

Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Selsdon Wood held on Monday 27th November 2023 at 8pm in the Forestdale Forum.

Present: Heather Govier (Chair), Ted Forsyth (Vice Chair), Linda Morris (Secretary), Karen Hall (Treasurer), Neale Fox, Jim Dunning, John Bickerstaff

- 1. Apologies for absence** were received from John Zareba & Chris Green
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 25th of September** were agreed.
- 3. Matters arising:** None
- 4. Membership and finances:**

Karen had circulated the most up-to-date financial statement. This showed a credit balance of almost £8900. It was expected that subscriptions would start to be received within the next month or so to boost this balance, even though there was some anticipated recent expenditure for the new trolley to be deducted from it. However, it was considered that the balance would still be sufficient to allow purchase of more essential tools and materials to further our projects.

It was agreed that the recent purchase of an electric trolley had already proved its worth and that another should be bought immediately to take advantage of a £300 reduction in the price. This would enable easy transfer of shingle for a renewed muddy paths project after it had been delivered to Vincent Avenue either loose-tipped or in bags.

Further expenditure was also approved to buy a cordless brush cutter with two batteries which were currently on offer so that the three items would cost only about £294 - a saving of over £130 on the usual price. Linda also agreed to purchase suitable protective items such as a visor and some leg protectors (approx £36). She felt these would be sufficient to give her adequate protection when using this and agreed that it should not be used in close vicinity to any other volunteers. She had been advised by Xabier that the Council insurance would cover the operation of battery powered tools in the wood by Friends groups so she did not believe she needed any additional power tool training. She considered this training to be uneconomic for her to pursue as she thought it unlikely that she would be able to pass the more technical aspects of this, but was well aware of the safety aspects that she should take note of whenever using the cordless tools. She would ensure all participants in any work sessions where this equipment was used would follow her instructions.

There was discussion about possible age limitations on the cover of volunteers and visitors in the wood within our present insurance. Linda explained that this was a problem that was being investigated through ACCS, TCV (Jane Hyams) and the council (Xabier). She hoped to be able to have a definitive answer soon and would keep the committee advised. In the meantime, it was agreed that the Treasurer should ask that personal accident cover for the working volunteers should be added to our policy. Linda understood that FoLW had this for about £35 so she should use this as the guide price when asking for this.

Karen was also asked to check if we needed to specify any items within the theft cover that were worth more than £300 e.g. the new trolleys. It was agreed a new inventory should be taken of our tools, especially the newer ones such as the Silkies etc although it was noted it seemed we had cover for tools to a value of £10K which should be sufficient.

5. Work sessions

Ted reported briefly on the sessions held since the last meeting as the full reports were on the website. Some ad hoc sessions had been held to install seats outside the usual programme. Thanks were given to Jim Dunning for his leadership of this project and for his work in producing some extra seats from timber saved from elsewhere. (*See also item 8 below*).

Linda reported that GoWild had not been able to attend as often as hoped and that their ability was more limited than initially expected. She hoped that help with the ongoing clearance of vegetation in the Centenary Plantation might suit them on their next visit due on 5th December.

6. Walks

Ted also reported that the attendance on the two walks recently had been good and full reports were on the website.

7. Facebook

Heather reported on Steve's behalf that Facebook now had about 1536 members, and it was being controlled effectively by Steve and Chris Green.

8. Seats and benches

Jim Dunning and colleagues had installed two new remembrance benches, and he had had an enquiry from another family for a further bench, but this had not yet resulted in a confirmation that it was wanted.

He had also made and fitted a bench at 'White Squirrel Corner' and had sufficient timber for another to be sited on the hill of VGW.

He would continue to monitor the condition of all benches and clean and repair any that needed attention. Linda suggested that the families of those who have benches in the wood might be contacted and reminded that they may wish to assist with their upkeep in this way. It was noted, however, of course that the benches would inevitably outlive the family originally financing them, so this was not always possible.

9. Council liaison

Linda reported that the ladies toilet door had finally been replaced. The Council had provided a much more substantial door with a metal cover and had painted it. Neale had spoken to the workmen doing the job and asked them to leave any paint left over so that the Friends could paint the other exterior doors to match. The paint had been moved to the office pending more suitable weather for the exterior work. Linda advised that the interior redecoration of the ladies toilet was due to be scheduled within the budget for 2024/25. Approval for this would not be known for some time, but she was hopeful that the work would be done.

Neale noted that the faulty tap in the toilet had been repaired, replaced by a press tap which was better.

It had been decided at the end of the works session on the previous day that, due to exceptionally cold weather being forecast imminently, it would be sensible to turn off the water supply now rather than in late December as is usually done. This was done and notices were placed on the outside doors and the padlocks were changed, so admittance should not be possible by any unauthorised users, until FSW turned the water back on in the Spring. Linda would advise the council of this action.

John B asked for clarification of the open gate policy. It was agreed that all gates (other than the one on the bend of Old Farleigh Road because of its dangerous position vis a vis passing traffic) should be left open.

10. Projects – (a) Butterfly Bank

Valerie's suggestion of replanting the butterfly bank or part of it or another area was considered. It was felt that a large-scale regeneration was probably beyond what FSW could manage even with her help. It was therefore agreed that Heather would discuss with her the option of Valerie adopting a triangular corner of the area behind the butterfly bund to care for herself whilst FSW continued to look after the main area as they had done so far. It was suggested that the poor show of flowers in the Summer was in part due to the weather and not because of lack of care. It was suggested that Valerie could weed out the grass in clumps, and then plant the seedlings of the new plants she was offering us in those cleared areas. It was thought this would be more advantageous and appropriate than digging out all the grasses and plants as the layer of chalk that had been laid should not really be disturbed or mixed (by digging) with the underlying soil. It was noted that the bund itself had been formed by upturning the grass from the flat area and then covering that with pure chalk. It was suggested that perhaps the bund had become more grassy than expected because the old grass had started to grow through it. It was agreed that the Butterfly Bank should be left (other than 'Valerie's area') to see how it developed this year, especially if the weather was more encouraging to plant growth than before.

10b. DMMFS

David Brown had said he would clear the pond there in the spring (*but he emailed the FSW following the meeting to say he had done this recently*). Steve Budd was expecting to receive some replacement birdfeeders (for free) for those that had not proved to be parakeet proof as advertised. Currently, Steve & Ruth clean the feeders on a regular basis by taking them home. Steve had suggested that the purchase of a power washer would enable this to be done by the office which would also be convenient for another volunteer after the Budds move away. However, Neale indicated that he was willing to clean the feeders periodically, and so he felt the purchase was not necessary. This was agreed, and he was thanked for his offer of help.

10 c. Linden Glade Pool.

It was noted that the pool was settling down well, and that the surrounding areas of rock were beginning to green over. It was agreed that the soil should be pricked whilst relatively soft so that the area compounded by footfall would become looser and so more chance of plant regeneration would be likely. It was agreed to accept Jim's offer of a lily or two for the pool in the Spring. It was not felt necessary to add other pondweed to the pool, or rake out leaves regularly as there were no fish expected to be there. Decaying leaves would provide cover for newts and frogs and toads. Replanting of the surrounding area would be considered in more detail in the Spring once any natural regeneration was noticeable and gaps could be identified.

Steve had changed the camera card there recently and he had posted some shots on Facebook. It seems the fence has so far deterred any repetition of the vandalism seen on camera before it was erected and it is hoped that the respect for the pool will continue.

10d. Wood sculptures

It had been suggested that the FSW could develop a short trail of wood carvings to be found on walks in the wood, and to add interest by following such a trail. Jim had discovered two wood carvers, who might be approached regarding the possibility of using tree trunks left in the wood after Council felling eg in Courtwood Grove and Farleigh Border. It was agreed that he should continue to make enquiries as to what they might offer for about £1000. It was hoped that this would be sufficient to provide 2 or perhaps 3 to start the trail off. Richard Edwards had agreed this was a good idea. This could then perhaps be expanded with more if they prove successful, and if people wished to contribute to fund these in the future.

FSW committee would survey the wood to identify where they thought a suitable log or trunk for carving was situated, and perhaps suggest subjects which could be used as the basis for such carvings. They would however be interested to know what the carvers themselves thought they could provide.

10e. Muddy paths project

It was agreed that this project should be restarted as and when time, funds and materials were available. The two new electric trolleys would enable the shingle to be transported from the delivery point in Vincent Avenue to the wet areas that needed attention.

11. 2024 Programme

Heather had prepared the programme posters, and these would be displayed, once laminated. The dates would also be listed on the website and Facebook.

12. Any other business

Jim tabled a print out showing a sample of a 'Welcome to the Wood' board he had seen and suggested we should renovate the old board by the entrance and set up one similar to this with the original message about the relevant prohibition of vehicles etc in the wood (an extract of the Byelaws) being made clearer. Various suggestions were made and Heather and he would consider these and discuss with the Council to see if we could proceed with this idea in due course.

First Aid training

Neale confirmed he was a trained First Aider for work and he thought Karen still held a valid certificate too. Linda indicated she was willing to be retrained in Feb/March 2024 and that the SRA would probably pay for this.

The meeting closed at 10.10pm. The next meeting to be on 5th February 2024