

Fordingbridge Conservation Group

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 27th September 2022 at the United Reformed Church Hall, Fordingbridge

Attendance: Sue Bennett, Edward Hale, Robert & Glynis Herridge, Jane Ward, Richard White, Marion Wingrove, Amelia Tolley.

The meeting began at 19:35.

1. Welcome to the meeting

Jane chaired the meeting and welcomed members to the AGM.

Apologies for absence

Ian Ruddock.

2. Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting

The Minutes of the AGM held on 28th September 2021 were agreed.

Matters arising

Re item 8 concerning Peter Tullett's photographic record and file of correspondence, Sue reported that she had not yet met with his daughter Amanda.

3. Vice-Chair's Report

In addition to her verbal report, Jane circulated a printed copy, of which the following is a summary.

Clearance work in and around the pond has continued, and 8 new bird boxes and 2 bat boxes have been put up. At least two of the bird boxes have been occupied by blue tits and great tits. Ash die-back disease is continuing to progress.

Water samples taken in Spring 2022 were found to contain encouragingly low levels of nitrates and phosphates, a great improvement on the high levels seen in 2017. This and the sinking of three more tanks as summer refuges for amphibians and insects to complete their life cycles has resulted in good numbers of insects, other invertebrates and some young newts, and at least one frog was seen. Flote grass and bindweed in the pond was cut back, allowing *Persicaria* and bur marigolds to flourish, and more marginal plants have been added.

The wildflower bank is increasing in diversity, assisted by yellow rattle to discourage grasses, although teasels and ox-eye daisies need to be kept under control. Some holly bushes along the bank by Normandy Way were cut back to improve light for spring flora including bluebells, and further coppicing of hazel is planned for the same reason. Bluebells, daffodils and snowdrops in the woodland areas are spreading, and wild garlic has been planted on the north side of the pond. A hibernaculum for overwintering reptiles and amphibians is to be built in a sunnier spot.

Contacts with members of the local community were enhanced by a successful open day at the peak bluebell time at the end of April and a stall at the Damerham Show, where Sue's Freddie-the-Frog game attracted youngsters and their parents.

Jane thanked the volunteers who made all this possible. Her full Report is available on the web site¹ and by request.

¹ https://fordingbridgeconservation.uk/_media/fcg/agm/fcg_annual_report_2022.pdf

4. Future plans for Bishop's Pond

Jane reported that we have been surveying the Pond area for tasks that need action, and listed more seed for the wildflower bank just inside the entrance gate, including Yellow Rattle to reduce the growth of grasses, continuing with clearing undergrowth where this threatens areas of wildflowers such as bluebells, clearing a few dead shrubs possibly killed by the summer drought, and building a hibernaculum for over-wintering reptiles and amphibians.

Jane also mentioned that another batch of small bare-root hedgerow trees and shrubs may be available, with some possible choice of species. Some are needed for the double row at the far end, and in places along Normandy Way. Fifty should be sufficient, preferably delivered at a suitable time for planting. Sue reported that the Woodland Trust are also offering trees.

At the beginning of next year we plan to carry out work to increase light levels to benefit the ground flora by reducing the preponderance of shady areas: more hazel coppicing, especially near the bluebell patches, coppicing of excess dogwood in areas including near the inflow, and controlling the height of hawthorn and blackthorn where they are blocking a lot of light.

Around the pond itself some birches overhanging the water need cutting back. Amelia suggested putting some gravel in the plastic tubs to provide better refuge opportunities, and we need to reduce the amount of duckweed and especially *Azolla* to improve gaseous exchange and so reduce the chance of anaerobic conditions caused by leaves rotting in the bottom of the tubs, as well as making the tubs more accessible to visiting amphibians, water-beetles, etc. We might experiment with floating plastic rings to keep areas free from duckweed.

Sue mentioned the extensive stacks of dead wood as a habitat for beetles, fungi, etc. Richard mentioned the desirability of finding a new swarm of honey bees for the bee-hive and the possibility for using some of the smaller branches and twigs to make nest sites ("bee hotels") for solitary bees, although there may already be sufficient suitable nesting places for the latter. Jane will contact the lady [name ???] who provided the previous swarm to let her know we would like another if one becomes available.

Amelia suggesting making contact with a group of volunteers active around Salisbury (Riverfly) and will try to find out more.

5. Treasurer's Report

Edward reported that the Nationwide account had been closed as they no longer support community groups, and a NatWest account had been opened in its place. A breakdown of income and expenditure showed a balance of £709.11, £19.58 less than last year.

Publicity report

(This is an additional item not on the Agenda, but too important to relegate to Any Other Business.)

Sue has been providing excellent information and working party dates to local publications including the Forest Journal, Link magazine, Ringwood & Fordingbridge News, Focus, etc., but it's a matter of chance what material is actually published. She might try Woodgreen and other local magazines.

Paying for an advertisement is expensive, so free publicity is useful, including our Facebook page and web-site². The Facebook group "Fordingbridge Our Town"³ is a place where we can make our activities known to others. Sue said that Ringwood & Fordingbridge News often publishes items about local history, and Richard wondered whether Fordingbridge Museum might be able to provide information on our group to visitors. Sue conceded that we are in competition with Fordingbridge Greener Living⁴, at least for people's attention, if not in what we actually do, and noted that we had tried contacting specific

² <https://fordingbridgeconservation.uk>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fordingbridgeourtown>

groups such as sixth-form and college students. This led to a discussion of how to convert people's interest in what we are doing into the provision of actual help. Sue said we should make it clear that people are free to look around while working parties are in progress. Other ideas for publicity suggested by both Sue and Amelia included providing information at a food stall at a future event to encourage helpers, getting people interested in particular tasks or skills (e.g. coppicing, and emphasising the benefits for physical and mental health.

6. Appointment of the Management Team

The existing Team was re-elected unopposed, as follows: Jane Ward (Chair), Edward Hale (Treasurer), Richard White (Minutes Secretary) and Sue Bennett (Publicity). Amelia offered to help with Facebook and the web-site.

7. Working Party Frequency and Schedule

Festive food followed by tea will be provided (after working for an hour) at the last meeting this year on Saturday 17th December 2022. It was agreed to continue with the pattern of three meetings per month on the first Tuesday of the month followed by the Saturday 11 days later and the Sunday 8 days after that. The following dates were agreed (all from 2 to 4 p.m.): Tuesday 3rd, Saturday 14th, Sunday 22nd January 2023; Tuesday 7th, Saturday 18th, Sunday 26th February; Tuesday 7th, Saturday 18th, Sunday 26th March. Further dates will be discussed before the next Team meeting.

8. Any Other Business

Amelia reported that the Environment Agency is starting a small network to monitor biodiversity at randomly chosen sites in the Wessex area, and will try to find out more.

Edward mentioned a scoring system for taking biodiversity, for example in Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) sites, into consideration in planning assessments and zoning. Jane said that Hampshire County Council had conducted a survey in 2009 to establish Bishop's Pond's SINC status. She also mentioned that builders assess biodiversity using techniques such as looking for newt DNA when a pond is dry.

Edward asked whether we need to reinstate the use of a form for volunteers to sign to show that they agree to certain conditions, but Jane felt this wasn't necessary for a small group such as ours.

Jane closed the meeting at 20:45. Minuted by Richard White.