

SAINTFIELD NEWS UPDATE

Issue 2

Sunday 21st June 2020

A SOURCE OF HELPFUL LOCAL INFORMATION

COMMUNITY PARK PLANNED FOR SAINTFIELD

Residents of Saintfield and district will soon be able to enjoy the benefits of a community heritage park, thanks to the efforts of the Saintfield Development Association, in close cooperation with the Saintfield Heritage Society and a generous donation from a benefactor in the United States.

The project to develop a park began in 2016 when it was confirmed that the long-awaited community centre would become a reality. The three-acre field adjoining the community centre was the site of a now derelict early 19th century windmill and presented an ideal site for a park, which was a much-needed facility in the village.

The SDA approached the owners of the field and protracted negotiations began to purchase the field. The funding was obtained through a very generous donation from David Moffett, a successful business executive with a well-known company in America. His family had links with Saintfield and Leggygowan dating back to the early 18th century. Members of his ancestral family, James and Isabella Maffett and children, are buried in the graveyard of the Church of Ireland in Saintfield.

The SDA applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to carry out the necessary feasibility studies on the field and the application was

approved. These studies have since been completed to the satisfaction of the HLF and have shown that there are no impediments for the field to be developed as a community heritage park.



The windmill stump in the windmill field.

These studies will also provide evidence for the necessary planning application for the change of use of the field from agricultural to community use. The consultants who carried out the feasibility studies of the field also compiled a list of proposals for the development and these can be seen on the SDA website discoversaintfield.com

The proposals include measures to obviate as much as possible any disruption or annoyance to neighbouring residents through noise or anti-social behaviour.

A public consultation on these proposals will be undertaken once the current pandemic restrictions are sufficiently eased. Following the consultation process, the SDA intends to raise the funds needed to implement the agreed proposals by

applying for suitable grants, as well as fund raising from the local community. The SDA has submitted a formal request to Newry, Mourne and Down Council to approve access to the park from

the rear of the community centre. Consideration of this has been delayed due to the constraints of the Covid-19 virus. The intention is to provide a first-class outdoor community asset for local people of all ages and backgrounds. The focus of the park will be on community heritage, where residents can exercise and relax in the outdoors.

In addition, explanatory panels will relate the stories

of the history and heritage of early Saintfield. These would include the stories of Francis Hutcheson and his impact on Thomas Jefferson and the early United States, the 1798 Rebellion and the Battle of Saintfield. Also included will be the industrial heritage around the site - the windmill, watermill and railway. These stories will appeal to both locals and visitors alike.

Other panels will tell of the emigration of families from Saintfield to the United States over the last 300 years, using the example of the three Maffett brothers who left Leggygowan for America, the first in 1777, followed by a further two brothers in 1784.

It is one of their descendants, David Moffett, who has made possible this precious community asset for Saintfield.

FROM THE CHAIR OF SDA



Martyn Todd, Chair of the Saintfield Development Association, writes that in 2005 Down District Council recognised the need in Saintfield for a town park. The Saintfield Town Regeneration Committee, (the fore-runner of the SDA), then chaired by the late Gerry Lowe, cooperated with Down District Council in seeking a suitable site for such a park. When, in 2013, Down District

Council bought the site and buildings for the new community centre it was clear that the field directly behind the community centre site was an option for an outdoor community facility. The owners of the field were approached by SDA and said they would be open to an offer for the field if the community centre ever materialised.

Eventually the new community centre was completed and so negotiations began in earnest. At around this time a benefactor, David Moffett, whose family emigrated to the USA from Saintfield in the late 18th century, contacted Saintfield Heritage Society to say he was impressed with their contribution to preserving the heritage of the Saintfield area and kindly donated a significant sum towards community heritage projects in Saintfield. Negotiations on behalf of SDA, kindly carried out by Peter Bowles, Solicitor, at no

charge, were further delayed by the Covid - 19 pandemic, but have now been successfully completed. The next steps are to raise the necessary funding to develop the field into a community park, where heritage stories can be told and local residents of all ages and backgrounds can meet in a safe, shared outdoor space for recreation, exercise and the enjoyment of wildlife.

Thanks are due to our benefactor, David Moffett, the Heritage Fund, who provided a grant towards the cost of the feasibility studies, the owners of the field who were willing to sell it for the benefit of the community, Saintfield Heritage Society chair, David Williams, and committee members, Catherine Seawright and Geoffrey Perrin. Working with me on the SDA team were Barbara Graham, Brian Gamble and Paul McGeown, who have put in many long hours on the project for over five years.

SDA COMPLETE FIRST AID COURSE



Members of Saintfield Development Association with their certificates following the completion of their first aid and defibrillator course which was held in March at the Saintfield Community Centre.

Jock McGowan was the instructor and the course was facilitated by the Department for Social Development's Small Grants for Volunteers scheme via the Limavady Community Development Initiative.

STREET CLEANING IN SAINTFIELD

Many residents of Saintfield have seen a team of SDA volunteers, led by Lawrence Murphy, lifting litter, sweeping up dirt and pulling weeds around the public areas of Saintfield. Although the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMD) has a responsibility to keep the place clean and tidy, their efforts have not been sufficient to maintain a good standard. For nearly five years SDA has been asking NMD to provide information about what cleaning is actually done by them in Saintfield, resorting in the end to submitting a Freedom of Information request in 2019.

As a result of this, SDA has learned that, because of recent resource problems, NMD has not been keeping adequate records of their street cleaning activities in Saintfield to provide the information requested. However, NMD has committed to keep such records for the period of April to September 2020 and to provide these records to SDA at the end of this six-month period.

SDA has also learned that the street cleaning that was carried out by the legacy Down District Council and the legacy Newry and Mourne District Council has yet to be harmonised in the new NMD Council. NMD is still operating according to the legacy arrangements, some four years after the merger. The result is that Saintfield, as part of the Down District legacy area, is receiving less cleaning than equivalent settlements elsewhere in the new

Council area. As examples, SDA believes that:

- the legacy Newry and Mourne area has around twice as many staff for street cleaning as the legacy Down District area
- the legacy Newry and Mourne area has over three times the number of mechanical sweepers as the legacy Down District area
- drivers of mechanical sweepers are often taken off this duty to cover absentee bin lorry drivers
- street cleaning in some areas of Newry is carried out on a weekly basis, whereas street cleaning in similar areas in Downpatrick is only carried out much less frequently, on an ad hoc basis.

SDA will continue to lobby NMD to give Saintfield its fair share of the Council's street cleaning resource. After all, Saintfield pays its fair share of rates.

If you would like to support this lobbying effort, contact your Rowallane councillors or write to the Council.

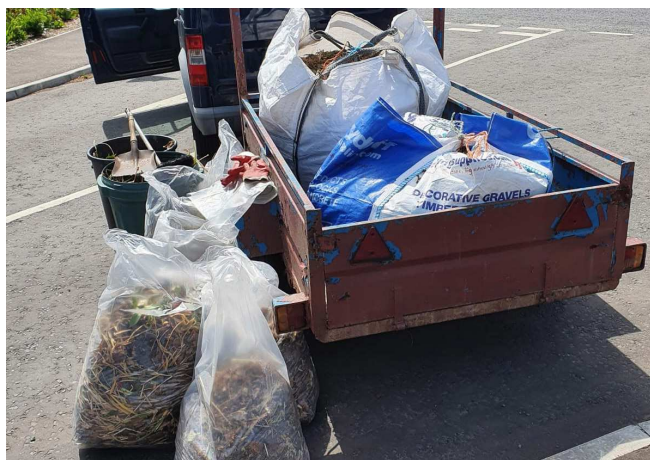
A campaign supported by a large number of residents will encourage the senior officials in NMD to bring about a fair allocation of resources right across the new Council area.

In the meantime, please give your support to Lawrence and his volunteer team.

You can do this by joining them or, if you don't have time to do this, by donating some funding to the SDA Green Team.

In the photograph below you can see just a fraction of the road dirt they have lifted and grass they have cut during the recent good weather.

On 4th June, 4.5 hours work resulted in 2x big bags, 6x small bags, 2x big bins and 2x small bins of material from flower bed clearances!



SUPPORT SAINTFIELD SHOPS!

Most of our local shops and businesses have suffered badly during the pandemic and for most an already difficult trading period has gone from bad to worse.

It is worthy of note how the majority of our Saintfield shops have gone the extra mile to help our residents during the continuing traumatic

period of the lock down. It makes you proud to be a part of the Saintfield community.

We residents must now do our part to fully support our traders as things gradually return to some semblance of normality. Without our traders our village would not survive, so the message is clear – SHOP LOCAL!



FOOTWAY COMPLETED AT LAST!

Residents of the area will have been pleased to note that the footway adjacent to the intersection of Station and Windmill Roads was at last completed at the end of March.

The SDA has been lobbying for a footway on this dangerous stretch of road for pedestrians for a long time. Thanks are due to Hugh Morgan of the Department for Infrastructure for getting the job done.



THE SAGA OF SAINTFIELD PUBLIC TOILETS

Rowallane Councillor Kathryn Owen advises that NMD Council has committed to repairing the public toilets on New Line just once more.

This was following an approach by all of our local councillors that it was worth one more shot. Council

will now obtain a quotation for the repair and it has been agreed that closed circuit television will be installed in the area of the toilets to act as both a deterrent and to record any acts of vandalism.

The toilets have been plagued by acts of wanton vandalism over the

past number of years and Council has neither the funds nor the will to continually repair them.

As well as vandalism, the toilets have also been the scene of drug deals in the past, which is not good as the toilets are adjacent to a children's play park.

THE SCOURGE OF DOG FOULING

Councillor Patrick Brown has been very strong on combatting the menace of dog fouling. Since the lock down, with more people at home, the incidence of pooch poop has multiplied, with some residents seemingly unconcerned at the hazard their ignorant behaviour causes. Unfortunately, our local enforcement officer cannot act without either video

evidence or other proof of offending. The latest development is that after much lobbying by our councillors, NMD Council has agreed to engage one more full-time enforcement officer, together with three seasonal officers. Council have also agreed to explore the possibility of DNA testing to try and curb the menace.



NMD District Council poster

FLY TIPPING

Fly tipping in the district was at an all-time high during the early weeks of the lock down, probably due to the closure of the recycling centres in the district and the utter disregard for the environment by a few selfish

individuals. Now that most recycling centres have re-opened, the number of offences has thankfully reduced. It is worth noting that householders are still responsible for the safe disposal of

their waste, even if they pay a contractor or others to cart it away. If that contractor should fly tip your rubbish, you will be held responsible for any penalty incurred. Be warned!