



# Friends of Horton Country Park

## Minutes

For the AGM and meeting held on the 07/04/2009

### Present

Brendan Kilby (Chair), Anne Cheshire, Alan Cheshire, Sarah Clift (Countryside Officer), Stewart Cocker, Kate Cochrane, Laurence Coley (Membership Secretary), Val English, Bill Facer, Tony Gibbs, Brenda Hammond-Gibbs, Pat Lowe (Minutes Secretary), Pam Pearcey, Terry Summerfield (Treasurer).

### Apologies

Ray Eyres, Rosemary Eyres, Mo Pearcey, Ian Tilbury.

### Chairman's Statement

The weather this year has thrown everything at us, we have had the darkest wettest summer for 18 years. Going into the park on a summer evening when the rain had cleared showed the park in a different light, as did seeing it under snow. Throughout that time the Rangers and Volunteers have still got the tasks done and the Park is looking well. There has been a lot of work done by the "paid professionals" and the Friends want to thank them and to wish the Countryside Team well in their new home. Thanks also to the Friends. We now have quite a large, stable group and the chair would like to say Thank you for turning up, for all your efforts and for taking part in the Volunteer Tasks. It is good to see people already working towards the Autumn Fair for which we have a busy time ahead. I am looking forward to the year ahead.

### Re-election of officers

It was decided at the 2007 AGM to elect Officers on a three year cycle in co-ordination with the election of the Chair, unless there were retirements in the meantime. The Chairman and all existing officers have a further year to serve.

### Membership Secretary's Report

We have 27 paid-up members, including honorary member Jan Mason. This includes 11 new members. There are 48 members listed but not all had paid membership fees. This year's fees are now due.

### Treasurer's Statement

Terry gave out copies of the accounts, which showed that there was £957.37 cash-in-hand at the Bank on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 2008. This included £163 in the Insurance Fund. As agreed in 2006 the increase of £1 in the membership fee has been put aside to provide Insurance cover for the Friends' tasks to be done in the future without a Ranger presence. The Council's Volunteer contributions over 2 years have also been added to this. Membership is down against 2007 so we would like to have more new members. Hopefully the Autumn Fair will give membership a boost, as well as another Task day spent recruiting. Terry suggested that lapsed members be contacted and sent a Newsletter and membership form. Laurence will do this.

Brendan said it looks as if we are in a comfortable position financially, but we are hoping to buy more apple trees and there will be expenses involved in the Autumn Fair.

Members were asked to agree the Accounts

Proposed: Sarah Clift

Seconded: Laurence Coley

The AGM was followed by an interesting and enlightening talk by Stewart Cocker on “The Days of Steam” in the Countryside Park. There will be a Days of Steam Walk on 15<sup>th</sup> November, starting from the Information Centre at 1p.m.

The talk was followed by the ordinary bi-monthly meeting for April.

### **Matters arising from previous minutes**

#### **Orchard**

Brendan asked if there was a record of our previous planting of new trees in the Orchard. One of these has fallen this year. The Friends will replace the lost trees with the same species and some pears.

Action - Sarah will check the Orchard file to get a species list.

#### **Pond Action**

Laurence has checked the “Pond Action” web site but there doesn’t seem to be funding available, just encouragement for people to work on ponds.

There are grants available for creating new ponds in 2009 -2012 but not for maintenance of existing ponds. It was suggested that as the Orchard pond was now more like a bog garden than a pond we could try for funding to (re-)create the pond. Sarah suggested applying to “Breathing Spaces” with a package involving Meadow and Orchard Ponds. It might be possible to get a grant of £10,000 to dig out and de-silt Orchard Pond. The Friends would have to apply under the “Awards for All” scheme.

Action – Sarah will liaise with Lawrence over an application to “Awards for All.”

#### **Woodland Management**

Brenda said it was important to keep old trees rather than replace them when they were lost. Sarah told us that the Council had spent £600 to have the old pear trees pruned. Brendan pointed out that we were concerned about the trees on the Balance Pond side of the orchard. We were told that the tree which fell in the snow was riddled with woodpecker holes and would have fallen soon anyway. She has spoken to Jeremy and has the matter in hand. Lawrence Crowe has suggested that clearing saplings etc. and cutting back undergrowth from near the Path in Hendon Grove would be better than all-over thinning.

#### **Tasks**

The April task will be a Recruitment drive for new members. People joining on the day will be given receipts for their fee. Sarah will get collecting tins, receipt books and make “Friends” badges for those who don’t have them.

A litter pick was done by the Rangers near Ruxley Lane recently but there are still large items to be cleared behind the houses further in.

Pat suggested a “Litter pick” competition within the Autumn Fair. Brendan agreed we need to get children involved in the care of the Park. Stewart asked that Friends always involve the Council in litter clearance “It is our responsibility” and they could supply bags, plastic gloves and pick-up tools.

### **Wildlife**

Terry has counted at least 20 nests in the Heronry in Great Wood, but possibly no more than half are in use. Tony has counted 9 in use. It is a difficult wood to do an accurate count as there is no viewpoint from which all nests can be seen clearly.

Brendan asked about the dormouse boxes. Stewart said the results are negative so far for dormice but other wildlife is using the boxes.

Tony asked if it was possible to have a kestrel box put up.

Brendan thinks he has heard a long-eared owl in the Park. Stewart said they like youngish pine trees and we do have some in the park so it is possible.

Tony told us buzzards are nesting nearby so we should look out for them.

### **Forum**

Stewart said that this has been delayed for a variety of reasons but it should be possible for it to be arranged for the end of the year.

### **Benches**

There should be money now in the Council’s budget for the new financial year to pay for replacement benches.

Sarah will contact the Maintenance team.

Stewart said that some of the planking produced by the Saw mill demonstration at the Autumn Fair should be used to make new benches.

### **Dog poo bins.**

Brendan asked why this had not yet been re-sited nearer the entrance to the Park. It would be difficult to move the existing bin from near the notice board because it is concreted in place but a new one will be put in near the entrance. Also one could be sited in the pedestrian entrance near the buffers to divide the opening and make it too narrow for cars to use.

### **Car Park**

Stewart would like to see the Car Park made one way with the rear gate an exit only but no entry.

Brendan asked if there could be clearer signs on the Main road marking the Entrance as so many cars drive into the Park assuming it is the Children’s Farm. It was agreed that the road signs were not that clear when coming from the Malden Rushett direction but other members felt it was not a serious problem.

### **April 19<sup>th</sup> – Recruitment task**

Sarah said the Rangers will be doing a “Green Stat” survey on that day. They will be giving visitors/members of the public a questionnaire asking why they come to the park, how they use it and their opinions on how the park is managed. Brendan will talk to

members doing the task when they meet up beforehand, to suggest their approaches to the public and what to say when recruiting.

### **Dates**

21st,22nd,23rd April – Deer fencing around coppiced area, with the Moles.

18<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> June – Meadow management; strimming and raking grassland to keep meadows rough but free of scrub. Fly Meadow will be one area.

The Countryside Team will be working one weekend in three from October so they may need to have more set times etc. for tasks which can then be displayed on the Notice Board.

Sarah will send a round-robin e-mail proposing dates for future tasks.

### **Vandalism**

The Apple picnic table in the orchard has been burned in the centre, there have been fires lit and alcohol litter left. A tree has been cut down and a sign uprooted. Members are asked to please keep watch and to notify the Rangers or police if they see or suspect any anti-social behaviour.

### **Park management**

The bat roost is to be checked for signs of roosting.

There will be a visit to look for signs of water-voles.

Material has been delivered to fill the pot-holes in the Car Park.

### **Newsletter**

Brendan would like to have an up-to-date Newsletter ready to give out on the recruitment drive. Sarah appealed to members to contribute articles. Terry was asked to write a piece on the herons and Tony something about the jays and other birds. Pat will do a short piece on the clearing of the water-vole habitat. All items, however short will be gratefully received, before 14<sup>th</sup> April if possible. They can be e-mailed to Sarah or to Peter Tomlin at [peter@friendsofhorton.co.uk](mailto:peter@friendsofhorton.co.uk).

### **A.O.B.**

Alan said the roof of the Information Centre needs de-mossing. He will liaise with Sarah about it.

Anne said they will help with the contacting of lapsed members.

Lawrence asked how much the Insurance for Friends' independent Tasks was likely to be. Brendan said about £200 plus £100 admin.charge. Stewart suggested going direct to Zurich which might be cheaper.

Brendan reported on the Autumn Fair sub-committee meeting. He said it had been very useful and had moved things forward a fair bit. It had the makings of an excellent fair with as good a diversity of stalls and numbers as last time. We had to be careful not to make it too big as we needed a large number of helpers, especially in the Car Park. The mown area of the Events field was now smaller so we might need to change the layout from last time's.

The next meeting of the Autumn Fair sub-committee is on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May in the meeting room in the house near the Information Centre. Sarah said we appeared to have

a good force of volunteers. She still had a few stall holders to ring round to confirm bookings.

Stewart showed members the new roller blind style of display boards for Events. One specifically about the Friends would cost £150 and the Team would help with pictures etc. Members agreed to spending this.

There was some discussion on whether the programme for the Fair should include a raffle ticket. This will be decided at the next A. Fair meeting.

**The next Meeting of the Friends will be on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June at 7.30 pm in the New Hall.**

Members are asked to use the Car Park and not to block the area in front of the Rangers barn.