

FRIENDS OF KNOLLS WOOD
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
JULY 3RD 2016

PRESENT Clive Atkins, Maggie Cook, Rosemary Hewett, Jack Owens, Sylvia Williams, Taffy Williams, Anne Smart, Gary Peach, Claire Mills, Jenny Verney, Wilf Powell, Julia Powell, Chris Christoforou, David Parry, Jane Parry

APOLOGIES Jenny Monk, Roger Seldon, Mick Hewett, Pam Winfield, John Cook, Dave Manley
Jill Pick, Chris Pick.

Clive welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that he regards the AGM as a valuable opportunity to find out what people think about the work of the FoKW committee and to hear people's suggestions/comments.

MINUTES OF LAST AGM MEETING

- ***Management plan:*** The committee felt that the plan was a bit too generic and wanted it to be updated. As far as Gary is aware, the plan is now as up to date as possible.
- Paul Burgess has suggested the use of contractors to clear the holly in the wood but we have already done this ourselves.
- There are plans to fill in gaps in the holly hedge along Plantation Road. Gary explained that while doing this job, it will be necessary to cut the rhododendrons to a lower height. The work is to start this autumn.
- Jen said she thought that we should get Central Beds Council (CBC) to do more because there is too much work for us to do. We need to think of some tasks that CBC can carry out for us.
- The survey that was planned last year didn't take place.
- Strimmer course: CBC puts Greensand Trust volunteers on their list for these courses. We already have one qualified person on the committee and we have our own strimmer. We would like at least one other person to be trained.
- Chris did a survey of the wood earlier in the year and produced a report for us. Clive thanked Chris for this
- It was suggested that we earmark a task which we can delegate to some of Gary's volunteers.

Jen proposed and Claire seconded the acceptance of the 2015 AGM minutes.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Clive read out the objectives of the FOKW. One of the aims of the group is to work with the Greensand Trust (GST) and CBC to maintain the wood. Julia suggested we add "regeneration" to our aims. Clive agreed that this should be done. He then went on to outline the way the FoKW works. He stressed that we now call our work parties "volunteer sessions".

Claire has been seeking feedback from local people to find out why so few turn up to help at the volunteer sessions. She has found that people say they are too busy with the usual things - jobs and children and their various activities. She also suggested that we may be more successful if we try a different method of communication: for example, when people walk the woods with their dog they could try to engage other dog walkers in a conversation about the work of the FoKW and draw their attention to the notice boards. They could also give out a flyer. All agreed that a face-to-face conversation is probably more effective than simply distributing newsletters or leaflets.

It was agreed that it is not a good idea to hold volunteer sessions on special days – eg Father's Day or Mother's day - as this makes it even more difficult for people to find the time to help out. The committee will check the dates of important events in 2017 so that clashes are avoided. The following dates in 2017 should be avoided: 26th March – Mother's Day; 18th June - Father's Day.

Gary said that in the 3 years he has been our GST ranger he has noticed that the numbers attending the volunteer sessions have increased significantly. Gary was asked how many volunteers he can manage. The maximum he can manage is 30.

Children's Event - the attendance over the past couple of years has been very good. We have found that a mid-week session in the autumn half term is popular. Doverly Down provides activities for the school children, like making bug hotels and bird feeders, so it may be a good idea to tie in with the local schools in addition to our annual Children's Event.

What publicity is most effective? Notice boards aren't as effective as face-to-face conversations. Do we collect email addresses next time we do a fundraising activity? The internet is a cheap and easy way to communicate.

Clive is keen to find out if the FoKW is doing the right sort of work in Knolls Wood which is not a formal garden but a natural wood. The one part of the wood which is unexploited is the south west corner. The job of putting wood chips down on the slippery muddy paths is a task we could ask CBC to do.

Regenerating Monkey Puzzle trees. It is estimated that there are between 60 and 70 in Knolls Wood. The young ones are growing well in the wood but a number of the trees in people's gardens have died. We should offer people Monkey Puzzle saplings to plant in their gardens.

Some people object to the clearing of the holly because it results in big gaps in the wood. Others, however, feel that where the holly has been cleared the Monkey Puzzles are thriving.

Taffy mentioned the problems with squirrels eating the trees. Can they be controlled? CBC thinks that they are so vastly overpopulated that the minute you get rid of some, others will take their place. Chris suggested that a goshawk would do the job of controlling the squirrels. He has friends who are falconers who are always looking for land to fly their birds. Goshawks are killing machines which focus on their prey and they are designed to go into woodland. We should investigate this as a possible way forward. We should discuss this in committee and contact Paul Burgess about it. Chris said that in the wild Goshawks do this every day. Goshawks wouldn't endanger dogs or cats. This option – culling the squirrels in a natural way – should be given serious consideration.

Clive referred again to Chris's excellent report on the wood and a vote of thanks was given.

WEBSITE

Dave Manley, who communicated with John Foreman about the website, is standing down from the committee. The website is excellent for archive material, although it is acknowledged that not all of the areas of the website are of good quality because we don't always keep refreshing it. Facebook and website should be working together. Content is needed - pictures with text. Chris Christoforou is providing pictures and text for the website.

It was agreed that there should be one point of contact between the committee and John Foreman. Sam (Sylvia's daughter) tries to put something on the Facebook page every week. Sam has provided some figures regarding the use of the Facebook page. It seems it is being viewed by 224 people, 72% of whom are women.

Clive requested views from the floor and asked for volunteers who would like to help with the website.

Claire, who already helps Sam administer the Facebook page, offered to be our website contact. The website has to be up-to-date and relevant so we need to be sending John Foreman material all the time so that he has items in reserve. Maggie will tell John that Claire is the main contact person. We also need to improve the quality of photos and accompany them with text. Chris offered his pictures from his survey and pictures of the wild flowers he has taken.

It was agreed that when we do the next request for donations, we should ask for email addresses so that we can cut down on the number of printed newsletters and leaflets. If people are not willing to give us their email address then there's nothing we can do about that, but it is worth a try.

All expressed their gratitude to John Foreman who continues to maintain and improve our website pro bono.

TREASURER'S REPORT

In Roger's absence, Maggie distributed a copy of the accounts for the year 2015-16 and read out the Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer's figures showed that we had minimal income in the year 2015-16. This is not a significant concern as we still maintain a healthy balance in our accounts in relation to our expected annual outgoings. The majority of our expenditure was spent on communication via the website and newsletters. With changes in media, for example a Facebook page, we probably need to continually review the cost effectiveness of expenditure in this area.

Other expenditure was mostly on gifts or donations. The group can only exist with the help of a number of people, and we are extremely grateful to all who help us. Particular mention should go to Frank Grover who resigned from the Committee this year after making an outstanding contribution including major construction of two noticeboards and an Owl Box.

Taffy proposed that the accounts be accepted.

All expressed thanks to Roger for his hard work as our Treasurer.

ELECTION OF NEW COMMITTEE for 2016 - 17

Claire proposed Clive as Chairman. **Clive** said that he would be willing to stand again unless someone else wanted to take on the job of **Chairman**

Sylvia proposed Maggie. **Maggie** is willing to stand again as **Secretary**

Chris proposed **Roger** as **Treasurer**. Roger is willing to stand again.

The following committee members are also willing to stand again:

Mick Hewett, Jenny Monk, Jack Owens and Sylvia Williams. Chris Christoforou volunteered to continue as our Consultant Naturalist and Becci Mosley would like to continue to help with Volunteer Sessions, leaflet delivery, Children's Events and other such events but will not attend committee meetings.

Claire Mills offered to become the (sole) member of the committee with particular responsibility for communicating with John Foreman regarding the website and with Sam regarding the Facebook page. She was warmly welcomed on to the committee by the Chairman and other committee members.

AOB

- How do we measure our success? Some of our success can be measured by the number of people at our volunteer sessions or children at the annual Children's Event. We hope that by distributing as many leaflets/newsletters as possible, more people will be aware of us and the work we do; they may then be more inclined to attend the events we organise.
- Should we try to be included in the publicity in the community leaflets which are delivered to households free of charge? Or our local newspaper? Facebook is a closed group but the website is open to everyone. It was agreed that it could be worthwhile putting an item about Knolls Wood in the local paper and people who are passionate about such things might come along to help out on the volunteer sessions. When we distribute information by email we can ask the recipients to forward the information on to their friends and other people who may be interested.
- Should we apply for more funding?
- CBC didn't like the idea of putting name plaques on trees. It was noted that the National Trust places a name plaque **in front** of the trees to avoid damage to the trees.
- Tree planting – recently we have acquired trees free.
- Owl boxes – Chris said they are easy to make. Jen suggested that we consider making owl boxes at The Children's Event. Taffy asked about the expense of materials.
- Gary reported that four lads had created a sandy bike jump in the wood. Gary has put notices up saying that no bikes are allowed in the wood. Frank has filled in the holes.
- Chris pointed out that there are mining bees in that area because it is very sandy and they could be disturbed by bikes
- It was suggested that we might consider asking families to plant plants in the wood. Gary pointed out that we shouldn't do this
- Because Clive is involved in an event management organisation, the AGM invite went out to 3 million people. Luckily they didn't all come!!

The business of the meeting was followed by an excellent talk entitled "Butterflies of Bedfordshire" given by Wilf Powell, Chairman of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society (BNHS).