

Friends of Selsdon Wood

Working to conserve our wood



Minutes of meeting held at 8 pm on Monday 27th September 2021 in Forestdale Forum

Present: Heather Govier (Chairman), Ted Forsyth (Vice Chairman), Linda Morris (Secretary), Neale Fox, Jim Dunning, Harry Creer, John Bickerstaff, Dawn Gibbons, Andy Hart, John Zareba

1. Apologies for absence were received from Sandra Crapper (Treasurer), Steve & Ruth Budd and Tony Flecchia. It was noted with sadness that David Malins was now too ill to attend meetings or participate in the work of the committee. The committee expressed their thanks for all he had done for FSW and hoped his condition would improve.

Heather also apologised for her virtual lack of voice but hoped she would still be able to manage the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 25th November 2019 had been circulated and were taken as read.

There was one **matter arising**.

The padlock for the emergency gate from the car park seemed to have been changed to a silver round padlock and so the gun key is no longer of use. Linda agreed to check with Peter Underwood if emergency services could access through this gate and try to obtain a duplicate key so we could use it if required. It was not essential for us to have one as we could gain access via the two gates at each end of the emergency overflow car park as long as they remained 'gun key' padlocks.

The height barrier has a gun padlock which has always been very hard to access and this problem has been exacerbated since the height barrier has been bent. It had taken Linda almost 30 minutes to lock it recently after a non-FSW event. Following a later discussion at this meeting, it was agreed that FSW should not be held responsible by the council for opening and closing this barrier unless it was for their own activities.

3. Finance

Sandra had provided an update of the financial situation as at 31st of August (appended) by email. This would have to be adjusted to take account of monies owed to Heather for calendars etc, to Linda for the laminator etc and payment of £100 to the farmer via Jim, and to Neale for various items he had purchased sometime ago but had yet to present the bills to Sandra. He agreed to send her copies as soon as possible so that she should be able to update all payments and expenditure without further delay on her return from Spain at the beginning of October. It had proved impossible to do this from there as she had planned. Nevertheless, it was noted that FSW had a healthy credit balance. Later in the meeting, as noted below, it was agreed how some of this could best be spent now and that a future planning budget should be set.

4. Seats, benches and memorials

In David's absence, Jim had kindly taken over the management of existing orders and the placement of the seat and benches already ordered. He hoped that these would be delivered this week and that they could be sited in the wood at the pre-prepared spots within a few days of delivery. The farmer, David Marden, would be paid £100 for his help and tractor time. Jim was invited to continue to fill David's role until it might be filled by another Friend in due course. He agreed to do so, subject to no more seats being ordered as there were too many problems with delivering them to the required location in the wood. He thought benches would be more manageable by the Friends with the equipment/transport they had between them.

Heather reported that she had had an enquiry about a memorial seat for Brian Pitkin, a Friend who had died in August. It was realised that this could present difficulties as the council had previously indicated they no longer wanted seats being placed in the wood. It was suggested that Heather should offer his widow the choice of a bench to replace a broken one or some other suitable memorial.

It was decided the availability of seats was greatly welcomed by users of the wood and so FSW would continue to deal with seats and benches as far as possible as their resources and labour allowed, aiming to site new benches (seats are too heavy to deal with) only as direct replacements for those seats and benches that could not be repaired. Jim would, over time, survey the existing seats and benches and note their condition and advise on costings for repairs of seats he could do as they became necessary. He would update the information made available to enquirers about the cost of replacement benches and Heather would continue the conversations with potential 'customers' up to the point of placing any consequent order/installation which Jim would deal with.

Jim would look at the seat in the corner of Field One to see if he could repair it or if it would have to be replaced with a bench when another is requested as it was felt that this was a good location for a rest.

Alternative memorials to seats were considered. Dawn suggested that trees could be appropriate. It was realised after the meeting that it would be almost impossible to identify such trees permanently in situ with a dedication

plaque. The possibility of adding such a donation to the existing memorial page on the website was suggested as an alternative.

Heather suggested a permanent dog bowl or trough to replace the washing up bowl currently under a tree near the car park. Linda also suggested that perhaps the damaged drinking fountain and dog trough could be 'tidied' or restored, albeit without running water but simply reliant on rain and passers-by refilling the dog trough.

John Zareba suggested that an outdoor tap on the toilet block could be provided for both human drinking water and a dog trough but it was thought this would be easily vandalised and so probably not viable.

5. Leaflets & Posters

In view of David's long-term illness and unlikelihood of being able to resume his duties, it was agreed that the management of leaflets should be transferred, for now, to Heather (for the words) and Linda (for the ordering and printing).

Heather had already started to revise the trifold information page leaflet as it was felt it contained more information than was necessary now that so much more was available on the website. She proposed that the new version (folded in half, with the map on one side and basic information in two columns on the other) should be on A5 paper or, more durably, thin card. This could then be easily put into the dispensers - and into pockets.

The current inserts about the programme and joining instructions were no longer necessary as these details were on the website and posters.

It was agreed that we had sufficient funds to pay for printing so Friends did not routinely have to claim for ink or paper for printing at home. Linda had already made some enquiries about professional printing of these leaflets and had received one quote so far from the Selsdon Gazette printer which seemed very reasonable @ £56 per 500 copies initially and then £6 per 100 thereafter. These could be delivered with the delivery of the Gazette (currently around 7th of the month, but possibly later in July and none in August) so no delivery charge incurred. Linda would order accordingly once the formats had been agreed by the committee within a week after Heather had circulated her final draft and they had been able to compare this quotation with the others requested.

Steve Budd and Heather had agreed to take over the design and distribution of the posters now that David was no longer able to do them. Linda would laminate them and leave the copies in the office for them to be added to the notice boards in the wood each time a new one needed to be displayed. She would continue to deal with the notices that are displayed in Selsdon.

6. Membership

Again due to David's incapacity, it was agreed that a new Membership Officer (MO) should be appointed. However, it was felt that the role did not need to be as onerous as he had developed it; keeping statistics and analysing the membership situation was interesting, but not essential. What is needed is simply a full contact list of members and the state of their subscription i.e. whether it is paid up-to-date or not and if it is paid by cash, cheque, online or via a standing order plus the Gift Aid info. It was thought that this information would already be readily available to the Treasurer and so the MO could be that person too without any duplication of their work. Heather needs the contact details to ensure the newsletter address list is up-to-date but she is reluctant to keep a spreadsheet of members' payments and details. Sandra would therefore be asked to take this role back and copy the required details to Heather for her use. Sandra subsequently offered to do this in the days after the meeting.

It was noted that the membership forms needed updating with the removal of David's contact details and Heather agreed to draft a new version pending Sandra's return and possible comments. It was suggested that, if Sandra became the MO, then it would be impractical to use her address as she seems to be spending a lot of time abroad now and enquiries/payments in cash or cheque could be on her doormat for some time unanswered.

Linda agreed to pass the SRA standing order form to Heather for information in case this layout might be relevant in her drafting.

John B confirmed that Sandra had all the details of those members who had joined or repaid their subs at Open Day.

7. Work days

It was pointed out that the regular work teams were ageing and becoming fewer in number and less able generally to do much heavy work. This meant that the programme needed a quite radical review as there seemed few younger people willing to come to help too. There had been one new person at the workday on Sunday 26th and her work was most welcome. It was hoped she would come again but often it seems people either enquired and did not arrive or came once or twice and no more. This seems to be a general problem and advertising as we have done on various social media, notice boards, website etc is to little or no avail.

Heather would contact the Ismaili Civic group to encourage them to participate in work days.

Although his health and eyesight were deteriorating, Ted was willing to continue to lead workdays as far as he could and notify the team of upcoming workdays and tasks. Neale would be his deputy. Heather would identify problems to

be dealt with e.g. fallen trees and way posts as she walked the wood most days. Harry had already started to develop a map of laurel in the wood so this would help identify that workload more clearly.

Ted had received no reply from the council to his note about the FSW situation regarding coppicing. The lack of response from the council was noted with disappointment and so it was felt that we should simply notify them (via Meike) of our intentions with regard to our future work plans, making the assumption the information in Ted's note had been accepted.

We therefore considered our present options and tried to prioritise the main work that we could do between us.

We identified the Gorses area as of major concern since it had not been dealt with for some time and the previous clearance had now been overgrown again, although less by gorse than by bracken, brambles and new trees.

There was a discussion as to whether the Friends had sufficient resources to work there effectively this winter themselves or whether we should pay TCV to work a few days there to make a significant difference. Some felt adamantly that this was not the best use of funds and so we agreed, for now, we would just do what we could do ourselves on each of the forthcoming work days.

Other jobs that required doing which we felt able to tackle this winter would be to cut, remove or poison laurel (and maybe holly), clear small fallen trees and path edges, and maintain seats, benches, posts etc.

It was agreed that John Zareba would contact David Brown in David Malins' absence to ask if he would continue to take responsibility for maintaining the Jubilee pond.

Possibly, on a longer-term basis, it was thought we should have a new project to develop Linden Glade as a bog garden as the pool there was not repairable/sustainable under the terms laid down by the council and as official permission had been refused for a new pool elsewhere in the wood.

In view of these decisions about FSW work in the wood, it was agreed that we needed to buy some new tools such as 10 replacement Silkies/ blades and a heavy duty brushcutter to complement the trimmer recently obtained. Harry indicated he would be willing to take the necessary brushcutter training. Linda would initially approach Ryobi to ask if they would fund or discount the purchase of one of their brush cutters as she knew they had donated tools to another residents' association nearby recently. It was agreed that the training should be paid for from our funds and also the purchase if Ryobi did not donate.

8. Walks

There was a discussion about the walks programme because again it was realised that the leaders might not be able to take part as much as before. It was hoped to continue as far as possible with a regular walks programme eg sometime January to March - a winter walk (led by Meike), March/ April – a Spring walk (led by Heather), a bluebell and birds walk in April/ May (led by ??) and the butterfly walk in June / July (led by Daniel), a Summer flower walk in July (led by Karen), the MBH in August (with Roger Hawkins and Vic Wallace), and a walk in November about trees (led by Heather). It was agreed that a bat watch should be continued by Steve Budd but it was not thought worthwhile or possible to do an effective moths walk/hunt. The programme would be published on the website and notice boards but not in a leaflet format.

9. Open Day

Linda referred the committee to the report on the website and thanked those who helped for their support. She asked the committee to confirm anything which they felt could be changed from the way it was done this year but she felt that the day had gone well and the new FSW stall layout had worked well.

She stated clearly that she was willing to carry on with organising the Open Day - but not if she found herself doing it alone. She had made a list of jobs that had to be done before the event could take place as well as those needed in the closer run-up to the event and on the day itself and afterwards. She hoped that more Friends would come forward to take responsibility for these as many of the jobs could be done by those people who would rather not do physical work in the woods or who are, for whatever reason, more housebound. All that is needed is some time, a methodical and reliable approach to their responsibilities in the whole process, some computer knowledge - and common sense. Linda said she was willing to liaise and support anyone who took these tasks on and would provide sample documents etc from her previous experience to help them. She would need to know by late April/ early May that all roles were covered satisfactorily so that she felt able to continue to lead the day with that help in place as she was mindful of the limits on advertising dates for the Selsdon Gazette and getting approval from the council for holding an event in the woods. To be fair to the stall holders, she would also have to let them know if the event was cancelled. She knew that the regular stallholders were keen to come again and hoped that there would also be new ones.

She has proposed the 4th of September 2022 as the next Open Day date because past experience had been that it was best to hold the event just after the schools started back after the summer.

Her comments were noted by the committee and it was agreed to proceed on this basis. Linda would provide the list of jobs and responsibilities she felt needed to be covered to Heather for circulation amongst the membership so that people could start to offer their services. She pointed out that a deluge of offers (!) might mean she needed to persuade some people to take on a job that they had not asked for but which seems to be less popular.

10. Other groups/activities in the wood

Heather explained that she had helped the Ismaili Civic group this weekend after they had applied to Meike for permission to hold an event there. Meike had agreed and had referred them to Heather for help regarding her knowledge of the wood and the things to be found in it.

The committee felt that FSW should not be getting involved with any group that has council permission to hold an event in the wood: it was too much responsibility to take on as volunteers since our available time is limited and the dates and times of such events might not be convenient to those Friends who would be asked to assist e.g. with the opening and closing of the toilets and height barrier.

It was agreed that this message be conveyed to Meike and that any knowledge or assistance such as that that Heather had given this weekend should be entirely at the discretion of the Friend involved. There should be no expectation that FSW would provide such a service. The gates are no longer locked so generally there is not a problem other than when the height barrier is needed.

It was agreed that responsibility for opening and closing this should remain with the council and not FSW although it was felt that FSW could possibly continue to open and lock the toilets as near as possible to the start and end of any event – but they would not be held responsible if there was any damage whilst they were unlocked.

It was thought that it would be appropriate for Meike to ask any group seeking our help to make a donation to our funds for this in the same way as they would have to pay the council a fee for using the wood. It was noted after the meeting they had not been charged by the council for this authority, unlike FSW for the Open Day.

12. AOB

Photo competition - Heather reported that this year's competition was very successful and she was willing to run it again so that it could be judged at the 2022 Open Day.

Bomb craters - Heather had been contacted by Jonathan Harrison who was researching bomb craters in Southeast England and she would liaise with him over his findings about those in the wood with a view to publicising his findings on the website.

Date of next meeting

29th November meeting at 7:30 for 7:45 pm start at the Forum (latecomers admitted!)