

COFTON LAKE CONSERVATION GROUP

Almost twelve months ago we became aware that the West Midlands Passenger Transport Sports and Social Club (the owners of Cofton Lake for the last 54 years) were proposing to sell the 17 acres of lake and surrounding land at a price of £330,000. A meeting was arranged to consider the possibility of local residents trying to purchase this site with a view of ensuring this lake and land was preserved. A group of residents volunteered to form a committee to represent the local community.

The "Committee" followed many lines of enquiry to obtain funding including Cofton Parish Council, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Lickey Hills Society, Heritage Lottery Trust, and the County Council. Many offers of help were available but no financial support was forthcoming. Discussions took place with John Earl & Son, Chartered Surveyors and an independent valuation was obtained at a cost of £750 following which the price was eventually reduced to £180,000.

Following a lot of negotiations with various bodies the Committee negotiated a potential purchase with the residents together with the Birmingham Anglers Association. On the 7th May the BAA wrote to say the enthusiasm for the acquisition of Cofton reservoir had diminished and they were no longer in a position to proceed.

There is a smaller fishing club interested who are willing to contribute £50,000 for the sole fishing rights. After lengthy discussions it was decided to offer the opportunity to purchase to a wider area within Cofton Hackett. 134 shares were needed at a cost of £1500 per share to cover the cost of the purchase of the lake and solicitor's fees. As the top 4 metres of water is owned by British Waterways any repairs to the dam wall or sluice gates is paid for by them. Any fishing club either renting or buying shares would be responsible for maintenance and public liability insurance. It is therefore envisaged that this £1500 would be a one off payment with no extra costs. 75 residents have already pledged financial commitment leaving 58 shares still available for an outright purchase by residents or 25 shares if the fishing club are invited to participate. We would stress that with only this amount of shares available they will be issued on a first come first serve basis. Residents not backing onto the lake and purchasing a share would be given a key and would have fishing rights and the right to walk around this beautiful local nature reserve, quite a unique feature in this day and age so close to a major city. Once all the share holders have contributed the offer will be closed. The committee realise there are many aspects of this purchase still to discuss but strongly feel that this beautiful feature in our area should be preserved not only for existing residents but for generations to come.

We would point out that these negotiations have taken up a considerable amount of time and the Committee have managed to stall the present owners from advertising this sale on the open market. We are, however, running out of time and a final decision is now needed. A final meeting has therefore been arranged in Cofton Village Hall on Sunday 27th June at 5.00 pm. We would welcome anyone with helpful and constructive views to come forward and assist us either as a member of the Committee or with professional expertise. We would envisage that cheques would be needed by the middle to end of July made payable to Cofton Lake Conservation Group. Should this sale fall through this money would of course be refunded.