

The Playing Field



Essex Playing Fields Association Newsletter

Training Seminar - the review

The dust has settled on our latest Training Day, and we have had the opportunity now of going through the evaluation forms that most delegates kindly completed. The findings were interesting!

We don't have much experience at organising and running Training Days or Seminars: for most of our Executive Committee, this was only the second one with which they had been involved – and certainly the first that involved the outdoor element. (Thank goodness that despite the indifferent summer, 17 September was reasonably clement!) So the feedback was extremely valuable to us.

It came as no surprise to discover that the venue was universally regarded as excellent, especially the facilities. We are very fortunate in enjoying the support of Writtle College, their Principal, and senior lecturers in a lot of what we do, and certainly without their involvement this Training Day would not have taken place. Likewise the speakers were given top marks – and we must say that in our opinion their collective ability to describe some fairly specialised topics in language that we could all understand and in a way guaranteed to hold the interest of the audience was masterful.

Delegates were less enthusiastic about the catering which we must say came as a bit of a surprise. Three tea and coffee sessions and a wide array of sandwiches for lunch seemed to us to be pretty good value for money. The problem is that anything more substantial both takes up more time (which was at a premium in any case) and puts up the cost. But obviously this is an area that we shall have to look at in future.

We were also a bit disappointed in the marks given to “Administration”. Hopefully these reflected only the oft-stated issues about exactly where the Seminar was being held and where to park. We thought we had put up enough notices, but we realise that Writtle College is a big place. We know our way around it – we go there frequently! – but we appreciate that it is a bit daunting for people less familiar with it. We shall endeavour to be a bit more precise next time.

So far as the content of the Day was concerned, we were pleased (and relieved!) that both the ‘indoor’ and ‘outdoor’ sessions were regarded as equally useful. Our speakers from “FIT”, Paul Allen and Alan Penn; from Writtle College, Nigel Beckford, and our own Planning and Development Consultant, Ted Gittins, dealt with the legislative and technical maintenance side of playing fields and the new Local Development Frameworks, and after lunch Richard Hughes and Andy Borman from Writtle College and Andy Turbin from Ernest Doe gave practical demonstrations of playing field equipment and discussed water conservation.

So why are we telling you all this now?

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Essex Playing Fields Association

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And also by the subscriptions received from our members – town and parish councils, local authorities, clubs and individuals – and we are extremely grateful to them all for their support without which we simply would not be

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From the President's Desk

Our AGM and the awards ceremony for our Best Kept Playing Field Competition on 25 October are covered elsewhere in this issue, so I shall briefly report on two November items of news – one disappointing, one encouraging:

1. Rugby Clubs/Schools Affiliation Scheme

Despite our best efforts and the excitement generated by England reaching the final in the World Rugby Cup, we have been unable to persuade enough children and parents to sign up to partake in this pilot scheme. As I mentioned in the Autumn issue, this pilot scheme, sponsored by **Awards for All**, offered the opportunity for boys and girls to receive expert rugby coaching and for parents to qualify as coaches or referees. Perhaps a combination of tight curricula in the nine schools we approached, the perceived extra physical risk involved and some apathy played a part in this failure. With hindsight, we probably lacked the resources needed to devote to this ambitious pilot to ensure a successful outcome.

2. Grant from the Acorn Fund via Essex Community Foundation

In early April we approached **Essex Community Foundation** for a grant towards the operating costs of employing our first part time Field officer for the period November 2007 to October 2008. Many of you will have either met or spoken to Colin Freeman, our Field Officer who started with us in May. You will understand our delight when we heard from the Foundation on 4th November that the **Acorn Fund** have made us a grant @ £3,700. This is a great encouragement to us. The front page of the Autumn issue describes the support and advice which Colin can provide and how to contact him.

Please may I refer you to our article in this issue on our training seminar **Protection and Maintenance of Playing Fields**, which was held at **Writtle College** on 17th September. We were most fortunate to have seven first class speakers including two from **Fields in Trust** and four Lecturers from the College plus our own Ted Gittins - all of whom gave their time. The mix between the morning's indoor instruction and the afternoon's outdoor practical demonstrations in good weather was very well received.

Finally on a personal note, our congratulations to our Ambassador, Danny Crates whose wife gave birth to their son on 16th October. The fact that his son beat the starting gun by 6 weeks and was consequently in intensive care, meant that Danny could not after all give a motivational talk to us at our AGM. We wish Danny and his family all the best. Good luck to Danny for the Olympics in Beijing next September.

David Gwynne-James

Get out of the House – Part 2

We reported in the Autumn edition of “The Playing Field” that only one in five children are allowed to “play out” in the street or local park nowadays, and quoted the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, as saying that the Government’s aim will be to ensure that children “.....are safe and healthy and enjoy their childhood”.

Now, in a report commissioned by Play England, the organisation that promotes free play for children and young people, and financed by the Big Lottery Fund’s Children Play Initiative, we read that it is in fact politicians and adults who are responsible for stamping on children’s rights to play in the streets! And the report goes on to suggest that teenagers should have a telephone hotline they can use to

complain about adults who don’t let them play or hang around in public spaces.

Beverley Hughes, MP, Mr Balls’ Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families (which, we think, puts her about third in the pecking order of that new department) thinks that the suggestion is “silly”.

And we agree with her. But she then drones on about “the need to get adults in communities to work to create and support better play environments for children and young people” and says that “setting up conflict between the generations is not the way forward”.

No indeed – but neither is a lot of meaningless talk. Which is, frankly,

all that we seem to have got out of Mr Balls and Ms Hughes so far. Early days it may be for this new department, but we do wish that they would cut the chat and get on with doing something to instill a bit of confidence in us that they are genuine in their desire to ensure that today’s youth and generations to come have somewhere safe to play, like convincing their colleagues that destroying open spaces, playing fields and green belt land in order to build thousands upon thousands of new homes is not the way forward.



Training Seminar – the review continued from front page

Well, to be honest we were a little disappointed at the relatively small number of delegates that attended the Day, and perhaps by going into some detail about what the event entailed we might sow a seed in the minds of the unconvinced and get more support next time. And there

will be a ‘next time’: we were suitably encouraged by the delegates’ overall response that it is clear that the subject has mileage for another Training Day – when, at our respondents’ suggestions, we shall try to include other issues such as health and safety in general and with

particular regard to playground equipment; multi-games equipment, and funding opportunities available to assist with equipment costs. And we’ll try to provide better lunches as well! Watch this space!

Obituary - Lieutenant Colonel Wingate Charlton OBE

Wingate Charlton, who died on 9th September 2007 aged 94, won a Distinguished Service Cross, one of America’s highest gallantry awards, while commanding B Squadron, the 8th King’s Royal Irish Hussars near Hamburg in April 1945. In 1936 he had seen active service in Palestine, while on secondment to the Transjordan Frontier Force and as ADC to King Abdullah of Jordan. Being a good Arabist, Wingate became one of the young squadron leaders of John Bagot Glubb “Pasha” in the Arab Legion in 1939. In the early 1950’s after attending Middle

East Staff College, he was appointed British Military and Air Attaché in Damascus, where he served during the Suez crisis in 1956.

After retiring from the Army in 1962, he worked for the Royal Humane Society for thirty years, first as Secretary and later as Deputy Chairman. He, his wife Angela and family settled in Great Canfield Park near Takeley. He became Deputy Lieutenant of the county from 1972 and was High Sheriff in 1976. He was President of Essex Playing Fields between 1978 and 1991. As

Chairman throughout these thirteen years, I recall with great pleasure his genuine interest in all we were striving to do. Often en route from the Royal Humane Society or St John’s Ambulance, his uniform from the latter would add some distinction, when he occasionally attended our Executive Committee meetings. His ideas were helpful and provocative. Wingate and Angela were enthusiastic supporters of Essex Playing Fields and were kind and generous hosts.

Best Kept Playing Fields Competition

Danbury Parish Council took the honours in our Best Kept Playing Fields competition this year when the results were announced at our AGM in October.

Their Dawson Memorial Field won Class 1, for playing fields serving a population of 2,500 or more, and Class 3 for children's playgrounds. And to round it off, the cricket ground situated within the Field was awarded a certificate of merit in Class 4 (cricket pitches).

As well as receiving shields and certificates, the Council also landed £500-worth of landscaping products and services from Billericay-based firm, Ground Control Ltd., sponsors of Class 1, and £350 of playground equipment from Wicksteed Leisure Ltd., who sponsor Class 3.

Parish Clerk, Margaret Saunders, said "We have had a good year in 2007: earlier in the year we won an award in the Best Village competition. Our only problem now is that we are running out of space in our little office to put all the trophies and certificates!

This is the second year in a row that Danbury has won Class 1.

"Last year we used our prize from Ground Control for the purchase and planting of a number of trees around the field, which obviously enhanced the facility to the point that we were successful again this year" said Margaret.

Other Class winners were Fyfield Sports and Social Club, who won Class 2 for playing fields serving communities of fewer than 2,500 and received a free safety and maintenance inspection of their facilities from RoSPA Playsafety Ltd.; Elmdon and Wenden Lofts Parish Council, whose cricket ground won Class 4 and £200-worth of products from Rigby Taylor Ltd; St Nicholas Primary School, Tillingham, who won Class 6 for special needs and school playgrounds and who receive a free facilities audit from Disability Essex, and the Buxton Trust, Theydon Bois, whose playing field renovation work during the year won Class 7 and £300 of equipment from Ernest Doe and Sons Ltd.

The final award, Class 5 for playing fields professionally maintained and managed by larger authorities and commercial organisations, went to Chelmsford

Borough Council for their Admirals Park. Chelmsford made almost a clean sweep of this Class in fact, since Chelmer Park was judged Runner-up, and other playing fields in the borough accounted for a further ten certificates of merit.

Our Patron, Lord Petre, and Chairman of Essex County Council, Cllr Gerard McEwen, presented the awards.

We had nearly 100 entrants this year, and we believe the standard is gradually increasing. Certainly the support we get from our sponsors makes it a competition well worth winning, and we are deeply grateful to them all for their continued support.



Mike Wood, vice chairman of Danbury Parish Council and Robin Dickens, Groundsman, pose with their shield and voucher with Chris Thompson of Wicksteed

Interactive Play Inspection Guide

Fields in Trust and our colleagues at Lincolnshire Playing Fields Association have combined to produce a CD offering interactive help in locating up to date information on the safe running of equipped play spaces.

The CD provides detailed information on risk assessment, routine inspections, play and amenity value, and disability access, and also has a "FAQs" section. It incorporates a logbook and can record your inspections, and is also a reference guide to EN1176 and 1177, enabling audits to be undertaken.

We believe it is a very useful and comprehensive package for anyone involved in providing or managing children's playgrounds and equipped play spaces, and you can order one through us for £20.00 by telephoning Malcolm Webb on our Helpline (01277 218005).

Valete

Two of our longest-serving Executive Committee members retired from office at our recent AGM: David Gwynne-James and Barry Watkinson.

David served as Chairman of EPFA from 1978 until 1991 when he stood down and took over as President from Lt Col Wingate Charlton. He stepped into the breach as Chairman once again in December 2004 and claims that this retirement is the final one.

Barry Watkinson served as Honorary Treasurer from 1985 until 1995. He too stepped into the breach when we were left without a treasurer due to circumstances beyond our control, serving from 2003 to 2007.

Both these officers, and their contributions to the smooth running of the EPFA, will be greatly missed.