

A Big West Park Welcome



Happy New Year and welcome to the 2022 issue of the West Park newsletter for residents, friends and partner agencies of West Park. Despite Covid, there are plenty of developments to report, together with an overview of key plans we'll see completed over the coming year. But first a big welcome to all of you who have moved to Westpark Garden Village in the last year. These include the final houses in the current phase of Bussey and Armstrong's development and also new householders

with Gentoo and Thirteen Homes together with those soon to join us on the Cussins' development. We hope, despite the difficulties caused by Covid restrictions, you are starting to feel really at home here in West Park. We know it's not easy to settle in to a new home at the best of times, but things got so much trickier with the pandemic, when for much of the past two years we haven't been able to visit one another's homes or even recognise our new neighbours because they're all wearing masks...

So a shout out for all of you who've been helping to support your neighbours and a name check for the Winding Way Wenches WhatsApp Group. They've been using social media to keep in touch, organise (Covid appropriate) social gatherings and generally helping each other not to feel isolated. A really good use of social media during a really bad time.

Women Wanted Urgently!

And talking of women who build community and make things happen, the recently formed West Park Levy Trust is desperately seeking Susan (and Hannah, Alina, Denise, Tara, Jade, Mary and ...) to join us to help shape the future of West Park. You can find out all about the Levy and the Trust below, but please consider joining us. The Trust has been set up for the benefit of the whole community and plays a major role in deciding the events, facilities, activities and ambitions for West Park. At present our Board of Trustees (all men, mostly on the wrong side of a bus pass) is 'male, pale and stale' (not really - but it rhymes...). We are seeking new trustees and especially want to hear from you if you're a different shape or colour. West Park is not just a country for old men. We need trustees with a passion for the needs of children and young people. We need rebels with a sense of daring. We need people who don't like to take 'no' for an answer. It's a great learning opportunity for anyone wanting to know how boards and trusts operate and being a trustee can help with your CV profile also. Interested? Then please get in touch to find out more.





But why do we need Westpark Levy Trust?

When the original plans for West Park Garden Village were agreed, £270,000 (about £400,000 at today's prices) was allocated as part of the agreement with Darlington Borough Council by the developer as a community lump sum payment towards the cost of park maintenance. This represented £27,000 per year for the first ten years.

To supplement this, and to ensure that no matter what pressures council funding came under, it was decided to include a Levy which householders and businesses would pay each year to ensure that there would always be sufficient funds to maintain the park, and the development, and to invest in further amenities and community activities. Initially, this Levy was set at £100 per year per household which would rise by a small amount each year, linked to the rise in the cost of living as measured by the Retail Price Index (RPI) the monthly figure produced by the Office of National Statistics based on the cost of a range of basic shopping trolley goods and services.

It was always planned that the Levy should be owned by a Charitable Trust run by residents and key stakeholders of the park and development. Initially however, as the development was only just beginning, the Levy was managed by Bussey and Armstrong and collected by County Durham Community Foundation (CDCF), the local charity which specialises in raising, managing and dispersing funds for charitable purposes in County Durham. To reduce the costs of collection, the earliest residents of West Park, who set up Direct Debit payments to automatically pay the annual Levy, were offered a reduced rate of £50 per year, again rising each year by the RPI.



Not surprisingly, many of the original householders snapped up this deal, which is built into their property deeds, and are still fortunate enough to benefit from this reduction. The rates for 2022 are £164.30 (and £82.15 for properties paying by direct debit). The annual request for payment accompanies this newsletter and payment falls due on 1st February. For comparison, similar schemes around the UK have an average price of about £250, and rarely provide the quality of amenities we enjoy here at West Park.



Two years ago, CDCF requested that it was now time for a permanent solution to handle the West Park Levy and so the committee members of the Friends of West Park, together with Bussey and Armstrong began setting up the West Park Levy Trust with the Charity Commission. This is often a slow process, but changes within the Charity Commission and the impact of Covid, meant further delays before the West Park Levy Trust was established December 2019 and all of the funds held by CDCF on behalf of the Trust transferred into the new charity. After a request for additional Trustees via social media, website and in last year's newsletter another three Trustees, including two more residents, have been appointed. Details of the Trust can be found on our website www.friendsofwestpark.com. By the way, all of the Trustees are volunteers and none gets paid for their work for the Trust. You can see their details on the Charity Commission website.

One of the Trust's first tasks was to appoint a new contractor to collect the Levy. After inviting a number of specialist organisations to tender for this work, Kingston Properties was chosen because they were the most competitive; are based in the North East; and have an excellent track record of collecting similar payments on other developments. Unlike CDCF, before them, they are also skilled in recovering any debt from the very small number of households who, for whatever reason, are behind in their payments. They began collecting payments on 1st February 2021 and under Kingston, the costs for collecting represents 19% of the total cost. Our contract with them will be reviewed by the Trustees in September 2022.

What are we paying for?

The current annual amount collected by the Levy is approximately £50,000, some of which is used to pay Darlington Borough Council for additional work in the park, over and above what they would normally do for other parks and green spaces. This includes additional planting of spring bulbs and wild flowers, additional grass-cutting and higher levels of maintenance.

It also enables us to support community events and initiatives by providing small grants. In the longer term it can be used as match funding for making bids to pay for major improvements, events and amenities. These include potential sports facilities, a community centre and a festival in 2025.

KINGSTON



Why do you still collect the Levy while we have money in the bank?

The Trust currently holds around £74,000. Of this we need to always have sufficient funds to cover the next year's likely spend; this is a requirement of our charitable status. Also, there is a recent amount of £43,000 paid to the Council towards the enhancements and improvements to the children's play area, which have been delayed due to Covid. Funds have also been allocated for additional signage and notice boards which are currently in production (See below). We are also in discussions with Darlington Borough Council about replacing a number of damaged fence posts and fences to match the quality of our existing materials. We are also needing to continue to cover enhancements to the dolomite paths. Anyone who wishes can view our annual reports and the minutes from The Westpark Levy Trust meetings together with minutes from the Friends of West Park Meetings can do so on our website. There is an open welcome for anyone to attend the Friends' meetings. See the box below, It's A Date! For the list of our planned Friends' meetings for 2022.

It's A Date! – Join us for the Friends of Westpark Meetings 2022
February 21st – May 9th – August 15th – November 14th
Starting at 17.30 West Park Academy

Building a great community... It's not just a walk in the park...

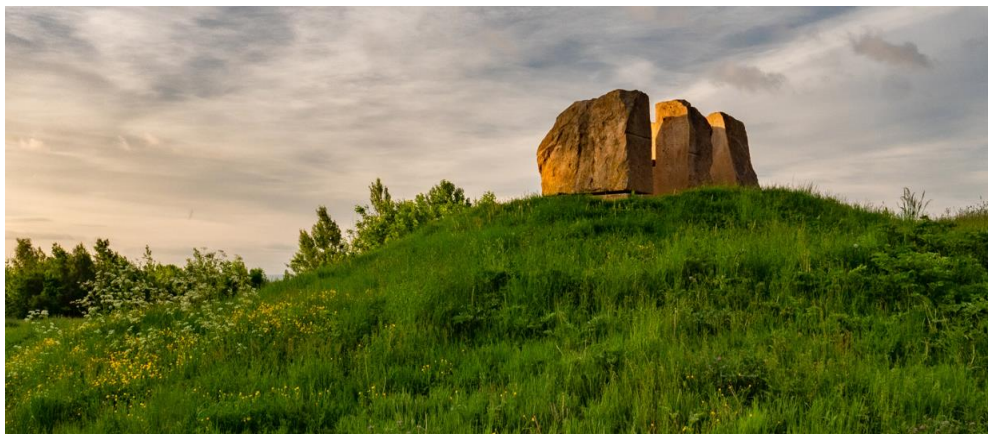
Many of us really found the Park come into its own during the various Covid lockdowns, when it provided a beautiful local space where we could take our allotted exercise and where we could also see neighbours in a safe space. In the coming months, as the lifting of restrictions allows, expect to see a range of ongoing maintenance around the fabric of the park. Rob George, a Trustee, who was involved in creating the park in the first place tells us to also be aware that there are thousands of small trees which need to be thinned out to enable the strongest to really develop and reach their full potential. Also watch out for more wildflower areas and enhancements in the established annual and perennial meadows.



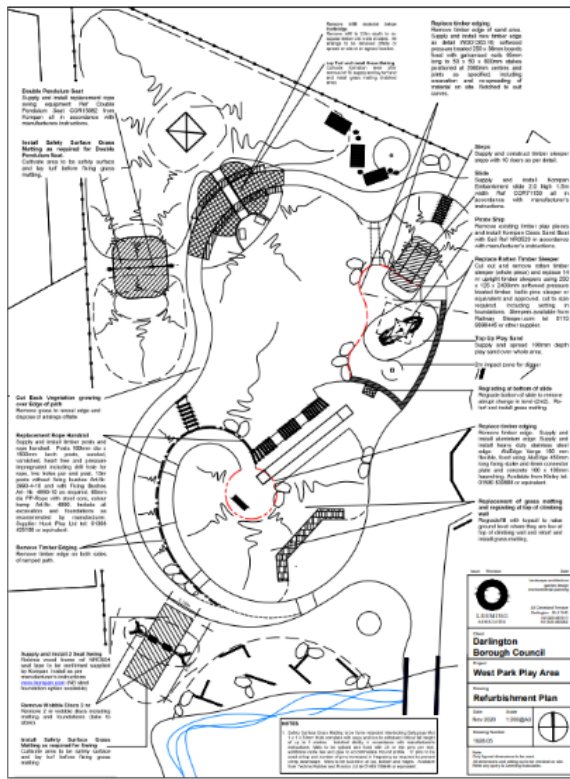
A big thank you to Rob together with Pippa and Wayne from DBC and all those volunteers who help keep the park in good condition. Once again, West Park won the prestigious national Green Flag Award last year. South Park is the only other Darlington park to gain the award.

Also if the original development can be described as a park with houses around it; then the new phase can be described as houses with a park around them. The designs, which can be seen on the Bussey & Armstrong

website www.busseyarmstrong.co.uk include planting native species and building bunds (raised mounds of soil) next to the A1 and planting them with native trees and shrubs. This will both help reduce the traffic noise and screen the development by creating a sense of being in among the woods, creating essential, quality wildlife corridors; a real Garden Village. There will also be maintenance and improvement works carried out on the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) around the development and check out the latest in the new phase around Newton Lane and Black Poplar Avenue as they come on stream, so to speak.



The Play's the Thing....



The planned improvements to the Children's Play Area, designed by Nick Leeming, informed by the community, will be starting this Spring. The cost of these has been supported by funds from both the Trust and Darlington Borough Council to enable us to install new features, and repair others to the highest standard.

In addition to the existing play area, work is planned to start in 2022/23 with a brand new Children's Play Park (Cow Green on Edward Pease Way). Residents who attended the Friends of West Park meeting at West Park Academy in November, will also be aware of the request by a resident, supported by local councillors and the Levy Trust to seek funding for improvements to the bike track in the park. In addition to repair work, funds will be sought to include a new junior track, suitable for younger riders, and for any adults wanting to learn to try out their first "little bunnyhop before biffing a barspin". (No, I don't know

what that means either, but I'm not sure I want to try it (editor)).

Arts, Crafts and the Alphabet of Trees



Did you know that one of the unique elements of West Park Garden Village is the fact that we have an Art strategy? Many people are aware that many of the house designs, and the concept of the Garden Village itself have been influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement a central idea of which is that useful things should also be well designed and beautiful.

in the development, Tony Cooper, the Director of Bussey and Armstrong, commissioned Bill Herbert, a poet and an academic at Newcastle University's English department, to develop ways to help create a sense of place within West Park. We managed to catch up with Bill recently and asked them about the strategy and what we can expect to see.

“The whole idea of an Art Strategy”, says Bill, “is to give people a unifying idea, a cultural backdrop, if you like, to pull the parts of the whole site together: landscape; geography; wildlife and the ecology; together with the history of the place were all things we wanted to highlight. What is a place and how do we want to live in it? What is it that we value about it? Often we don’t think about these things but with a new development like this, we have had a great opportunity to try and build on our past and our connection to the land and history.”



The Comet
comes to town
 A revolution in farming practice

“He had a fine masculine head, broad and deep chest, shoulders well laid back... fair-sized horns, ears long and hairy, and a grandeur of style and carriage that baffled description.”



“The Comet, Calf of Honor, with his father, the Comet, parent of Charles, by Thomas Sopwith 1810.”

The exceptional bull called Comet was a product of the Culling tradition: innovations in livestock culling involving Charles’ wife Mary played a significant role in developing the distinctive practices, resulting in remarkable cows to breed and negotiating prices with local farmers. When Charles retired from farming, Comet sold for a record £1000 in 1810, a rare sum of money in 1810.

Comet was not the greatest bull they bred. The Rotten Ox, bred lower on The Durlais Old, was an ancestor from that drove large crowds to agricultural shows because of its shape, size and weight. Animals like the Culling tradition were set to be exported all over the world.

British: Property of Comet by its trademark with...
 copyright of the Sopwith family, www.sopwith.com



Not surprisingly for Bill the poet; one of the key ways he has chosen to express this is through words and stories. “We’ve used texts and textual art, to help link people to the place, their heritage and their connection to the land.” We can see this in the rhyming couplets which Bill has produced to go with each of the street names which have also been chosen for their connection to our history and includes: the Romans; the Quakers; cattle breeding; and the Industrial Revolution. The street names and rhymes, gently remind us of our heritage. Similarly, Bill is developing what he calls the ‘alphabet of trees’. Where reference is made to native trees and the benefits we have from them and which can be seen in the name of buildings at the Village Centre and the wording inscribed in the arches and on plaques. One of Bill’s current projects is to produce a street map of the development, featuring the names and rhymes we can see as we walk around and a bit of background to them.

Thomas Sopwith Way

Sopwith saw through stone to lead
 and modelled the minerals under our tread. 

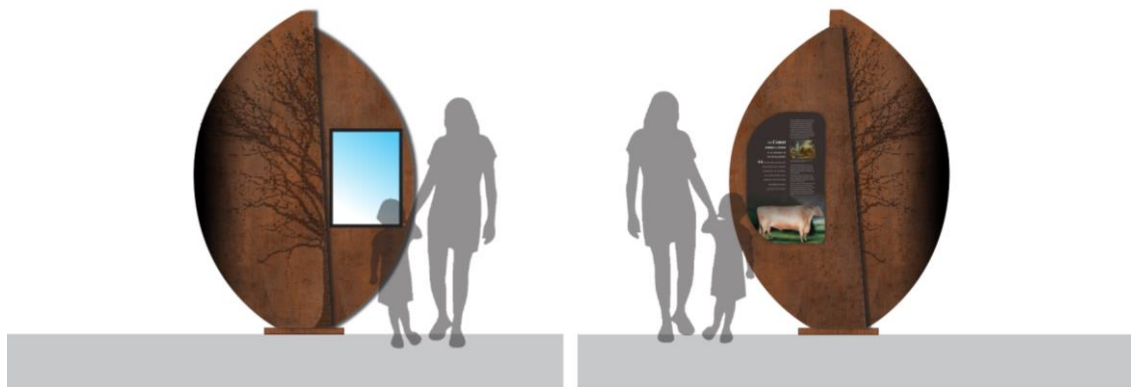


Linked to Bill's work at West Park, is that of Steve Pardue, the north eastern designer responsible for the signage within the park. Steve is currently developing a series of interpretation panels and noticeboards which are due to appear in the next 12 months around the development.

As you can see from the photographs and illustrations, the new panels will look stunning when they are installed later this year. "Like other features on the development, I've tried to combine both nature and our industrial heritage to help create a sense of our links to the past" says Steve. "The key idea of the design is to use the colour and shape of a curled beech leaf in autumn.

I had problems with my initial ideas because I discovered I'd effectively designed a 'sail' which would have caught the wind and become unstable, so it was back to the drawing board. By constructing the structure from corten steel, the same material we've used on the 'Caring Sharing Daring' installation near the village centre and which we've used to create the amphitheatre

in the middle of the park; it helps to unify the designs and materials." The eventual design is both robust and very elegant. It involves the curled leaf motif in two sections, and Steve has used laser cutting techniques to depict the silhouette shape of a bare tree as a series of 'perforations' in the construction. Each panel will depict a story featuring our local heritage, linked to the street names, and on the back will be a community notice board. The steel is currently being 'weathered' (rusting) in the sea air at Hendon before being installed later this spring.



Who to Contact

If you would like to be on the mailing list for news and future events please send an email to info@westparkdarlington.org.uk Information about what's happening on the nature reserve can be found on the following sites or contacts listed on the next page.

Contacts & Useful Numbers

Park Ranger:

pippa.smaling@darlington.gov.uk 01325 406 719

Rob George, Park Coordinator:

Robert.george@westparklevytrust.org.uk 07500 090384

Issues within the Park

Darlington Borough Council

Customer Service: 01325 405111

Email: countryside@darlington.gov.uk

West Park Levy Trust

Website: www.friendsofwestpark.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Westparklevytrust

Email: info@westparkdarlington.org.uk

Kingston Property Services

Telephone: 0330 123 1133 (Mon-Fri: 9.00am-1.00pm)

Email: mail@kingstonpropertyservices.co.uk

Darlington Neighbourhood Policing Team

PCSO 8617 Chloe Allison: Telephone 101 extension 744232

Email: Chloe.Allison@durham.pnnpolice.uk

PS 1340 Karl Lowe: Telephone 101 Extension 742277

Email: Karl.Lowe@durham.pnn.police.uk

With best wishes,

The Friends of Westpark & The Trustees of Westpark Levy Trust

January 2022

PS: Thanks to Nick Leeming and Steve Pardue to use their designs and images and special thanks to local resident, Peter Giroux, for permission to use his fantastic images of the park. To see more of his work, visit the Friends of Westpark Facebook Page.