

OPEN LETTER to HERTS COUNTY COUNCIL Re: PANSHANGER COUNTRY PARK.

10th March 2015

Dear Sirs,

Hertfordshire County Council meets with Lafarge Tarmac, the owners of Panshanger Park, on 16th March 2015 to settle final arrangements for the full opening of Panshanger Country Park.

We wish them success in this forthcoming meeting, but at the same time, would remind Councillors and Officers of the key points. Sometimes these tend to be forgotten in the fog of 'public relations' that can cloud what is a very straightforward issue and requirement.

- Delivery of a Country Park is a legal condition imposed on the owners when planning was granted, in 1980, for extraction of gravel from this impressive Grade II* listed landscape. This permission followed intervention by the Secretary of State and a full Public Inquiry. Return of a Country Park to the people of Hertfordshire was for the disruption and value of quarrying at Panshanger. In 1982 more detailed Country Park plans were requested from the owners and have never been delivered. In the absence of these plans, the requirement should be today's Natural England desired standard for an accredited Country Park.
- Barely one third of the park has been opened and this bears little resemblance to a Country Park. It is crisscrossed with barbed wire and other inappropriate fences, car parking arrangements and paths are inadequate, and toilet facilities have not been built. There is no visitor centre and its opening is over twenty years late.
- Key listed buildings like the Orangery have been allowed to fall into substantial disrepair, some replanting fails to adequately restore designs of Capability Brown and Humphry Repton, the gardens have been allowed to be overrun and the woodland is poorly managed.
- The County Council knows precisely what is required. This was set out in a letter to the owner from CEO, John Wood, in a letter dated 11 June 2013 (the owners are already over a year behind the schedule set out in that letter) and another from Jan Hayes-Griffin, Assistant Director (Planning, Strategy and Communications) dated 4 February 2014 which details what is required to be done in terms of fencing, paths and the like.
- We do not expect to hear about ideas for housing development in a Grade II* listed park and we suggest the owners are told this is a non-starter in any circumstances. Nor do we expect the owner to plead poverty as the costs of rectification are high. All these liabilities should have been properly provided for as gravel was being extracted.
- The current management arrangements for the park have not worked: they have failed spectacularly, particularly in regard to heritage aspects and access, contravening the legal agreements in place. So an adequate management structure needs to be put in place that represents the wider public interest; and planning controls need to be imposed on the owner to ensure future compliance.

For our part, you can expect our wholehearted support to move this forward to a satisfactory conclusion. You will see that we are arranging the People Anniversary Walk on 31 March 2015, at which we hope we will be in a position to hail your success.

Yours faithfully,

Gary O'Leary
Chairman, Friends of Panshanger Park