

Minutes

Present: -

Steve Batt, SB; Phil Parr, PP; Cyril Cleaver, CC; Jan Elliott, JE; Frank Ollerenshaw, FO; Karl Curtis, KC; Gerry Allen, GA; Ken Monk, KM; Neville Weston, NW; Derek Lill, DL; Margaret Richards, MR.

SB welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

Apologies were received from Tony Landless, Peter Hanby, Diana and Colin Forbes-Powney, Wendy Grant and Chris Godding.

Treasurer's Report

Frank handed out a statement of accounts to everyone showing last year's expenditure (see attached). The finances are in a healthy state. The Volunteer Wardens were reminded that funds were available if they couldn't obtain it any other way for tools and projects. Chris Worman at Rugby Borough Council (RBC) has been very supportive financially. NW asked if the level of donations was sustainable. SB said not, each donation is spent on contractors and plant hire for a specific use or project. SB thanked FO for his work.

Reports from local conservation areas.

SB pointed out that the achievements this year have been spectacular with nearly 4000 hours worked by volunteers (see attached report by PP) and such a lot of work done to improve and increase the biodiversity and accessibility of our local reserves. SB thanked PP for all his work in collating these numbers that can be used as important evidence when applying for grants and other dealings with Councils.

Cock Robin Wood. Volunteer Warden - Derek Lill. Report on Cock Robin Wood February 2014

This time last year the wood was snow bound. Evidence of badger and fox in and around the sett.

Spring and summer saw further evidence of the sett in use with bedding out to air and regular paths being beaten into the wood and out onto the field over the ditch. This year so far there are signs of dead wood having been torn apart.

After last years tree thinning in Compartment A, new plants were already colonising the space cleared. We have continued to open up this part of the wood and have now taken down all the dead shrubs to allow light in and understory to flourish and have taken this through to the hedge on Dunchurch Road. The number of apple trees now discovered suggests that the wood should be called 'Cock Robin Orchard'!!

Further hedge laying has been completed to the kissing gate. I am hopeful that we can complete the task to the corner, but this will depend on other tasks.

Further clearance at the top of the pond, has revealed yet more apple trees. This is work in progress to allow the trees to get some light and to prune. I have to be careful not to get carried away and leave some dense thickets for nesting etc.

Highlight of the year perhaps was a female grass snake swimming in the main pond - much excitement for a family who were passing.

Compartment C is being actively used by the school, and we are looking to remove some of the holly in that area which is getting too dominant.

Our somewhat unscientific plant survey was completed on 8 July 2013 and we counted 68 species not counting the trees (13) and grasses (4 - there must be more if only we knew what we were looking at)

Kingfisher spotted over main pond last Monday 3 February 2014

I finish by commending the faithful band of volunteers who have achieved so much in the management of the wood.

Derek Lill
Voluntary Warden

PP asked where the Kingfisher noted in the report came from. DL said that it probably came from the Bilton Grange area or was just passing through, there being no suitable nest sites for kingfishers at the site.

JE commented on the beautifully laid hedge at the site, had it been done by a contractor? No, it was done by Derek and the team. Derek was congratulated and thanked for all his efforts, the hedge laying and litter picking making a big difference. There have been many appreciative comments from local people.

Tools needed for the site e.g. pole saw and sawblades can be paid for by money from RBC "biodiversity offsetting" (previously Section106), the money set aside for mitigation of the effects of new development.

Swift Valley. Volunteer Warden – Chris Godding. Report from Neville Weston
Nature Force & the Swift Valley volunteers completed the thinning & Coppicing work in one of the Woodland area's

NW said that he had been concerned about the amount of thinning work carried out in the wood but that the results in the summer were fantastic. The work encouraged the appearance of wildflowers, butterflies and birds.

The next phase of woodland thinning is being carried out this winter in the wood by the Old arm of the Canal.

The footpaths were in need of improvement and thanks to a grant secured by the Rugby Disabled Forum this work was completed during the summer of 2013. Extra benches have also been installed by the Swift Volunteers as part of this upgrade.

The car park urgently needs maintenance work; SB suggested that finance could perhaps come from biodiversity offsetting generated by the Ambulance Station development; it would certainly be worth tabling with RBC.

The long field has developed nicely but would benefit from being seeded with wild flowers. It was suggested that NW could collect seed from other reserves as long as he had prior permission from the Reserves Officer at WWT. KC said that Draycote Meadow is a "Coronation Meadow" and WWT are looking to make it a donor site so Swift Valley could benefit from that. SB said that Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) money or biodiversity money could be applied for to buy seed. KC said that he could help with the paperwork involved in applying for grants from Warwickshire County Council (WCC).

The volunteer numbers have doubled this year from 4 to 8, with some new members finding out about Swift via the website.

Butterfly and bird surveys have noted 89 species of birds and 22 species of butterfly. Vandalism and theft continued to be a slight problem, Notices have been ripped down and bird feeders taken. NW said he would look to replacing the notices and add the Rugby wildlife website address to them.

SB thanked CG and NW for all their work.

Reports on local reserves by Phil Parr (See attached)

Ashlawn Cutting.

There has been lots of positive feedback about the Healthy Living Walk at Jolly's Field. Five councillors including Neil Sanderson (who has taken a keen interest in the cutting) helped on a day of planting wildflowers along with local volunteers. The planting around Jolly's Field has resulted in attracting many birds and butterflies. The drainage problem at the cutting is causing the loss of calcareous grassland plants. The results of the work on Pytchley Marsh have been excellent, it will be interesting to see how the wildflowers compete with the likes of the nettle as time goes on, the removal of nutrients from the soil (by cutting and raking) should favour the wildflowers.

SB said that the species enrichment at the site is really starting to show; Ashlawn Cutting has such a range of habitats running from the centre of the town out into the country creating a "breathing lung" for Rugby.

Leaflets have been created and left in the library and the proprietors of Summersault kindly offered to make them available in their restaurant.

A volunteer group from Rugby College has started guided by SB and GA. They have been cutting successional scrub scallops between the Ashlawn and Pytchley Bridges to create growth of different ages to increase the diversity of habitats.

A group from the Probation Service is working on an area by Onley Lane.

KC (representative of WWT) said that PP's management database of volunteers, volunteer hours worked and brushcutting hours done and the wildlife data is excellent and can be used as evidence for planning.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) They are non-statutory areas of local importance for nature conservation that complement nationally and internationally designated geological and wildlife sites. The Habitat and Biodiversity Authority (HBA) does surveys and puts forward appropriate sites for designation and this should help to get funding for improvements.

However LWS status seems to offer little protection against development.

See attached report by PP for the following local reserves

Malpass Site.

Leicester Road Cycle Track / Hunters Lane Embankment LWS

Kilsby Lane Meadow LWS

Allan's Meadow LWS - Lower Hillmorton.

Hillmorton Ballast Pits LWS

Newbold Quarry

Hillmorton Mast site

SB thanked PP enormously for all his work.

Rugby Wildlife Website and WWT Magazines

Ref: Magazine Deliveries

Since last years AGM we have had further people offering to deliver. To date there are 40. We are now delivering approx. 85% of Rugby and Rugby villages. Main outstanding areas/villages are as follows:-

New Bilton - off Lawford Road.....24

Hillmorton.....20

Clifton-upon-Dunsmore.....32

Grandborough & other villages.....130

Bad news is we still haven't replaced the other Magazine co-ordinator.

Several helpers are now picking up the bundles from Brandon which has helped enormously.

Ref: Website

Current

We have had an article published in the magazine this year, giving our website - good news. It has been up and running for 36 months now with contributions from a limited number of people.

It includes minutes from the AGM's.

We've manage to get rid of COMMENTS.

We've improved the way PICTURES are shown.

I've tried to do a Blog for the work parties even if we have no pictures, just to keep track of events.

Also, when known, I've expanded on the work to be carried out @ the next Work party.

Future

I would like more people to contribute, either themselves or by emailing me details to add (jobran@care4free.net). E.g. Swift Valley, Cock Robin & Newbold Quarry. For each work party two or 3 sentences and a few pictures would be good.

How can we improve our visibility? Articles in local media? e.g. Around Rugby

Future Activities

The west side of the station pools on Ashlawn Cutting is to be dredged by the contractor Dave Whitlock to clear it of willow and reed mace. The money will come from Chris Worman at RBC and the work is to be done before the frogs spawn. Notices will be put up to inform local people about the work.

Money from the NIA will fund the hedge-laying project close to the Healthy Living walk, Steve Boswell has been contracted to do the work in March with about 100m of hedge done this year, and if funds permit, will do another 100 metres next year. There is a meeting to make the Sustrans cycle route 41 between St Peter's Road and Onley Lane suitable for both cycling and walking again in winter, by raising and improving the track bed. A meeting of interested parties will take place on Monday 10th February. Chris Worman at the council has asked PP if he could scatter some wildflower seed between the edge of Ashlawn Cutting and the new Jubilee Wood. SB said that so many people are unaware of the work that volunteers do he suggested looking into the possibility of publicising our activities and advertising for work party volunteers in local free papers and circulars such as "Around Rugby". MR agreed to investigate. We need to do more advertising with leaflets and posters. KM said that he would like to take some to distribute at the Dunchurch Camera Club. KC suggested using social media for the same purpose and to put a link on the Trust's Facebook and Twitter accounts to our website and add our workparty calendar. There will be a guided walk on Ashlawn Cutting in June. Details will be on the website. There will be a guided walk at the Malpass site in May. Details will be on the website.

AOB

FO announced that he would be Treasurer for another year but will be resigning as of next year. We are therefore looking for someone to replace him. He was thanked for all his work.

Steve Trotter has left his position as Chief Executive after three and a half years with WWT. SB said what a fabulous job he had done leaving the Trust in great shape. Ed Green takes on the job from 6th May; he is currently the Chief Executive for the Derbyshire Trust. Karl Curtis and Amanda Evans are jointly taking on his role in the interim.

KC said that Chris Worman had been offered £2000 worth of Sutton's "Cornfield Red" poppy seeds available. PP said that they would be good for Ashlawn Cutting and the Leicester Road sites.

WWT to review what needs to be in work party first aid kits and address the current anomalies. PP asked if we should also carry gel bandages as they were strongly recommended at the recent first aid training day. KC said that once a decision was made he would let people know, the current thought is that WWT will issue new first aid kits to all regular work parties to ensure we all have the right 'kit'. DL asked if he needed his first aid certificate as he hadn't received it from the course yet and thus wasn't 100% sure he was qualified. Karl confirmed Derek had passed and would ensure certificate forwarded very soon.

A road has been built to the new crematorium, CC said that the council vehicles left in the car park by Ashlawn Bridge were leaking diesel that was running down the track towards the cutting. Chris Worman or Steve Cook from RBC need to be informed.

JE proposed the nomination of all the existing committee members to stay in their posts. DL seconded this proposal. The committee was duly re-elected. PP and MR thanked our Chairman SB for his continuing commitment and hard work for the group. SB thanked MR for hosting the meeting. As there was no further business the meeting was closed.

Margaret Richards (Secretary)