

FRIENDS OF KNOLLS WOOD
AGM JUNE 15 2011

PRESENT: Helen Aldridge, John Aldridge, Clive Atkins, Dave Cheesman, Ann Cheesman, John Cook, Maggie Cook, John Creasey, Frank Grover, Mick Hewett, Joan Kiddle, Peter Kiddle, Dave Manley, George Monk, Jenny Monk, Chris Pick, Jill Pick, Alexe Rose, Kathy Saunders, Mike Saunders, Ray Smith, Jim Taylor, Daniel Wiedemann

APOLOGIES: Jack Owens, Toni Seldon

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Roger Seldon, standing chairman, opened the meeting by describing the history of The Friends of Knolls Wood (FOKW). The organisation started life as "The Knolls Wood Action Group" in 1985 when it was formed to lodge an appeal against a compulsory purchase order for Knolls Wood. Roger emphasised that much has happened since 1985 and it's thanks to a lot of people that we can continue to enjoy the wood in 2011.

Roger wished to put on record our gratitude to Victor Jones for all his work. Victor, who became Chairman of The Knolls Wood Association in 2003, worked tirelessly for the organisation up until 2011. Roger praised Victor's energy, enthusiasm and sociable nature, all qualities which made for a very motivational chairman.

There followed a pictorial report of the year's achievements under the headings:

- Maintenance of the woods
- Educational activities
- Social activities

Roger reminded us that Knolls Wood is a living environment and we are faced with the fact that trees won't last for ever. As a result, a lot of the work of the FOKW has involved replacing trees which are dying. This has been a challenging task particularly in this dry spell. Some of the trees have suffered stress from the drought and some are being swamped by brambles and rhododendron. It is good that we are renewing the monkey puzzle trees, some of which have taken very successfully.

He went on to describe other events, such as the joint Greensand Trust (GST)/FOKW Children's Event. During the Bug Lab and other activities, children have been learning about their environment; hopefully, through their enjoyment of the natural world around them, we may have some future naturalists. Roger also mentioned the excellent work of former committee member, Tony Green, who recently moved away from the area.

Among other photos, there was a record of the planting of the oak tree on April 29th, the day of the Royal Wedding. Roger expressed his thanks to those who gave of their time and hard work; it is heartening to see everyone getting involved and working

together to complete the task. He commented on the fact that the wood is in as good a shape as it ever has been and hopefully it will continue to improve over future years. We are able to enjoy the wood at all times of year.

TREASURER'S REPORT

- Clive projected his annual report and stressed that FOKW is banking with the Coop bank which is an ethical bank.
- He highlighted the AGM expenses and the expenses for the BBQ and suggested that we may need to ask for a contribution (tickets) towards the latter from now on
- Expenses incurred by our website maintenance are minimal as the work is done for a very small fee. Clive urged members to look at the website which we are striving to improve.
- The new notice board, which we hope to erect in the near future, will cost in the region of £1000, £500 of which we have secured from the town council
- Other costs include the cost of 380 newsletters which are circulated regularly to members
- The Oak tree which was planted on April 29th this year has yet to be paid for

MINUTES OF THE LAST AGM

The Minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the 2010 AGM.

ELECTION OF 2011- 2012 COMMITTEE

Chair person: Roger Seldon was proposed but did not accept the position. Subsequently, **Clive Atkins** was proposed by Jenny Monk and seconded by Maggie Cook.

Treasurer: Roger Seldon was proposed by Frank Grover and seconded by Jenny Monk

Secretary: Maggie Cook was proposed by Clive Atkins and seconded by Jenny Monk

Committee members:

The following committee members agreed to stand again:

Frank Grover

Joan Kiddle

Jenny Monk

Jack Owens (in absentia)

Toni Seldon

Sylvia Williams

Two new members were voted on to the committee: **Mick Hewett and Dave Manley**

The business of the evening over, Clive introduced Alexe Rose, Senior Development Officer (communities) from the GST, who had come to talk about the latest developments at Rushmere.

After her talk, Alexe answered questions:

Q

What are the parking arrangements?

A

There will be a charge of £2 for use of the car park but frequent users will be encouraged to buy an annual ticket for £30. People will be encouraged to use Rushmere as there will be more parking than at Stockgrove

Members of the audience expressed objections to the car parking charges. Alex pointed out that it is necessary to think of ways of raising funds and the £30 annual permit is a good way. Families may get more benefit from the annual permit and will make more use of it

Q

Will there be facilities for kids?

A:

Yes, the same as at Stockgrove

Q

Is a bike permit needed?

A

Only if you are using the mountain bike trails not the family routes. Permits are available from Stockgrove or Rushmere. The same permit will cover Oak Wood and Stockgrove

Q

Will it be possible to access Rushmere from the big gates at the Linslade Road/Plantation Road crossroads if you are on foot?

A

No, this is private property. They are working on more access routes but for now Bragenham Lane will be the best way on foot.

Members of the audience expressed worries about visitors parking on Plantation Road and walking into the Bragenham Lane opening instead of paying for parking.

Alexe said that the GST doesn't envisage this problem. They will make sure that the parking restrictions are enforced.

Q

On the Old Linslade Road will there be a speed restriction?

A

A speed limit (40 mph) is definitely in the plan.

Q

How many parking spaces are there?

A

80 plus overflow parking

Members of the audience pointed out that the brown sign informing motorists of the entrance is too late and needs to be further along the road. Alexe said that this was a good point and that she would communicate it to the Highways Department

There was concern that, even at 40mph, the bend is very dangerous. Traffic and Highways experts say 40mph is enough.

Wooden posts have been placed outside the big gates in an area which people have in the past used as an emergency run out. Alexe said that that piece of land is still owned by others so GST can't do anything about this.

Q

Does the GST have any further cash for future developments for the flora and fauna?

A

The GST has enough resources to address the needs at the moment and they are fundraising so that they have enough for the future. They will only do things when they have the funding for them. They have spent the past 2 years surveying and carrying out investigations and this has delayed the opening so they can now do it with the confidence to be able to say that it is safe. Support from the public to abide by the regulations will be needed.

Q

What ideas do you have for telling the public about the wildlife in the park?

A

There will be guided walks and an introduction to the site. Later in the year there will be walks and talks and workshops and people can learn new skills. There are 16/17 members of staff currently working on the site. There is a wealth of information to go on the website. The trouble is condensing all of that down. Alexe asked for the public to let the GST know about any ideas they have about the site. Alexe told the meeting about an opening event on 16th July from 10am – 3pm

Q

What is the set up at the site?

A

GST manages the site. None of the land is in private ownership from an operations point of view

Q

How will events be organised?

A

Via the Internet. Alexe is happy to take the names of people who don't have the Internet in order to inform them.

Q

Will there be wardens on the site?

A

Yes, voluntary wardens as well as GST rangers. There will be wardens day and night. The main purpose of the voluntary warden is to be our eyes and ears There is a ranger on site at the weekends at Stockgrove and Rushmere.

Q

What time is it open at the weekend for cyclists?

A

The site is open at any time of day or night as long as you aren't entering through the main vehicle access gate. It is open to cars from 7:30 till dusk at the moment. There will be facilities for cyclists around the family route.

Q

Is the plan to use Rushmere rather than Stockgrove as it has been noticed that the signs for Stockgrove seem to have disappeared?

A

Yes we are trying to preserve the sites of special scientific interest at Stockgrove, so we want Stockgrove to be a bit of a secret.

Q

What about dog walkers who want to get in before 7:30?

A

Greensand Ranger, John Creasey, said that anyone who is interested in getting into the area earlier than 7:30 should contact the rangers who can make some arrangements.

Q

Is there a second entrance?

A

Yes, Stockgrove will be the second entrance.

Q

Are there any changes planned for the top of Thrift Road.

A

Not at the moment. The GST have spoken to the H & R Parish Council about this. They want to make sure there are no problems round the whole site. There is a private owner who owns the area near Thrift Road.

Q

Is there anything planned for Bragenham Lane?

A

Alexe was only aware of the plan to fill in the lay-bys to prevent parking there. She said that she would pass on any further information as she learns it.

Q

Would you be able to donate trees to the FOKW?

A

John Creasey said that some trees have already been donated and the GST will do so again in future. He went on to say that the GST will continue to grow and sell Christmas trees and at the same time make a profit. They will make sure that the environment won't be damaged. Trees will be sold up at Rushmere again next Christmas.

John went on to say that if people have further questions they should contact him or go to info@Rusmere.org

AOB

In his new capacity as Chairman, Clive Atkins asked for questions from the floor.

Q

Are there any proposals for the FOKW to collect more funds?

A

Yes, some time this year we will be raising funds particularly as the new notice board will be expensive.

Q

Does the committee have any ideas (eg musical concerts) for fundraising in addition to collecting donations from members?

A

Not at the moment

Q

Should we consider holding an event to mark the Queen's special anniversary next year?

A

There is a tension between being a local residents' association and a preservation society.

Q

Are the FOKW members mainly from the local area?

A

Yes.

Q

Do you anticipate a new notice board at the Taylor's Ride entrance to the wood?

A

Not at the moment. There is still a notice board there which needs to be updated and tidied.

Joan Kiddle made the point that if there hadn't been an action group all those years ago, the wood might not be here now. FOKW is a voluntary organisation which can only exist by means of donations. Even notice boards are very expensive so fundraising is necessary.

Clive announced that the next work party will be Sunday 10th July 11am outside 55 Redwood Glade followed by a bbq.

Clive closed the meeting and invited all to stay for refreshments.