

Friends of Oakley Wood

MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH 2018

AT THE BARFORD MEMORIA HALL AT 7.30 PM

Present: Liz Sheehan (Chairman)
Wendy Barlow (Vice Chairman)
Rod Scott (Treasurer)
Judy Cooper (Secretary)
Graham Leeke
Cathy Kennedy (Membership Secretary)
Susan Watt
Chris Wood
Karl Curtis (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust)
16 members of public

Apologies: Chris Hastie (Website Manager)
David O'Sullivan
David Lowe
Jon Holmes
Moirra-Anne Grainger (portfolio holder)
Tony Heath (Mayor of Whitnash)

Minutes of the AGM held on 7 March 2017 were approved and adopted.
Proposed by Cathy Kennedy and seconded by Wendy Barlow.

Chairman's report:

Good evening everybody and welcome to our 10th AGM. The committee have held 4 meetings during the past year. I will now try to briefly summarise what we have discussed and actioned towards maintaining and improving Oakley Wood.

I can report that, thanks to Warwick District Council, Oakley Wood has received the Green Flag Award. This has to be a very positive achievement which should provide a basis for negotiating possible grants and sponsorships.

I now move on to our activities. During the year we have organised several activities. Karl from Warwickshire Wildlife led a spring walk in May. It was well attended and Karl gave excellent explanations about the wildflowers and his particular interest, the beetles that cross our path and help to clean up the Wood.

In June the renowned ornithologist and lecturer Colin Potter led a bird listening walk. It was a hot sunny day but the birds obliged and Colin identified and pointed out many species.

Future activities planned so far include Colin returning on April 15 to lead another walk when we hope to identify more birds who will be busy calling to attract their mates and arriving from afar. We also plan to do a tree identification walk possibly aimed at school children preceded by a talk in local schools. It may include a treasure hunt and a picture competition. In the autumn we plan to have a social event based on a quiz relating to natural woodland topics.

As you know, we now have a website which is linked to Facebook. We are fortunate that committee member Chris Wood has set up a WebCam from which we shall benefit later tonight. From these pictures there are plans to set up a gallery with categories of flora, fauna, fungi, birds and seasonal pictures. We would welcome contributions from you all.

Turning to Warwick District Council who continue to cooperate with ourselves and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, we are very fortunate that the appropriately named George Green from WWT has held 5 working parties supported by volunteers where they work to remove sycamores and to plant hedges. All tools are provided, the atmosphere is most congenial, work is not onerous and refreshment is provided. To any parent longing for a morning free of iPad, Internet or mobile please give it a try. Young people especially welcome.

I will touch briefly on the Management Plan as it relates to tree planting plans. We have discussed the Plan at length in our meetings. Karl from WWT reported that the Plan had to be approved by the Forestry Commission. If approved they will issue a tree felling licence which will cover the next 10 years. The much-desired tree planting cannot sensibly take place until it has been decided which parts of the Wood are to be further managed. Discussion has taken place as to replanting and sources of grants, sponsorship and legacy money. We would like to investigate the possibilities of further working parties to take out brambles, plant new trees and clear the ground around new plantings.

Now thank you time. My thanks go to Barford Village Hall for accommodating us, to The Friends of Oakley Wood committee (Wendy Barlow, Rod Scott, Judy Cooper, Chris Hastie, Cathy Kennedy, Graham Leeke, Susan Watt and Chris Wood) who are so enthusiastic in their support for our cause, with particular thanks to Judy Cooper, our Secretary. She is extremely hard-working on our behalf. We have one member retiring from our committee. David O'Sullivan has been with us from the inception of Friends of Oakley Wood and we thank him for his loyal support. We are open to members wishing to join our committee. It is a joyous occupation requiring only attendance at quarterly meetings which are held in a pub and definitely not teetotal. The thrust of all meetings is to preserve our precious rare asset on our doorstep, Oakley Wood.

In conclusion I would like to draw your attention to the new charter for trees, woods and people, launched in November 2017 at Lincoln Castle on the 800th anniversary of the 1217 Charter of the Forest. It is supported by many organisations. The charter set up principles by which trees and people in the UK can stand stronger together.

I would like to finish with a quotation from John Clare Sheppard's calendar which illustrates that there is nothing new in our current spell of weather. "March, month of many weathers, wildly comes, in hail snow and rain and threatening hums and floods."

Thank you all for your time and now Rod will take us through the accounts.

Treasurer's Report

Rod suggested that we need to trim back our spending over the next few years on costs of AGMs for example otherwise we may run into difficulty. (See attached set of accounts.) Adoption of Accounts proposed by Graham Leeke and seconded by Dan Sheehan.

Membership Secretary's report

Cathy encouraged those present to join if they were not already members. We currently send out 350 emails to members.

Web Manager's report

Chris (Hastie) was unable to attend but sent in his report. Over the last 12 months the website has received around 3,200 visits from 2,700 users. Between them they have viewed nearly 8,000 pages. April 2017 saw the most visits to the site, with 1,400 page views. This was largely driven by the posting of a trailcam update on 31 March. These trailcam updates have proved to be very popular and I should like to thank Chris Wood for all the work he has put into producing them.

Election of Officers

The list as presented to the meeting (copy attached) was voted en bloc, proposed by Dan Sheehan and seconded by Anne Kirby. Keith Wellsted volunteered to join the committee for which we are very grateful and look forward to working with him.

Latest news on Oakley Wood from Karl Curtis (WWT)

George Green is keen to increase the numbers of those who volunteer for his working parties during September to April where unwanted sycamores are removed and hedges planted. In previous years the rides have been widened. As Oakley Wood is classified as an ancient woodland site so it is intended to return it to a broadleaf woodland site with oaks, ash and hazel which are typical of Warwickshire landscape. The Oakley Wood Management Plan is being reviewed within WWT's management plan for all its sites for approval by the Forestry Commission hopefully by the end of the year. WWT is keen to communicate to the local community what work is needed and why in key areas of the Wood. It is intended that work carried out will not disrupt the whole Wood. A guided walk to explain these things could be useful to members.

Questions received from those present:

Is the felled timber sold for wood fuel? Sales of the wood are needed to offset management costs. This is done by Warwick District Council and not WWT.

Are more areas of the Wood to be clear felled? This depends on the age of the wood and structural integrity, looking for diversity across the Wood. Small pockets of the Wood will be cleared to allow for growth from the forest bed and will be as organic as possible.

What about considering a doughnut-shaped thinning cycle as seen in Hampton Wood? No, as Hampton Wood is mainly coppiced and Oakley Wood's vision to be returned to a broadleaf woodland over the next 80-100 years is different though some coppicing in key areas around the Wood may be done.

There are concerns about using large plant and machinery which are not very 'organic'. Large plant may be needed for future extraction. It could be said 'that there is no gain without pain' and WWT endeavour to manage the Wood as best as possible by using the right contractor, using the right equipment and with the right knowledge of the sensitive of the job in hand. Since WWT took over the management of the Wood the machinery used has been less invasive.

Are there plans to maintain paths in a usable state? WDC routinely flail the brambles. There are no plans to resurface path which would be too expensive. A wood by its nature is a wet site as is a muddy track but if it becomes unsafe then there is a fine balance. The Management Plan allows for consideration of the infrastructure with the Forestry Commission and there are agricultural grants for improvements.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 8.05 pm.

Following refreshments we were treated to a compilation from Chris Wood's trailcam of the Secrets of the Wood when there is no-one around. This was a completely riveting 25 minutes of sightings of wildlife at work and leisure together with a Jean Michel Jarre musical accompaniment. This was enthusiastically received and we all thank Chris for his time spent in selecting and editing the best footage from the trailcam. Chris aims to make the 'film' available to watch via the website.