



# FRIENDS OF RIDGE WOOD

## Informal Meeting and AGM

Community Meeting Room, Tesco Extra, Yate

Start time: 7.30pm

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018

|          |                  |                       |
|----------|------------------|-----------------------|
| PRESENT: | Sarah Hardcastle | Chair                 |
|          | David Barlow     | Secretary / webmaster |
|          | Geoff Millard    | Treasurer             |
|          | Emma Morrison    | Publicity             |
|          | Richard Aston    | South Glos Council    |
|          | Tim Fairhead     | Avon Wildlife Trust   |
|          | Bob Evans        |                       |

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Apologies: | Jill Hows      |
|            | Dianne Millard |
|            | Roger McLean   |
|            | Sue Walker     |

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 a wildflower walk, an owl prowl and an evening chorus walk. The wildflower walk was again very informative, and it was nice to see many species of plants thriving in the woodland and in the meadow area at the top of the site. The owl prowl was good and is always popular – unfortunately no owls seen or heard once again, but it was encouraging to note that Tawny owls nested in the woodland last year. The evening chorus walk was slightly less popular this year than on previous occasions, but was also very good although more expensive to run than our other events due to Ed's fee.

Workdays were held in 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. A few Spanish bluebells / hybrids do remain (see later).

The January work morning comprised another woodland management training session with Anna Brunton from the Forest of Avon trust. This was a very good session, more practical than last year, and covered coppicing, tree felling and dead-hedging techniques as well as tree identification.

Richard summarised the council's works in the woodland this year; these have been less extensive than in previous years due to lack of funds. A tree survey has been carried out, and there is a plan to coppice some of the larger stools with power tools, so that FORW can do the remaining smaller ones. Unfortunately this year the main footpath ride edge and meadow area at the top of the woodland will not be cut.

Other achievements this year: Ridge Wood has been adopted as a Site of Nature Conservation interest by South Glos council which could provide a degree of protection in future. Still active publicity of the group via our facebook page, website and a number of local publications.

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

### **Treasurer's report (GM)**

The current balance of the group account is £892.09, which includes the £400 donation from Hanson's towards Forest Fun Time (which will be spent in August). One major expense is the TCV insurance policy, which should not be required now that the Volunteers' Agreement with SGC is in place. However RA pointed out that this agreement will not provide insurance cover for tools, so a separate (hopefully cheaper) policy will be needed for this. Other expenditure items include fees for event leaders. We have agreed to charge for attendance at events where the leader charges a fee (having previously invited voluntary donations), however the Evening chorus walk still made a net loss. Any large items of expenditure or defined projects could be funded through a local grant application if needed.

### **Secretary's report (DB)**

There are currently 82 members on the mailing list. This includes 3 new contacts acquired this year; 1 contact moved away from the area and 1 contact email de-activated. One of the new members resulted from the volunteer centre at Yate library.

It was acknowledged that a large majority of those on our mailing list are not "active members" (ie. They do not attend meetings / work mornings or other events). Each year DB invites all members to let him know if they no longer wish to subscribe, but in view of the new GDPR rules this year an email will be sent asking people to "opt-in"

to continuing to receive our communications. However a reminder will be sent in the event of no response before removing people from our list.

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 Richard, seconded by David – all agreed

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

**Treasurer** – nomination to continue Geoff Millard; proposed by Emma, seconded by Richard – all agreed

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

**Publicity** – nomination to continue Emma Morrison; proposed by Sarah, seconded by David – all agreed

### **Regular Friends of Ridge Wood Meeting – chaired by Sarah**

#### **4. Matters Arising**

- SGC volunteers' agreement: RA confirmed this is now in place. But, as above, does not cover insurance for tools.
- Lockup relocation: RA confirmed that planning permission is not required as this is permitted development. Hanson's should be able to provide crushed stone for the footing. SH will approach Alan Coward and sons (local firm) for the cost of moving. RA will approach SGC contractor Chris Belcher re: the cost of preparing the base. It is acknowledged that the container will be more vulnerable to vandalism / break-ins in its new location, but as it is not serving a useful purpose at present, this risk is felt to be acceptable.
- Pruning saws discussed last time have now been purchased.
- First aid training: JH has recertified. GM will ask DM to let us know when her training will expire. RA is also first-aid trained.
- Funding / sponsorship: Hanson's have kindly made a £400 donation once again to sponsor Forest Fun Time. We are on the list for the Waitrose Green token scheme again, but may have a long wait as lower priority is given to those who have received funding previously.
- Bluebell conservation work: TF and JH kindly undertook a survey of the bluebells in the woodland following the last work morning. There are several clumps of hybrid flowers which still need dealing with, plus an additional patch of white flowers at the northern Jubilee Gardens entrance (Pauline Wilson has advised that these look like an allium species, probably escaped from a garden and should be removed). JH has all GPS locations. We have all noticed increased dumping of garden waste in the woodland since the green bin charge was introduced. Some of the bluebell clumps identified will need to be poisoned rather than dug up due to their location. As we have no remaining work mornings this spring, this work will need to be completed ad hoc. TF will liaise with JH to see if they can do another session. SH will be available in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of June, and GM has also volunteered to help. Any

remaining clumps can be dealt with next year. Unfortunately SGC are unable to help due to funding issues.

Actions: SH, DB, DM, RA, TF, JH

## 5. Events

- The next event will be Forest Fun Time on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> August. This requires as many people as possible to come along and help on the day, both for setting up and running the event (a minimum of 6). 2 forest schools practitioners have been booked for the day – SH needs to double-check whether their costs have changed. Suggested activities include leaf printing and woodland games (e.g. a giant kerplunk made from pinecones). SH has been thinking of different ideas for the trail this year e.g. collecting letters to make up a word or phrase. Provisionally to hold a work morning the Sunday prior to the event (19<sup>th</sup> August) to do a litter pick. RA confirmed he can attend and bring the storm kettle. JH has volunteered to purchase refreshments. SH will put together a list of volunteers who have confirmed they are available in order to facilitate more detailed planning. We discussed charging for the event, but felt it would be better to keep it free given the sponsorship that has now been secured: refreshment costs should be largely covered by donations on the day.
- Sarah has not had any reply from Rich Wright regarding a Fungi foray in the Autumn. She has emailed the Cotswold fungus group again, but they did not respond last year. Ideas for an alternative Autumn event were discussed, and another moth discovery evening was thought to be the best option, possibly in late September. SH will contact Ray Barnett to ascertain his availability.

Action: SH, all

## 6. Work programme

Provisional dates were agreed for our winter work programme for the rest of 2018 as follows:

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November

Priorities for the rest of this year will include more coppicing along the back of Dorset Way. TF also highlighted that in other woodlands in the area known to have Ash dieback present (as in Ridge Wood), active planting of alternative tree species is being planned. Therefore we will consider planting some trees as part of our winter work programme this year (possibly to be obtained through the TCV promotion or funded by Hanson's as previously discussed). This could take place at any time between November and January. Although the dead hedges we constructed to block off unofficial paths within the woodland were destroyed quite quickly, RA suggested that continuing to block off these paths would be worthwhile to prevent erosion, perhaps with an explanatory notice as to the purpose of the work.

Actions: DB (updating website), All (attending work mornings where possible)

## 7. AOB

- EM asked about the field area at the back of Dorset Way adjoining the woodland. RA confirmed that this is not part of the wood, but that it is good habitat and hence should be left alone if possible. The fence separating the area from the wood is broken, but there are no funds available to fix this at present.
- Re-gravelling of the steps was again discussed. GM will go back to the Environment agency to enquire about achieving this via a corporate volunteering day.
- A couple of FORW members submitted forms in support of a local green space designation for Ridge Wood. RA advised that this scheme recognises quality green spaces locally which have community importance. If the wood receives this designation, it will provide a measure of protection in the future against development on the site.

Action: GM

#### **8. Date of next meeting**

- This was provisionally agreed as Wednesday 5th September 2018; GM will check if the meeting room is available on this date.

Action: GM