

Friends of Selsdon Wood

Working to improve our wood



Chair's Annual Report to the AGM – 27th March 2017

In 2016 the small band of active Friends ran a varied programme of walks and volunteers worked on site on more than 17 planned occasions – including the Open Day on Sunday 11th September. There was also much unscheduled work as I shall detail later. Accounts of all our 2016 activities are archived on the website.

As last year, I shall structure this report with regard to the aims of our group as stated in the constitution. But before I detail our work I am proud to announce that in 2016 the FSW were winners of the **Forestry Commission Community Woodland Award**. This award is given for woodland management that has been inspired, driven and delivered by a local community group and we were nominated by Matthew Frith of the London Wildlife Trust. The award panel noted that since getting involved in management of the site in 2008, our group has been involved in survey work, habitat management and tree planting. They also mentioned our engaging website, path improvements, leaflets and guided walks that have improved access and connected people with the woodland. A group of 4 Friends attended an award ceremony at City Hall in May, where we were presented with a plaque and a wooden bowl – both of which are now kept in our office/museum. **On behalf of all the Friends I should like to thank Dawn Gibbons our founder chairperson who set the whole thing in train 9 years ago.**

Aim 1) To ensure that Selsdon wood is maintained for the benefit of the flora and fauna so that no one species shall threaten the survival of another and for the enjoyment and well being of the public

- a. Summer workdays focus on regular maintenance, such as the clearance of areas around benches. Maintenance work also involves some occasional activity such as replacing fallen route marker posts, removal of branches blocking paths and the reporting (to the Council) of hazardous or fallen trees that are too large for us to deal with.
- b. The main Winter workday activity this year involved a major cutting back in the Gorses area. This had become very overgrown since the larch plot on the site was felled in 2009. Although the new growth of gorse looked spectacular for the first few years it had become very tall and leggy and tangled with brambles. In the 2016/2017 winter season the Friends undertook the job of cutting everything back right to the ground in the sure knowledge that it would quickly recover. Naturally occurring gorse is adapted to frequent burning. The upper parts burn freely and the seeds germinate most readily after fire but the roots are very resistant to burning and shoots readily return. It could be dangerous to freely burn our gorse as fire could spread to the rest of the wood so we had to take the harder route and cut it back by hand. We were assisted by TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) working under the supervision of Peter Underwood (Senior Project Officer - Croydon & Surrey). They put in a couple of days' work at the end of November 2016 and made a big impact, including cutting an avenue through from Middle to East Gorse and returned for a further day in January to clear more of the plot. The FSW work continued through to March. We were joined on one occasion by a youngster working towards a Duke of Edinburgh Award. **Thanks to Ted Forsyth, our workdays organiser, and to all the other volunteers for their dedicated efforts.**
- c. A further major project in the last year was our assault on muddy puddles in paths throughout the wood. The idea was to purchase gravel and woodchip which could be used to fill the hollows in the paths where water and mud are most frequently seen. David Malins did the preliminary groundwork by researching the locations and making preliminary enquiries about suitable gravel. Sara Bashford agreed that we could apply to her Community Budget for the full cost of the first batch (£432). Tony Flecchia then took over the project and with Neale Fox was responsible for liaising with the suppliers and organizing the initial distribution. Paul Winter, of Woodside Timber and Spring Lane Builders Merchants, helped with the distribution and later donated further materials and offered a generous discount for another purchase. Most of the material delivered in the later batches was delivered to the sites and laid by Tony Flecchia using his own vehicle. In summary - 439 bags of gravel and 6 cubic metres of woodchip were spread. The total cost of the materials was £1028.64 - but thanks to support from the Council and the suppliers, the cost to FSW was only £297.84. **Many thanks to Tony Flecchia for all his work on this project and to all others who contributed.**
- d. In spite of the vigorous cutting back last winter, the Centenary Plantation was very thick with Ash saplings and brambles by the end of the summer. **Our thanks to Peter Underwood, Senior Project Officer for The Conservation Volunteers, who, with a colleague, spent a wet miserable day in January 2017 brush cutting the Ash seedlings and bramble.** The FSW wish to see this area kept as

an Oak plantation as originally designed but we do not have the resources to undertake the removal of the thousands of Ash seedlings which threaten to swamp the Oaks so we are especially grateful to TCV for their help with this.

- e. We are sorry to report that Chalara (Ash Dieback - a disease of Ash trees) was found this year in the Council coppice blocks in Selsdon Wood. Unfortunately this was inevitable with the infection being found at Warlingham two years ago. Current advice is not to try to remove the infection but to carry on as normal as there is a good level of resistance being found in the UK and fatality is not necessarily going to occur for infected trees.

Aim 2) To carry out programmes of practical work, especially sustainable conservation and restoration work

- a. A major project this year was the restoration of the Bird Pool in Linden Glade. The pool was fed by mains water and it disappeared when Croydon Council disconnected the water supply many years ago. It had gradually filled with mud and leaf litter and many walkers have reported that they did not even know there had been a pool there. In the summer of 2016 the Friends decided to have a general clean up in the area in hope of restoring the pond. The work started in April and lasted throughout the summer months. Once the pond had been emptied the surface was sealed and the general area was improved by removal of the old broken fencing and the construction of a "henge" of logs to mark the boundary with taller ones to represent gateways to the pond area and house the explanatory plaques. Several native plants were placed around the pond and we are currently considering further planting in the pond itself. The pond has filled well with rainwater but the mains supply has been identified and we are liaising with Sutton and East Surrey Water in hope that they will agree to fund occasional top-ups during the summer months. **Thanks to Neale Fox who took the lead on all of this work and to all the team who supported him.**
- b. One rather frustrating restoration activity has involved benches which have been moved by troublemakers. Last summer we restored Clive Little's seat to its original position after it was moved into Steven's Larch but months later it was moved again and we have now left it in its new location. The adjacent Sarah Purvis seat was so badly damaged when it was moved that it had to be replaced. This was undertaken by the Council using a refurbished bench at no cost to FSW. More recently we had to restore Millie Dinnick's seat to its original position in Field 2 after it was moved several yards away.

Aim 3) To educate volunteers of all ages in the principles and practices of nature conservation and encourage the public interest in Selsdon Wood

- a. Our guided walks have been well attended and all the presenters have provisionally agreed to come back in 2017 when we plan to run a similar programme. **On behalf of the FSW, thanks to all our external group leaders - Meike Weiser, Malcolm Jennings, Malcolm Bridge and Roger Hawkins.** Reports of all walks are published on the website.
- b. We organised a Community Picnic in July 2016 in conjunction with the Selsdon Residents Association (SRA) to celebrate 90 Years of the Selsdon Residents Association and 80 years since Selsdon Wood became National Trust property. It was a Big Lunch BYO picnic with support from the Scouts who ran a refreshment tent serving burgers, cakes and hot and cold drinks. The weather did us proud and the event was much enjoyed by groups of families and friends. **Many thanks to Linda Morris for organising this event.**
- c. Open Day is always an effective event for encouraging public interest in the wood. We had a beautiful day for it this year, the attendance was steady throughout the 4 hours and a good time was had by all. **Many thanks to all the Friends and others who contributed to its success and especially to our Open Day Organiser, Linda Morris.** As usual, refreshments were provided by the Scouts and guest stalls included: East Surrey Badger Protection Society, Friends of the Earth, Beekeepers, Woodturners, RSPB, Selsdon Ceramics, Friends of Littleheath Woods, Epilepsy Society, Vegans, Uncle Ria's Jams, SRA, and Mrs Jess Bates with her ferret.
- d. FSW members continue to receive an illustrated newsletter each month, which I produce and circulate via email. **Thanks to Linda Lee for delivering these to members who do not have email access over the past few years and to David Malins and Christian Kuepers who have volunteered to share this load for future deliveries.** We are proposing to drop the monthly hand/postal delivery after

next month and batch up the newsletters to deliver them quarterly which will save on postage and/or shoe leather.

- e. We produce three main leaflets (Membership Application, General Information, Red & Green Walks). These were updated this year and are available on the website, in the Selsdon Library and at events. As in previous years we have provided articles for the Selsdon Gazette and the Local Link where we advertise all events and workdays. Events are also advertised with posters at entrances to the woods and in other places around the community. **Thanks to Ted Forsyth who writes the Nature Notes for external publications and to David Malins for the production of the leaflets and posters and to all committee members who support with their distribution.**
- f. We were sorry not to be able to run the annual Photo Competition in 2016 as there were too few entries. We have decided to make this a biennial event and will definitely be running it in 2017, with photos from the previous two years eligible for entry. However, the response this year so far is still disappointing and we shall have to advertise it widely as the summer progresses.
- g. The website continues to be rich source of information about the flora and fauna of the wood as well as being a public record of the work of the Friends and a notice board for all information. The Fauna, Flora and Fungi pages contain annotated photographs of over a thousand species. **Many thanks to Tony Flecchia and Ted Forsyth who have contributed most of the photographs.**

Aim 4) To act as a forum for discussion on issues that may affect the aims and activities

- a. Monthly meetings rarely attract many members beyond the core team but this does have the advantage of keeping them tightly focussed. All members are welcome to attend - location and times are advertised on the website.
- b. The website and newsletters provide a forum with a wider reach.
- c. The FSW have maintained liaison with other local groups through the ACCS.

Aim 5) To raise money as necessary for the carrying out of its work

- a. As in previous years, Open Day was a fruitful money raiser, netting over £550 and 16 new memberships. **Thanks to Linda Morris for organising the event and to all who helped on the day.**
- b. We have successfully applied for a number of grants to support our work - details of which are covered in the report from the treasurer. **Many thanks to Sandra Crapper for all her work on this.**
- c. Membership continues to grow. Most memberships are eligible for Gift Aid, which adds to our funds. (Membership numbers for the end of 2016 = 161 Paid Members including Chairs Members, 69 Household members, therefore 230 supporters and 19 Honorary Members.)
- d. The FSW 2017 calendar was available for £5. We supplied 70 copies and raised over £140.
- e. Distribution of logs and charcoal is another fund raiser. **Our thanks go to Neale Fox who coordinates this and Cyril Whatmore who cuts them all with his chainsaw.**

Conclusion

We have had a busy and successful year and I continue to enjoy my involvement in the role of Chair. My thanks to all members of the management group for their commitment to the FSW and for all the work they have done throughout the year. 😊