

Planetarium plan at observatory

THE public are being asked for their views on plans to expand an observatory in Sutton and create a planetarium.

The planetarium would be open during the day and also available to schools, who could send classes for pupils to enhance their learning experience.

The exciting plans by the Mansfield and Sutton Astronomical Society for the Sherwood Observatory on Coxmoor Road will be put to funding bodies — and the public have also been asked to back the project through easy fundraising initiatives.

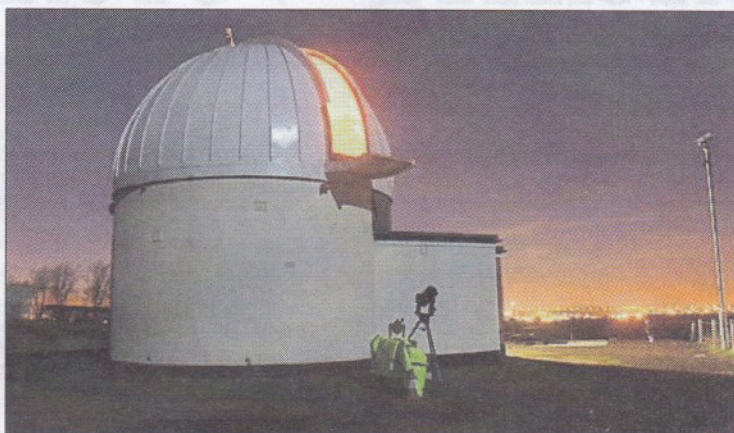
The planetarium, which would be built on land next to the observatory, would have seating for around 100 people.

A spokesman for the society, whose enthusiastic amateur astronomers aim to promote and advance public interest and education in astronomy, said: “We want to expand and enhance our astronomy education outreach activities.”

The society has written to all local schools asking if they would be interested in sending pupils and students to the planetarium.

It has also launched a public consultation on the plan through an online questionnaire. The results will be used to help to develop its plans and support funding applications.

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THE Sherwood Observatory. PHOTO: Phil Randall

Steve Wallace, planetarium project manager, said: “We want to expand and enhance our astronomy education outreach activities.”

“The more responses we get to our questionnaire, the greater chance we have of securing the funding”

The society already hosts many public open events — open evenings in the winter and solar observing days in the summer — and private group visits for Scouts, Cubs, Brownies and adult groups.

Twice-yearly, six-week basic astronomy courses are also held and can be booked by anyone interested in attending.

Around 2,000 visitors per year visit the observatory, but the new plans would increase the scope of the society’s public outreach.

The observatory building was built by the founders of the society on a voluntary basis. Building work started in 1972 and the observatory was officially opened by the then Astronomer Royal 1986, though it had been in use before then.

Much of the observatory was built using demolition material recovered from local pit closures.

The observatory dome houses a hand-built 24-inch Newtonian Reflecting Telescope. There are also several smaller telescopes that can be set up outside the main dome. The next open evening is on 27th January.

Further information on how to raise funds for the planetarium project and the questionnaire are at www.sherwood-observatory.org.uk