

FRIENDS *of* LONG LANE PASTURE

NEWSLETTER

No.4 April 2006

A Big Step Forward

A key decision has been taken by Barnet Council that Long Lane Pasture is to be made available for community use. This changes its status as 'development land for residential use' agreed by the previous administration four years ago.

At a meeting of the Cabinet Resources Committee on 30th March, Councillors supported a recommendation to lease the Pasture at a peppercorn rate to a community group for a period of up to seven years. This honours a commitment by the Conservative Party made at the local elections in 2002. Although delighted with this outcome, we regard it as but a step towards longer term protection. In effect we have an extension to our licence, which we originally negotiated two years ago as the first stage in securing a lease. We very much hope the granting of the lease will not be delayed again.

A number of conditions attached to this recommendation will now be reconsidered in the light of concerns raised by Ann Brown in her presentation to the Committee. We were reluctant to accept an obligation to maintain all the fences in good condition since it is not clear who is responsible for them, but we are quite happy to keep the site secure. Nor did we think the yearly 'break' clause acceptable as this would make it impossible to secure funding, and we saw little point in producing a biodiversity action plan *before* a lease is granted.

There is a formal process to be gone through with respect to tenure of the land. Firstly, the Council has to provide an opportunity for any interested group to bid for the lease – though we do not expect much competition for this, nor a rush of other bodies coming forward! For the Action Group the next stage is to convert to a community trust and to work on a detailed plan, including all the fundraising needed to carry it through. **We will be addressing these issues at our Annual Meeting on 27th April, when we hope for a good turn out of Friends to support us and help to take forward this very positive development.**

Meanwhile the extension of our licence will enable us to continue to care for the land and to record the wildlife until a new leaseholder is firmly in place. There are plenty of things to do.

Dates for your diary

27th April – Annual Meeting: 8.00 p.m. at the Sea Cadets Hall, off Long Lane

3rd June – Friends Open Day: 11.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. at Long Lane Pastures!

22nd April, 6 & 20 May, 17th June – Field meetings: 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon. Come prepared for wet conditions underfoot.

The Garage Site

You will recall that when Fairview New Homes put forward their proposal to build 97 flats and houses on the Long Lane Pastures the access to the development was via the old garage site on Long Lane (opposite the Fire Station). After they withdrew their application they sold the garage site to Turnhold, who have now been given planning permission to build a small block of flats there.

This means, of course, that there is no vehicular access to the Pastures.

Wildlife Report

Some of the comments made by officers in their paper to the Cabinet Resources Committee baffled us, none more so than the claim that 'the Council does not have any formal assessment of the importance of the site in terms of . . . ecology although it is worth noting that the site does not feature in the London Ecology Unit's most recent assessment of the Borough.'

The London Ecology Unit's 1997 handbook is not the most thorough of documents, but the Council does have a 40 page report on Long Lane Pastures from Dr Jan Hewlett of the London Ecology Unit (dated July 1999). Dr Hewlett concluded that 'the considerable diversity of invertebrate species recorded at Long Lane Pasture during the summer months is notable . . . The fact that so many species are supported by such a relatively small site is in itself of some importance in the wider context of local urban ecology.' And: 'It can be concluded that Long Lane Pasture, whilst having few species of vertebrates and invertebrates of notable conservation value, is still an important grassland site within this area as it has its own significance . . .'

Derek Warren reports:

During 2005 we discovered more plants, moths and butterflies, many seen at our work mornings.

75 different species of moth have been recorded on the site so far, including Ruby Tigers, Willow Beauty, Flame Shoulder and Angle Shades, as well as 20 species of butterfly, including the beautiful Yellow Brimstone. We are planning to attract an even greater diversity through judicious planting.

Birdlife varies with the seasons, with Redwings in the winter and breeding Whitethroats in the summer. The Blackcap sings in the spring but does not appear to stay, and the Green Woodpecker feeds on ants in the autumn. House Sparrows, in decline nationally, are fairly common here, and the Song Thrush can often be heard as can the occasional 'jack' of the Jackdaw.

Numerous other creatures have been seen, including 6 species of ladybird, 14 of spiders, 15 of bees, 2 of grasshoppers and crickets, as well as voles, bats and the fox.

There is still much to discover and if you would like to lend a hand with the survey do give Derek a ring (020-8346.5258).