

Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Selsdon Wood held on Monday 5th February 2024 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, David Debenham, Steve Budd.

Lou Green was also in attendance, as a web adviser, at the invitation of Steve Budd.

1. Apologies for absence were received from John Zareba

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2023 were agreed.

3. Matters arising: None

4.a. Membership and finances: Karen had circulated the most up-to-date financial statements - Dec 23 and Jan 24). The last showed a credit balance of almost £7900. It was expected that subscriptions would continue to be received within the next month or so to boost this figure. She would provide an updated membership total as soon as possible but had been unable to do this for the meeting in view of her recent illness.

Heather asked that thanks be recorded for the generous donation received from Tony Flecchia to cover the cost of the photo competition prizes again in 2024.

4.b. Insurance : There was discussion about adding personal accident cover for FSW volunteers to our present insurance. The Treasurer had asked the company that personal accident cover for the working volunteers should be added to our policy but she had subsequently been asked by them for more information about the exact amount of cover for loss of income needed before they could quote. Linda understood that FoLW had this accident cover for about £35 so she would contact them again to clarify what the extent of the cover they actually had. She would also ask ACCS members what level of cover their groups had. In the meantime, it was considered Friends working in the wood should self-insure against injury /disability if they wanted this cover for themselves.

It was confirmed to Karen that the value of our tools was no more than £10,000 (including the two trolleys at approx £800 each) which was the current total theft cover. There were no other items worth more than £300 each.

5. Work sessions: Ted reported briefly on the sessions held since the last meeting as the full reports were on the website. Linda hoped that GrowWild might be able to help with the ongoing clearance of vegetation in the Centenary Plantation on their next visits due on 6th and 27th February but they would prioritise the clearance of plastic rubbish first on 6th. *(Secretary's note – they actually part-cleared a fallen tree after dealing with the rubbish on 6th)*

Ted and Linda had met the previous day with Jamie Baileysmith, a new volunteer, who had worked well at that Sunday session and seemed keen to return again.

6. Walks: No walks had been programmed for the winter months as the paths were expected to be too muddy.

7. Facebook: Steve reported that Facebook now had about 1600 members, and it was being controlled effectively by Steve and Chris Green.

8. Seats and benches :

Jim Dunning still had a spare plank ready to make another FSW bench when a suitable site had been identified.

He would be re-tagging/re-labelling benches 1-100/A-Z when the weather was suitable for this job and would then update the bench location list/map with the details.

9. Council liaison: Linda reported that the Council had now recruited a new Trees and Woodland Officer (Paul Dalton) but it is not clear if he has replaced RE. There is also a Council Ecology adviser now. Meike's replacement job vacancy should be advertised by now and it is hoped the new person will be in post by April. Xabier was still looking after Friends groups and confirmed the Council was happy for them to continue working as now until any changes in woodland management policy were advised.

10. Website: At this point, Steve introduced Lou Green who was a professional website adviser and who had suggested that, in her opinion, our website would benefit from a review and possible re-design. She provided copies of a brief paper outlining her thoughts and suggestions as to how the site might be improved and how she could help with this. The committee discussed this.

In summary:

Problem	Possible remedy	Comments
A. No current way to make any online payment to FSW (subs /donations) directly from the web pages. This could be seen as a deterrent to a spontaneous decision to pay.	Add a QR code link (as on hand out) or payment button(s) via a gateway such as Stripe on an appropriate page on the website. For Annual Sub £5 per year https://buy.stripe.com/9AQcNR5S26eR8y414 for Donations https://buy.stripe.com/7s18xBfsC7iVcOkeVc Cost 1.5% plus 20p per transaction	- Stripe has facility to include names, addresses and email details but this could have GDPR implications for FSW which could cause considerable extra work to the Treasurer or website manager - This might not be followed up automatically each year unlike committing to a standing order.
B. Current website format could be found to be hard to read on mobile phones without zooming it. C. Menu does not adapt to screen size D. Website is not always easily found via Google search	Newer website formats are now more responsive to being read on screen e.g. auto adjusts text layout to suit as the reader moves through the message.	Those present generally did not feel they had any problem with reading the site as it is now. They were uncertain as to whether there was really the need for the substantial changes suggested
E. Website is large and has many pages which are not all easy to navigate through to find a specific point.	- A re-design of the website as a whole or - Sub-division of the website into two - one to deal simply with the information about the wood and the other to deal with the running of FSW ie membership / subs, donations and programmes	- Potential cost of c.£100 per page - Problems of potential limited migration facility from Yola to a new provider and fear of loss of the information
F. Recent and future changes to Google	Could make use of the website more difficult.	Committee found this needed more explanation for them to be able to make an informed judgement on this
G. Potential loss of data or access to the website as back-up not possible locally and uncertain of situation re Yola's central back up system and future availability of the website to their clients should it be 'lost' or hacked.	Heather to contact Yola to confirm back-up situation	

Lou Green offered to meet with Heather at her home to see how she managed the website now and to clarify more directly to her how she believed her suggestions might be of use to FSW. Heather would then report back to the committee.

11. Projects: (a) Butterfly Bank

Valerie had not yet started to prepare an area of the BB for her replanting although Heather had agreed that she could adopt an area behind the butterfly bund to care for herself: FSW would continue to look after the main area as they had done so far. It was suggested that Valerie could weed out the grass and then plant the seedlings of the new plants she was offering, taking due care not to disturb the layer of chalk that had been laid. She would then hopefully be able to care for this area more to the standard originally indicated by the BB project team.

It was suggested that perhaps the bund had become more grassy than expected because the old grass had started to grow through it. Linda was willing to take out some grass in places from the bund and then perhaps sow wild flower seeds there to see what happened this year, especially if the weather was more encouraging to plant growth than last.

This would probably though have to become more of a 'general' wildflower patch than a pure chalk bank as she and FSW did not have the time to commit to any special care for the bund as a whole.

10b. DMMFS: Steve Budd was expecting to receive some replacement birdfeeders for those that had not proved to be parakeet proof as advertised. The DMMFS remained a popular feature of the wood – and was now a hunting haunt of a sparrow hawk.

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 surrounding soil should be aerated whilst relatively soft so that the area compounded by footfall would become looser. There would then be more chance of plant regeneration, hopefully. Linda and Neale had showed interest in doing this work when time and conditions allowed or it could be done at the next work session.

It was noted that a request had been made for a plaque recording the work done on the regeneration of the area should be displayed instead of the temporary 'progress notices'. Linda explained that it had been her intention to do this once the replanting of the surrounding area was completed and the whole area was looking more 'finished'.

10d. Wood sculptures: A wood carver had been asked to survey possible trunks in the wood suitable for carving and to quote for this. He had visited last month and quoted for three trunks – two single ones (£600 each) which he had suggested were suitable for an couple of owls and a green man and a double one (£1200) for a woodland scene. It was agreed Jim should ask him to produce the two single ones and that maybe, subject to the quality of his work and the potential design for the scene, we could then order the third. Steve asked if he could be the official photographer for the project and so be advised of dates when the man would be on site. Jim would liaise accordingly. Linda suggested perhaps we could have something being carved on the day of the Open Day.

10e. Muddy paths project It was agreed that Jim and Neale would arrange for delivery of 3 tonne bags of gravel (approx £300) so this project could be restarted as muddy patches re-appeared.

Lou Green asked if this was something Scouts could help with. She was advised to contact Neale or Ted about possible tasks for them in the wood to fit in with their badge work.

11. 2024 Programme Linda would send the programme poster to Xabier for inclusion in his Events diary

12. Any other business

a. Succession Planning: Steve strongly advised that FSW should consider future roles and responsibilities as the present incumbents inevitably aged. He was willing to speak to people in the wood and to use FB to try to recruit more active volunteers. Linda explained this was a subject that had been considered and raised several times in the past but that, as with most voluntary groups, there was a lack of people willing to step up to take over and then act reliably and responsibly e.g. when she had asked for help during the year for the Open Day organisation and those few who stepped forward had then done little or nothing anyway!

b. Yew Tree Way broken fence: Heather asked if we should consider dealing with this. It was agreed that the fence was not really needed so there was no requirement to have it repaired. In that case FSW would remove it to a suitable location as a work task. Linda suggested moving it to the end of Yew Tree and then notifying the council of 'some fly tipping there' through the app.

c. First Aid training: Linda confirmed she was attending a course on 28th February – cost shared between FSW and SRA.

d. FSW Social events: David suggested FSW held social events (e.g. an evening in W'spoons) to encourage more team-building rather than just meeting at work sessions. It was agreed that it would be good if he could arrange one to see if the idea was popular.

The meeting closed at 10.02pm. The next meeting would be the AGM on 25th March 2024