

DRAFT

Friends of Oakley Wood

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON 14 MARCH 2023
AT THE BARFORD MEMORIAL HALL
AT 7.30 PM**

Present: Liz Sheehan (Chairman) Wendy Barlow (Vice Chairman)
Rod Scott (Treasurer) Judy Cooper (Secretary)
Chris Wood (Web Manager) Susan Watt
Keith Wellsted Karl Curtis (WWT)
and 4 members of the public

Apologies: Graham Leeke Co Cllr Jan Matecki
Bary Franklin, Mayor of Whitnash James Johnson, Barford JPC Clerk
Dan Sheehan

Adoption of the Minutes of the AGM held on 26.4.22: The Minutes were taken as an accurate record of proceedings and proposed for adoption by Wendy Barlow, seconded by Susan Watt.

Chairman's report:

Good evening everybody, and welcome to the Friends of Oakley Wood AGM.

I will briefly summarise our discussions during our four meetings this year. Firstly, we have re-examined our mission statement, which was created when the FOW committee was first convened. We agreed that the original aims had largely been achieved. We therefore questioned our purpose. This would seem to be to encourage the use of the Wood by the public, to disseminate information and to provide a forum for discussion about improvements and complaints. As ordinary members of the public, we can provide objective comment and opinion to the owner of the Wood, Warwick District Council and to the manage, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

We are open to any suggestions or ideas to protect the Wood for the future or to hold events which promote the natural state of the Wood. We acknowledge the work of Kat Reay from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, who has held some well-being courses.

During our meetings, we have used the skills of our Web Manager, Chris Wood. He summarised the website hits and discovered that 6% originated in China. Watch out for balloons overhead In our Wood!

He also made interesting subjective comments about noticing less wildlife and birds in the early months of 2022. We are not sure why this is but most likely due to the thinning of the trees.

Chris also managed the handover from the previous Web Manager, Chris Hastie, whom we thank for his work during the early years of the committee.

In addition, we appreciate Chris's enlightening articles, together with his superb photos, and mourn the loss of his home spun, aptly named ephemeral seat which was possibly a bit too portable.

We thank Karl Curtis for his regular informative input at our meetings. He will shortly introduce Nick Martin, the new Manager of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Reserves whom we hope will attend our meetings. We congratulate Karl on his new role at WWT.

Our September meeting featured discussion, reports and opinion on the gravel paths newly laid in the Wood. As with all innovation, not everyone was happy, but as time has moved on there seems to be wholehearted favourable approval, both of the materials used and the curving design. The run-off ponds seem to be working, although they have not been tested by seriously heavy rain.

Graham suggested using the surplus stone for patching. This has now happened and all the surplus has been used. We imagine further patching will be possible if and when it becomes necessary.

Provision of seating has been regularly discussed at our meetings with various options considered. At the moment the idea is postponed due to lack of funding from Warwick District Council.

On the topic of funding, Judy has written to local parish councils, and we have received small grants from Bishops Tachbrook and Newbold Pacey and Ashorne for which we are very grateful.

Our most recent meetings have flagged up the pressing problem of dog poo around the paths. Complaints have been received, which in spite of the provision of poo bins, have resulted in another talented member of our committee, namely Keith, performing a poo survey which inspired Jon Holmes to look into the problem. The findings were messy and manifold. Keith reported the worst findings of poo were on the 200 to 400 metres walk from the lower car park into the Wood. He suggested either re-siting the bin in the car park or providing a bin nearer to the machinery gate. That might have a chance of alleviating the problem.

In conclusion, may I sincerely thank Judy Cooper, without whom The Friends could not function; and all the committee. I thank Susan for her posters and publicity skills, Rod for our finances and tonight's bar, and Wendy for fitting us into her amazingly busy schedule and for her wise comments. Any donations will be gratefully received into Rod's bucket.

Thank you for listening and I now hand you over to the next speaker.

Treasurer's report and Adoption of Accounts: Rod presented the accounts showing payments made of £58 and money received from Section 137 grants of £200 and a bank balance of £299. Adoption of the Accounts proposed by Keith Wellsted and seconded by Chris Wood.

Web Managers Report: Chris reaffirmed that the website is our primary means of communicating with members, underlining its importance. Statistics for the past year show an average of between 50-100 user visits per week, and that apart from interest in specific postings when they are made, the most popular pages relate to visiting the wood: location, maps and walking routes. Analytics show a surprising origin of visitors to the website: 14% of visits were from the USA; Chris's theory is that they were probably looking for the Oakley sunglasses. There were also significant visits from China which were probably "bots" that crawl the web looking for vulnerabilities.

Membership

In the absence of the Membership Secretary, Chris gave some details about membership. We have 489 signed-up members, of which 329 are subscribed to receive website updates. We still have historic members with no email addresses; however, we are agreed that sign-up is now only via the website - this not only captures an email address but also satisfies the legal stuff of GDPR and privacy.

Wildlife

Chris looks after the trail camera in the Wood, so briefly put on his wildlife hat and showed some statistics of video captures by the pond over the past year. This shows a fairly dramatic reduction in wildlife sightings towards the end of the year. He suggested a number of reasons for this: increased dog activity at the pond, increase in visitors, recent thinning of the Wood, although perhaps the most likely is that the new pathside scrapes created when the paths were resurfaced has provided more water sources for animals (especially muntjac) so they don't need to travel to the pond now. It was suggested that we could apply for a grant for a second camera, so the existing one can be left in its position by the pond permanently so it can gather comparative statistics.

Election of Officers: The list of nominations as presented to the meeting was voted en bloc. Proposed by Graham Collis and seconded by Sean Deeley.

Any other business:

The purchase of a second camera was felt to be very worthwhile. Cost would be around £180 and is a type regularly used by Springwatch. Wendy suggested Barford JPC may fund (or part-fund) this.

Paths have now been laid around the circumference of the Wood and are proving very popular with people using them rather than creating other tracks. This in turn means that there is less disturbance to wildlife which is welcomed.

Meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

Following a break for refreshments Karl Curtis gave a talk on Wildlife Gardening.

Wildlife Gardening – Karl Curtis, Director of Nature Reserves – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

In introducing the talk, Karl outlined the Trust's new strategy of which its purpose as a charity is to bring back wildlife and help people act for nature. What this means in practice is that the Trust has the ambition for more space for nature with more people on nature's side and in doing so sees that 30% of land should be in recovery, protected and connected for nature by 2030 and that 1 in 4 people in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull take action for nature.

The need to do this was highlighted that even though the Trust has been working hard for 50 years to protect nature, there has still been a loss of wildlife in the same period. This loss has meant that more than 40% of species populations have been in decline, 38 million birds have vanished from our skies in the last 50 years and a quarter of our mammals are at risk of extinction in the UK.

However, there is a need to act and a further decline of our wildlife is not just bad news for our wildlife but ours too so this is an ambition we simply cannot fail in. Therefore, in taking action for wildlife and working towards 30:30, the best place to start is in your garden....

The facts are that in urban spaces gardens make up 25% of land use and so play an important role in helping wildlife. There are estimated to be over 1 million ponds, 2 million nest boxes, 5 million compost heaps and 40 million trees all doing their bit for wildlife in our back gardens. You can sometimes find over 2000 species in a garden and together all the gardens in the UK are larger than all the National Nature Reserves put together. This really demonstrates these are a priceless nature reserve that need to be wildlife friendly.

The role gardens play provide a patchwork of habitats and green spaces for wildlife to live, breed and move around in. They connect us to the natural world, literally on our doorstep and they can help with our health and wellbeing. This was exemplified in the recent pandemic lockdowns and those fortunate to have gardens no doubt made the most of them. Of course, large or small, from window boxes to sprawling lawns, everyone can do their bit. If you want to plant trees, shrubs or flowers, try to make them native and also ensure that you have flowering and fruiting species that provide a season long food source.

The best approach to ensure your garden is wildlife friendly is to reduce or remove any chemical input. That means not using slug pellets or herbicides and seeking more nature friendly alternatives. Try not to be too tidy (or leave particular patches to run wild), nature isn't, and wildlife loves messy nooks in your outdoor space for places to breed and feed. Importantly try to provide a home, put out some water and a food source be that nectar for pollinators or feed for the birds, it will all entice more nature into your neighbourhood.

If you want to go really wild, then create a wildflower meadow. The UK has lost 97% of its wildflower-rich meadows so just turning over a square yard to a meadow will help wildlife. You can over seed or buy native plug plants and importantly let it grow and certainly try to adhere to "no mow May". Leaving the meadow to grow long and cutting in the early spring will benefit any overwintering insects and eggs.

Water is essential for life and wildlife too. A pond, a water butt or just a bucket can bring in an array of wildlife to your garden. Just ensure it is safe and that any plants brought are native and never take anything from the wild to introduce to your pond. Most wildlife will come of its own accord and if

you can resist having fish, this means more invertebrates and amphibians like frogs and newts are more likely to thrive.

Feeding the birds can bring you joy as well as providing a useful year round food source for our feathered friends. Just ensure you keep feeders clean and supply fresh water and the birds will thank you for it by becoming daily visitors. Birds may also use nest boxes too and putting one up might encourage a brood or two of blue tits, robins, sparrows or even swifts if you erect the right type of box. There are lots of designs out there but plain and simple works well and just make sure the local cat can't access them.

Whilst not everyone's cup of tea, creepy crawlies are essential to our wildlife rich gardens. They provide food for other animals and also play important roles in breaking down soil and pollinating our plants and crops. There are a staggering 32,000 species of terrestrial invertebrates and many are endangered. Building a home for these couldn't be simpler and a log pile, stack of leaves or a compost heap will be favourable for many species. There are ladybird boxes, insect hotels and bumble bee abodes that you can buy and also look nice and are fascinating to watch the comings and goings of our garden friends.

So, some final top tips. Try where possible to adopt an organic gardening regime, don't be too tidy and leave a messy space for nature, allow climbers and plants to grow thick and don't cut back too soon after the summer – stems and sticks are places where wildlife will over winter. Try to plant native species where possible, never take from the wild and go peat free. Providing water, food and shelter is really important and if you do so you will reap the rewards of a wildlife friendly garden throughout the year. For more information and some really useful fact sheets on how to create a pond, bug hotel or other wildlife friendly projects visit <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/gardening>.

Friends of Oakley Wood AGM 2023

Election of Officers

Nominations have been received for the following Officers:

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| Chairman | Liz Sheehan |
| Vice Chairman | Wendy Barlow |
| Secretary | Judy Cooper |
| Treasurer | Rod Scott |
| Membership Secretary | Cathy Kennedy |
| Website Manager | Chris Wood |

Other committee members:

Graham Leeke
Susan Watt
Keith Wellsted

Friends of Oakley Wood AGM 2023

Treasurer's Report

FRIENDS OF OAKLEY WOOD

Receipts & Payments Account - Year ended 31st January 2023

| | 2022 - 2023 | 2021 - 2022 | 2020 - 2021 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Opening balances - 1st February 2022 | | | |
| BANK | £157.00 | £241.48 | £280.66 |
| PETTY CASH | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| TOTAL | £157.00 | £241.48 | £280.66 |
| INCOME | | | |
| Horse Logging Grant | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Membership -ordinary | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Membership - additional donations | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Membership - group 1 at £5 | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Events | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Woodland Craft Day | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Grants | £200.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| AGM | £0.00 | £0.00 | £50.00 |
| Bank Interest | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Miscellaneous | £0.00 | £89.49 | £0.00 |
| TOTAL | £200.00 | £89.49 | £50.00 |
| PAYMENTS | | | |
| Horse Logging | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Woodland Craft Day | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Insurance | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Website | £30.00 | £0.00 | £28.78 |
| Publicity | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Events expenses | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| Secretarial | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| AGM costs | £28.00 | £0.00 | £40.40 |
| Miscellaneous | £0.00 | £173.97 | £20.00 |
| Bank Charges | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| TOTAL | £58.00 | £173.97 | £89.18 |
| Surplus / deficit for year | £142.00 | -£84.48 | -£39.18 |
| OPENING BALANCE less DEFICIT | £299.00 | £157.00 | £241.48 |
| Closing balances - 31st January 2023 | | | |
| BANK | £299.00 | £157.00 | £241.48 |
| PETTY CASH | £0.00 | £0.00 | £0.00 |
| TOTAL | £299.00 | £157.00 | £241.48 |

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| Chairman: | Treasurer: | Date: 5th February 2023 |
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Accounts examined and found to be correct:

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| Independent examiner: <i>R. A. Scott</i> | Date: |
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| NOTES | |
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