

CONNAUGHT PARK

Newsletter 23 (August 1995) alerted members of the Society to the fact that we would be asking for their views on the future of the park.

Following this announcement a questionnaire – a copy of the essential parts of which is printed below – was distributed to members at the 'October Meeting.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. ACCESS AND CAR PARKING

Please suggest ways in which you think access could be improved and/or car parking provided in each of the following locations.

- a) The bottom gate
- b) The middle gate
- c) The top gate
- d) A new entrance near the Guston junction on Castle Hill Road – the road to Deal.

2. PROVISION FOR SPORT

At present the park has six grass and two all-weather tennis courts. There are three other grassed areas previously used for various sporting activities. There have been many suggestions for the use of the park. Please rate the following, on a descending scale of 10 to 1, to show your priorities or preferences.

- a) Upgrade of the eight existing tennis courts for multi-purpose use.
- b) Full sized hockey pitch
- c) Five-a-side football pitch
- d) A dry ski slope
- e) Cycle track (top perimeter)/National Cycle Route
- f) Area for roller skating/roller blading
- g) Practice walls for games, (these act as social areas/meeting places)
- h) Archery
- f) Boules

3. OTHER RECREATIONAL USES

The Park has a play-area for children. It is used seasonally for firework displays organised by Dover Lions, and for the Dover Pageant. Many ideas have been suggested. Rate these, please, on a descending scale of 10 to 1, taking into consideration cost and feasibility.

- a) Continued use for fireworks displays
- b) Continued use for pageant
- c) Improved children's play area
- d) Measures to keep dogs away from the play areas
- e) Spectacular flow arrangements
- f) Planting more bulbs in woodland areas
- g) Waterfalls in pond areas
- h) Pub in the park
- i) Club/bar in the park
- j) Restaurant
- k) Souvenir shop
- l) Formation of new tennis club

In addition members were asked to continue with any further suggestions they would like to make.

Once again the response to this request for members' views has been highly satisfactory and we thank everyone who has returned a questionnaire.

It is impossible to include the full results as we are still receiving completed copies. It will also take some time to collate the responses to the three sections.

In the meantime members may be interested to read some of the ideas contributed and to know the general trend of the replies.

CONNAUGHT PARK — THE PAST 135

"The Connaught Park – leased from the War Department, a part of Dover Castle Farm – was laid out and planted by public subscription in 1883. It has charming walks and extensive views of the sea and the western hills, and by passing through from end to end

the pedestrian has an unrivalled walk from the upper end of Charlton right away to the Castle entrance at the Constable's Tower"

An extract from John Bavington-Jones's *"Annals of Dover"*, pub. The Dover Express, 1916

The pictures below are from Budge Adams's collection



The Duchess of Connaught plants a tree at the opening



The park as originally laid out on a bare hillside



The Lake (on the left), looking towards the Castle



The same, in the reverse direction. The tree in first picture is within the ring fence at left



The famous Whalebone Arch – alas now no more



A Mayoress's Garden Party on the lawn beyond the Lake

CONNAUGHT PARK — THE PRESENT

JOHN OWEN

"A well-planned enclosure on the hillside, named after the Duke and Duchess who opened it in 1883. It commands delightful views ..."

WARD LOCK RED BOOK circa 1920.

Remaining one of the town's pleasant public amenities Connaught Park is within walking distance of the centre of Dover. Its change of character from that of gardens with magnificent labour-intensive flower beds to shrubbery and woodland has not been generally well-received but the pleasant walks and recreational areas remain. After the 1987 hurricane many mature trees still exist and have been enhanced by carefully planned new plantings.

Early morning sees many dog-walkers joined by regular joggers taking the morning air before commencing their daily round, along with army PT squads and hard-court tennis players striving for fitness.

This gives way to the main force of regular dog-walkers which continues throughout

the day, many lucky canines getting two walks daily. Some arrive by car from further afield, the existing off-the-road parking being Connaught Park lay-by for only about twelve cars. At dropping and picking-up times at schools, both family dogs and younger children appear with the excellent children's playground coming into its own. At lunchtime the park hosts pupils from the numerous schools in the area. The system of paths is used for orienteering, cross country and treasure hunt activities organised and supervised by local schools and especially it seems when weather precludes other games. Five local schools within walking distance have an ideal location for nature studies including an aviary and a pond.

Come Wimbledon fortnight there is a sudden demand for the few remaining tennis courts. The hardcourts, used the year round are marked out but also for the ladies netball matches.

The summer months also see a regular influx of young people staying overnight at both the YMCA and YHA hostels letting off steam on the slopes and terraces after a day's coach travel.

During school holidays and weekends, fine weather brings out family picnickers and the local disabled group are regular users, including the park in their organised and supervised daily walks.

The layout of the park allows for the paying public to attend such charitable events as fireworks displays and pageants from time

to time and there exists a choice of suitable settings for possible band concerts. Autumn attracts the conker hunters and there is a wealth of other material for the nature table, whilst only a trace of snow in winter transforms the slopes into a hive of activity with a media presence assured!

This quiet on-going round-the-year usage is only apparent to the many daily users.

Treasures such as Connaught Park should be cherished as urban green spaces for the quiet enjoyment of the public, as their Founders intended. Whilst cost reduction is a desirable objective public parks by their very nature rarely, if ever, make a profit; to expect them to do so is to misunderstand completely the ethos of public parks.

THE BANKERS in a DOVER PAGEANT SCENE



PART OF THE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND



THE BAND OF THE DUKE OF YORKS R.M. SCHOOL at a DOVER PAGEANT



CONNAUGHT PARK

Do you want to see changes in Connaught Park? - or do you feel like one of our members who merely wrote - "PLEASE leave it as it is." If there were to be changes in Connaught Park, how could it be improved to bring benefit to the community?

From the responses of members it seems that many people are in favour of upgrading or altering the provision for sport in the park if there is sufficient demand and if space allows. Most members want to see an improvement in the park to make it more attractive for Dover residents and for visitors. Some visualise the creation of beautiful gardens and cite examples from other part of the country. In particular one of our members, June Dyer, who has written on this subject in previous Newsletters, has obtained detailed information from the Ventor Botanic Garden on the Isle of Wight, with a helpful letter from the Curator. *see page 138.*

There is such a lot of material in the replies to the questionnaire that, at this stage, I can only present some general points extracted from the responses and a selection of extracts from the more-detailed contributions so far.

General points arising from all sections.

SECTION 1. ACCESS/CAR PARKING

- All respondents wanted improved car parking.
- Many respondents asked that car parking be kept separate from pedestrian access.
- Many replies indicated that the top gate was the key entrance and that this could be made into a major feature of the park.
- Most replies favoured the idea of an extra fourth entrance higher up Castle Hill near the Guston junction.

SECTION 2. SPORT

- Most members rated the items listed on a descending scale from 10 to 1 and this information has yet to be collated
- Multi-use surfaces were generally approved and some members suggesting flood-lighting
- For activities such as skate-boarding, roller blading, ski slope many suggested that demand be checked first.

SECTION 3. RECREATIONAL USES

- Many members contributed detailed ideas of spectacular flower arrangements with examples from other towns and cities.
- People love water features and there were many suggestions about the use of the pond and the creation of waterfalls and fountains.
- Many replies were in favour of the idea of a restaurant or cafe with a patio area and spectacular views.
- Additional suggestions included:
 - a putting green
 - a large chess playing area
 - education rooms for school parties
 - provision of a picnic area with benches
 - band concerts on a regular basis
 - telescope and plaque of area
 - art area - sculpture
 - make amphitheatre by bull-doing the bank and erecting viewing terraces for sport or pageant.
 - design separate gardens with different themes, Roman, Japanese, Italian, English etc.
 - form a "Friends of Connaught Park" Society
 - Make the park a tourist attraction.

THE FUTURE?

EXTRACTS from some of the QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

(a) "The prime use should be that of a park. The Pines Gardens at St. Margaret's Bay are an excellent example of what can be achieved. The first aim of any improvement should be to make the best of a very special site through its use as an attractive park. Before any re-planning and change of use, the original Victorian planning and layout should be checked out and substantially preserved.

The poor parking provision must be rectified if the park is to be more widely used. A road needs to be laid out on the north border from Castle Hill Road, but on additional land to be acquired. The road would need plenty of parking bays and be screened from the park".

(b) "It would be very advantageous to have much more, safe, well-screened car parking. at the same time car parking should be kept separate from pedestrian access so that people feel free to roam with no threat from vehicles. Connaught Park is of Victorian origin and something of that should be retained, at least in part

Also it was paid for by public subscription so should, above all, remain free for the people of Dover with no commercialism involved, basically peaceful, not a theme park.

The attraction of the park lies in its varied levels and its variety of forms; play area, flat lawns, flower bed and wilder areas and also the fact that it catches the sun all day long and has spectacular views from the top.

Age groups to be targeted? – the young (including teenagers) and the old? Both often have leisure, but not always money."

(c) "I would like to see the park brought up to a higher standard so that out-of-town visitors and tourists would want to see it. ... We have a magnificent castle and a park nearby.

Two of the most successful castles in Kent, from the tourist point of view, are Leeds and Hever, but what would they be without their grand gardens? Probably a half-day visit instead of a whole day ... Dover Castle being what it always was, a fortress, grand gardens would be out of place within its grounds. But here is an opportunity to provide tourists with another worth-while place to visit and enjoy ... Why not a grand garden park next to a grand castle?"

(d) "There should certainly a deployment of the gardens to make them really beautiful. I envisage a series of pools and waterfalls, with a beautiful fountain as a feature. ... Perhaps different types of gardens, e.g. Alpine, Japanese, etc. and maybe a tropical house.

There should be a terrace, but not only for a tea place but also for a really good restaurant which would be open in the evenings as well. — The views of the lights of Dover are lovely in the evenings. Access would be needed for cars and for invalids ...

... There is a beautiful waterfall in Victoria Square, Birmingham where the water in the pool at the top just disappears from view and goes down a series of steps which are lit up at night. I think the water goes into two pools at the bottom on each side, where there are fountains. There is a statue in the top pool with water falling from it and a poetic inscription around the pool. I was very impressed by it."

(e) "The park could loosely follow the example of Ventnor Botanic Gardens, I.O.W., or the style of Compton Acres, Bournemouth, both on sloping sites. In each case the area is divided into separate gardens, e.g. Roman, Italian, English, Japanese, etc. The existing pond area of Connaught Park might lend itself to a Japanese Garden. Alternatives

140 might be a Kent Tudor Garden, an English Cottage Garden, a Physic (Medicinal) Garden, a Perfume Garden. ... Perhaps the tea pavilion could be set in a cottage garden ...

... Whilst Connaught Park should always remain a place for the people of Dover District, there seems to be no reason why it should not also be developed as an important tourist attraction. Coach operators would

probably include it in their Dover Castle itineraries. Connaught Park could then be enjoyed going down from the top entrance, leading visitors to the town ... At present the top entrance leads to a long path across the top of the park, receiving much sun. Could this be a Lavender Walk, with rose arches at intervals? Bulbs could be planted for Spring interest."

From the second paragraph onward the following is an extract from a letter written to Mrs J. Dyer by Susan Goodenough, Curator of Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Ventnor Botanic Garden

Ventnor Garden is on a sloping site, near the sea, protected from the north and east by chalk downs. Although frosts are recorded they are usually of short duration.

"... Primarily the Botanic Garden at Ventnor is the responsibility of the Isle of Wight Council. They employ the staff and fund the day to day running of the place. This is as you can probably imagine run on a very limited budget and as the garden is on public open space it does not generate a great deal of revenue for itself.

Having started with the more negative side of the situation the positive aspects of the scheme here is that it is seen as a tourist facility and is therefore part of the council commitment to the tourist industry. The community at large utilises the garden in many ways and the intention is to expand upon this particularly with regard to children and education. There is a very active 'Friends of the Gardens', about 700 strong, autonomous from the council and an active fund raiser for development of the garden. A small rental is obtained from the franchises on the café and the Smuggling Museum that are on site. The Temperate House is currently

generating money through admission fees although this is small beer.

Historically the garden came into being largely through the foresight of the then Ventnor Urban District Council who purchased the site as public open space to avoid over development of housing. A local pressure group called the Isle of Wight Botanic Garden Society were instrumental in the direction that the grounds developed. The involvement of the late Sir Harold Hillier encouraged the society to press for the botanic garden and this is finally how the public open space became the Ventnor Botanic Garden. Officially opened in 1972 by Mountbatten the garden had a short, by garden standards, and very chequered history. After the death of Sir Harold the sourcing of plants dried up and the garden rapidly deteriorated and was virtually destroyed by the 1987 storm. The gardens today have largely been rebuilt by raising our own plants from seed from other botanic gardens around the world. The need for a support nursery to do this was of paramount importance and indeed as the garden continues to develop we are needing to expand this aspect."