

DRAFT

The Friends of Oakley Wood

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON

MONDAY 27 APRIL 2026

AT BARFORD MEMORIAL HALL

AT 7.30 PM

Present Liz Sheehan (Chairman) Wendy Barlow (Vice Chairman)
Judy Cooper (Secretary) Sean Deeley (Treasurer)
Chris Wood (Web Manager) Graham Leeke
Susan Watt Keith Wellsted
Nick Martin (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust)
Adrian Barton (Mayor of Whitnash)
and 16 members of the public

Apologies Chris Elliott (CEO Warwick District Council)
Jan Matecki (Warwickshire County Councillor)
Deb Merrick (Warwick District Council)

Adoption of the Minutes of the AGM held on 31 March 2025 The Minutes were taken as an accurate record of proceedings and proposed for adoption by Graham Leeke and seconded by Wendy Barlow.

Chairman's report

Good evening. May I give you a warm welcome to the AGM of the Friends of Oakley Wood and thank you for coming.

Here we are again in the pleasant surroundings of Barford Village Hall, whom we thank for opening their facilities to us.

I will now briefly summarise the committee's activities and observations during the past year which are planned during our quarterly meetings. During the autumn of 2025 a further programme of tree felling was carried out, according to the original Management Plan and advice commissioned by Warwick District Council some years ago. The objective is to clear fell several coupes, particularly in areas of conifer, to facilitate the planting of native broadleaf trees, and develop a woodland rich in wildlife. There is inevitable damage to the ground caused by the heavy plant and the customary wet ground. On the whole the contractors make good after their work. WDC have stated that there will be another thinning in autumn 2026. After that there will be a pause in these activities.

Following the extraction and removal of the timber an extensive tree planting operation was completed by Warwickshire Wildlife. They protect each sapling with tree guards which at the moment are plastic, as nothing yet has proved as efficient.

The sapling trees have been frequently discussed by the committee as we feel that there should be more aftercare and follow up. Many trees are engulfed in weeds and a member of our committee has calculated that between 10 – 20% have died. It may be that the dry summer last year was a contributory factor. Deb Merrick from WDC was enquiring from George Green and Nick Feledziak, who manage the woodland, whether anything better can be done.

Other topics frequently discussed are the provision of seats and I am delighted to report that there are now two huge tree trunks which have been pegged and levelled as seats. They may be a little low for some to get up from, but it is a good start.

Susan Watt, our creative director, has made some small business cards showing our mission statement and a QR code, to be given to walkers or people showing an interest in Oakley Wood as committee members meet and talk to other Wood users whilst walking around the Wood.

Chris Wood, our Website Manager, and our most regular eyes and ears in Oakley, has the web camera placed for wildlife shots. He has also developed, at very little cost, an ingenious bird song recorder, placed in the Wood. He regularly reports his findings which I hope you take advantage of on line. From his camera monitoring over the year he reports less foxes, fallow deer are rare but badgers are very evident.

Chris also organised a fungi walk last September, led by our favourite people whom advised and attended the BioBlitz of 2024.

We are planning to hold a spring walk, led by Nick Martin, which will include tree identification, on Saturday 13 June from 10am – 12pm. Do come along.

Now I must thank the whole committee for their enthusiasm and commitment to the Friends. A particular thanks to Rod Scott who has retired as Treasurer, after working ever since the committee was formed. We are delighted that Sean Deeley has come onto the committee as our new Treasurer. We are only sorry that contemporary bank regulations have made it a difficult handover. Particularly as the balance concerned is so small. Huge thanks go to Judy Cooper who tirelessly contacts people by email when we have the need or a new idea. She organises us and presents the Agenda and the Minutes with great efficiency. Special thanks to Chris Wood for his huge contribution on the website.

General thanks to the entire committee who all play their part. We always welcome new members – either to join the Friends or to join the committee. Our meetings are held at the Leopard Inn in Bishops Tachbrook and liquid refreshments always accompany us!

Talking of refreshments, please help yourself here this evening. If possible a donation would be welcome.

That's all. Thanks for listening!

Treasurer's report

Sean told the meeting he had spent many months trying to set up a new bank account as the Co-op Bank was not suiting our needs. Having looked around for a better option he has opened an account with HSBC which is live as of today. Signatories are Sean, Wendy and Judy. With changing accounts and balance transfer to the new account not completed, it has not been possible to prepare a new set of accounts to present to the meeting. He will endeavour to do this once the balance has been transferred from one account to the other and will present this year's accounts at next year's AGM for adoption. Transactions during the year are: AGM costs £21.50, hire of Barford Hall £30.00, Chris Wood £81.41, camera batteries 18.48, website cost £30.00. Last year's closing balance was £422.66 and this year it is £271.27. Rod has paid a £30 bill for which he will be reimbursed in due course. Graham highlighted the fact that we have no income stream and Sean agreed saying we need to fund raise at least £150 per annum to remain solvent.

Web Manager's report

Chris reminded the meeting of our domain name: www.oakleywood.org.uk. He showed the meeting a chart of activity on the website each month from which it can be seen that it varies greatly. For example, the figures for April are high and this could be due to the better weather we have been experiencing. The reasons people have visited the website are mainly 'about us', where we are located and walking routes. There is something of a conflict between dogs versus nature. We have suggested that dogs should be kept under close control especially during the breeding season. This led to unfavourable comments on the website but we are not saying dogs should be kept on leads.

Referrals, that is to say how people have come to the website, are for the most part from search engines, mainly Google, Facebook and Dog Friendly Warwickshire.

Membership – We have 533 signed up members which is an increase of 10 from last year. There are 337 subscribed for website updates which is an increase of 4 from last year. Friends of Oakley Wood Facebook has 504 members which is an increase of 87, probably due to mobile phones in greater use.

The trail cam continues to provide interesting footage and, as Liz said earlier, this year has shown there have been less foxes, fallow deer are rare but badgers are very evident. Bird recordings have shown the Wood has 40 confirmed species of birds including a Crossbill which was spotted by the Banbury Bird Group. Wendy added that she continues to use the app Merlin, as recommended by Chris, and within half an hour 14 different birds were evident.

Election of Officers

The Nominations for Officers was presented to the meeting showing one change, that of our new Treasurer, Sean Deeley. The nominations were voted for election proposed by Dan Sheehan and seconded by Fizz Forbes McGlenn.

Any other business

We have yet to meet with Deb Merrick to walk the Wood to consider additional benches in the future. This is soon to be arranged but for now the committee very much welcome the addition of two newly-prepared tree trunks as resting points.

Graham asked Nick Martin if he had a figure of income earned from the sale of timber from the recent thinning. Nick did not have a figure but he believes sales do not always cover the cost of the thinning operation. Judy will write to Nick Feledziak for further details.

Wendy questioned whether a Green Flag had been erected following successfully receiving this award. We had previously asked WDC for this as we had received the award for the last three years. The meeting was unsure and Judy will confirm the situation with Deb Merrick.

Fizz Forbes-McGlen, a past member of the committee and who readily admits she doesn't visit the Wood very often these days, asked about the management of the Wood as the first thinning some years ago created a considerable amount of damage. The committee reported that things were now progressing well and most people accepted the temporary after-effects of a thinning procedure but found that in a matter of a few months the woodland recovered well.

Chris asked Nick Martin about the amount of bracken and brambles which obscured the bluebells. Nick said that in fact a bluebell wood however pretty was not a healthy wood from a nature perspective which needs the 'weeds' and fallen timber for a healthy eco system.

Jean Drew asked whether in Nick's opinion climate change was having an effect on the woodland as we are experiencing longer wetter spells followed by very dry spells. Nick agreed it does change the composition to some extent but that nature tends to balance out and cope with these changes.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm.

Nick Martin, Nature Reserves Manager at Warwickshire Wildlife Trust – The Secrets of a Wildlife Photographer

Following refreshments Nick gave a highly fascinating speech on the secrets of a wildlife photographer. He is, himself, a very keen amateur wildlife photographer and runs as a sideline www.allthingswildlife.co.uk. We saw a number of his photos which he has taken on his travels around Britain and including many of the Scottish islands in search of rare species of birds especially. He gave us tips on how to take the best

photos, for example getting to know the habits of certain species and therefore the best time of year to find them. He does sometimes use his mobile phone but with his keen interest he now has advanced camera technology. A tip is to really understand your camera and what it can do in order to get the best exposure for what you are trying to photograph. With this knowledge you can produce different effects, for example, focussing on the target object and blurring the background. A slow shutter speed shows movement whereas a fast shutter speed freezes the action. He also showed us photos when getting down on the ground to photograph wildlife gives a very different result to photographing it from a standing position.

We all marvelled at his photos and the talk inspired us to look afresh at how we use our cameras whether they be mobile phones or SLR cameras.

Friends of Oakley Wood

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2026

Election of Officers

Nominations have been received for the following Officers:

Chairman	Liz Sheehan
Vice Chairman	Wendy Barlow
Secretary	Judy Cooper
Treasurer	Sean Deeley
Website Manager	Chris Wood
Membership Secretary	Chris Wood

Other committee members:

Graham Leeke
Susan Watt
Keith Wellsted

The above nominees were duly elected at the AGM

Friends of Oakley Wood Accounts - presented at AGM on 27/04/26

Due to the change of Treasurer no formal itemised account was presented. However, our new Treasurer, Sean, provided a summary of the accounts (see Treasurer's report in the minutes).

Sean stated that last year's closing balance was £422.66 and this year it is £271.27.
Sean also stated that we need to fund raise at least £150 per annum to remain solvent.