



FRIENDS OF RIDGE WOOD

Informal Meeting and AGM

Community Meeting Room, Tesco Extra, Yate

Start time: 7.30pm

Wednesday 10th May 2017

PRESENT:

Sarah Hardcastle	Chair
David Barlow	Secretary / webmaster
Geoff Millard	Treasurer
Emma Morrison	Publicity
Richard Aston	South Glos Council
Tim Fairhead	Avon Wildlife Trust
Dianne Millard	
Bob Evans	
Alison Hosken	

Apologies:

Jill Hows
Edward and Jeanette Wrighton
Pauline Wilson
Roger McLean

1. **Introductions / apologies**
2. **Minutes from last meeting**

Minutes circulated, agreed.

3. Annual General Meeting

Chair's report 2016-17

Sarah summarised the group's activities over the past year. The committee structure has remained the same.

Public events during the year have included Forest Fun Time, a bat walk and a wildflower walk. Forest fun time was again a great success and attracted lots of families to the woodland. A couple of new adult members signed up to the mailing list on the day. The bat walk was good and well attended, but fewer bats were seen compared with the last time this event was held. The wildflower walk very informative and did attract some new members of the public to attend, but overall does not seem as popular as the evening chorus event; it is worth noting that the scheduling seemed to clash with a rotary club event we weren't aware of.

Workdays were held in August, September, October, November, January, February, March and April. Tasks completed have included litter picking, vegetation clearance, coppicing, dead hedging and clearing Spanish bluebells from the woodland – another excellent display of bluebells this year and very few remaining Spanish bluebells. We also planted over 60 new trees within the woodland thanks to the TCV “I Dig Trees” promotion – most of the new trees appear to be doing well despite some of the canes and spirals being removed. Several new volunteers have attended recent workdays, including some who have come back more than once which is really encouraging and will increase the amount that we are able to achieve. We may be able to plan some more ambitious work during the next winter season if this increased attendance continues.

The January work morning comprised our woodland management training session with Anna Brunton from the Forest of Avon trust. This was a very good session and covered coppicing techniques, dead hedging, tree planting, ash dieback and safe use of tools. Anna did mention that sessions are usually longer so we could consider inviting Anna back for a follow-up, perhaps a more practical session next time.

At this point, Richard summarised the council’s works in the woodland this year, and planned work for the next work season (see appendix).

Other achievements this year: the group ran a photography competition to encourage submission of photos of the woodland for our website. We received a good number of entries (50 in total, though several people submitted multiple photos), and were able to display the winning entries on our website and facebook page. The facebook page is going well, but could do with more likes and shares

Thanks to all committee members for their hard work over the past year. The main aims for the group going forward are ongoing woodland work, a manageable number of events and continuing to safeguard the site for wildlife and the local community.

Treasurer’s report (GM)

An accounts summary was circulated. The current balance of the group account is £942.11. Expenditure items included fees paid to the leaders of our events, our insurance policy, website hosting costs, photography competition prizes and shortfall to fund tool purchase (the majority being funded by an SGC grant). Income was generated from donations at our events, interest on the account, donations via the Waitrose Green Token scheme and a donation from Hanson’s to help finance Forest Fun Time. Accounts were recently audited and found to be accurate.

Secretary’s report (DB)

There are currently 81 members on the mailing list. This includes 4 new contacts acquired this year; 1 contact moved away from the area and 1 contact email deactivated. One of the new members resulted from the annual newsletter.

The website continues to receive regular monthly access. Taking the News & Events page as a marker, this received an average of 140 hits per month. The peak months were July (191) and August (166).

Nominations for committee posts

Chair – nomination of Sarah Hardcastle to continue; proposed by Geoff, seconded by Richard – all agreed

Vice-chair – nomination to continue (in absentia) Jill Hows; proposed by Sarah, seconded by Emma – all agreed

Treasurer – nomination to continue Geoff Millard; proposed by David, seconded by Sarah – all agreed

Secretary / webmaster – nomination to continue David Barlow; proposed by Richard, seconded by Dianne – all agreed

Publicity – nomination to continue Emma Morrison; proposed by Dianne, seconded by Richard – all agreed

Regular Friends of Ridge Wood Meeting – chaired by Sarah

4. Matters Arising

- Newsletter: This is now complete and available on the website. Copies have been distributed to the new housing development adjacent to Waitrose; JH has also distributed some copies within Chipping Sodbury close to the woodland. SH has volunteered to take any remaining printed copies to the tourist information centre in Chipping Sodbury for interested members of the public to pick up. It was also suggested that the newsletter be emailed as an attachment to the FORW mailing list members – all agreed this was a good idea.

Actions: SH, DB

- Lockup relocation: Since the last meeting, we have confirmed that Hanson's would not object to the lockup being moved into the woodland just inside the top gate, providing it is made to look more visually appealing (e.g. with a coat of green paint). The container and proposed site have been measured and there is sufficient space. However, Richard has recently contacted Louise Pullen to enquire whether the container could be relocated to the car park just beyond the gate, as this would remove the need to level the ground and would therefore reduce cost. It would also mean that there would be CCTV coverage to improve security. He will let us know the outcome of these discussions. If we do need to fund moving the lockup to inside the wood, RA knows a local contractor we could approach, and we would consider obtaining grant funding to do so.

Actions: RA, SH

- 5 year woodland management plan: Rupert Higgins has completed the survey work in preparation for this - RA will liaise with John Morris about the next steps and will let SH know if any input from the group would be helpful.

Actions: RA

5. Events

- The wildflower walk was felt to be successful – Rupert Higgins was once again an excellent guide. It was encouraging that he pointed out a number of new plant species making a comeback in the grassland area at the top of the woodland since it was recently cut.
- The owl prowl, led by Ian McGuire, has now been confirmed for Wednesday 20th September.
- Unfortunately, despite recently chasing this, SH has yet to hear back from the Cotswold Fungus Group regarding whether they could lead a fungi foray in the wood in the Autumn. TF suggested we could consider contacting BREC (Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre) as they have surveyors who would be able to lead this event. If this is unsuccessful, we will just run the Owl prowl as a single event. As previously discussed, we will not run Forest Fun Time this year.
- TF has kindly given us an updated list of press contacts for publicising events, and TF / RA also suggested the HIVE newsletter produced by SGC as another place to advertise events.

Action: SH, EM (publicising events)

6. Work programme

We discussed whether to hold any work mornings during the summer. Tasks which could be completed would include digging out bamboo, ride edge management and putting new stone down onto the paths, as well as litter clearance. As some key members were missing from the meeting tonight, SH will send out a doodle poll to try to find a suitable date in July / early August for this.

Provisional dates were agreed for our winter work programme for the rest of 2017 as follows:

Sunday 17th September

Sunday 15th October

Sunday 19th November

It was recognised that not everyone present could make all of these dates, but they were felt to be the best available.

Action: SH, all (attending work mornings where possible), DB (website), EM (publicity)

7. AOB

- RA received a recent email from the Yate and Sodbury Voice publication inviting submission of articles. We agreed that a good time to submit an article would be around August in advance of our Autumn/winter work programme, to promote the work of the Friends and publicise the upcoming work morning dates. EM and SH will work on this together.
- It was felt that a follow up Woodland management training session with Anna Brunton would be a good idea, perhaps for early 2018. SH will liaise with her to find out if this is feasible.
- SH raised the issue of the SGC volunteer agreement, and whether it might now be possible for the group to sign this, which would avoid the need to pay for external insurance. RA thinks that these agreements are issued annually in April, so would probably need to renew for a further year and then consider signing the agreement next year, hopefully after additional woodland training. To discuss again at a future meeting.

- TF gave a vote of thanks to JH for her help in identifying the Spanish Bluebells. In addition, all present wished to thank TF for his time in helping with this.
- RA advised that this year's SGC Volunteers' celebration event is likely to take place in late September at Grimsbury Community Farm – further details to follow.
- AH enquired as to the status of the group i.e. is it a charity? This is because her employer will pay £10 per volunteer hour to charitable organisations. RA confirmed that we are not a charity (in common with the vast majority of Friends groups), but may qualify for this scheme as a voluntary group. AH will check on this.
- A newly created path has been noticed, located just up from the Greenways Rd entrance to the woodland. RA believes the plan is for this to eventually link up with Ridge Wood, and will enquire about this.

Action: EM, SH, AH, RA

8. Date of next meeting

- This was provisionally agreed as Monday 11th September 2017; GM will check if the meeting room is available on this date.

Action: GM

Appendix

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL COUNTRYSIDE OFFICER REPORT

Short Summary: 2016 - 17

Volunteer works completed

- Community Events
- Woodland work mornings:
August – Forest Fun Time
September – clear snowdrop bank of bramble and unwanted regeneration
October – Coppicing / woodland management
November – Coppicing / woodland management
January – Woodland management training event with Forest of Avon
February – Planting of hedgerow plants
March – Litter pick / clean up site
April: Spanish Bluebell removal / litter cleared / maintenance of young trees / survey of Spanish bluebells.

Woodland management

- Woodland management works completed by SGC have been completed as specified within the management plan. Winter works this year focused

on felling dangerous trees / removal of dead wood in trees overhanging woodland paths.

- Complete coppicing works started by FoRW
- Ride management along the paths continues to encourage woody shrubs, bramble and nettles to grow, ideal for our native butterflies.
- Clearing grassland area to south of site above former cement plant (now housing)
- Felling of poplars – associated with housing re-development at Quarry Road entrance
- Consideration of new location for container lock up (not resolved)

Site infrastructure

Gates / fencing / Steps checked – January 2017.

Annual work programme to aid volunteers for 2017/18

Winter works (Sept – March):

Clear scrub / bramble from snowdrop area

Coppicing of hazel stools (on-going)

Any tree / shrub planting (central area of woodland – steep banks)

Summer (May – September):

Cut back encroachment over main path / stone to steps

All Year:

- Dwarf Bamboo – start programme on on-going clearance – a tough job!
- Litter clearance
- Cutting back of undergrowth over main path