than grain to the wildfowl. This can lead to starvation and disease. It was agreed that a couple of information boards will be erected and we will ask if Ellesmere Primary School will allow a local volunteer to speak at the school assembly each year about the Mere in general and what to feed the birds, in particular.