



Friends of Horton Country Park

Minutes

For the meeting held on the 06/02/2007

Present:

Brendan Kilby (Chair), Rosemary and Ray Eyres, Bill Facer, Sandy Fleming, Sarah Hallums, Pat Lowe, Pam and Mo Pearcey, Terry Summerfield, Ian Tilbury, Peter Tomlin.

Apologies:

Anne and Alan Cheshire, Laurence Coley.

Matters Arising:

New Leaflets

Sarah gave out copies of the new Horton Country Park leaflets. They show that the Golf Course is now included in the Local Nature Reserve status. She also gave out the lists of Countryside Events and Walks for 2007.

Newsletter

Brendan apologised for its not being out yet but pointed out that there had been no contributions from members – it could not all be left to Peter.

Tasks carried out

There was a good turn out on 14th January for the continuation of the hedge cutting. The hedgerow between Osiers and Lawn Barn Meadow is now finished and the cut wood burnt.

Brendan praised the amount of work which had been carried out by a number of groups in the last few months. This was noticeable when walking round the park.

Fencing of Coppiced area

There is to be a project to show that fencing is necessary to prevent deer damaging new growth. The Butchers Grove coppice will be fenced but an area will be left unfenced to compare the damage to growth when deer have been browsing on the new shoots. There will be posts with netting between them. Sarah suggested that helping with the fencing could be a Friends' task for May. Some of the funding will come from "Green Arc" for Urban Fringe Improvement.

Dangerous Trees

Sarah explained that the "red dots" on trees were to indicate that the tree needed work on it. They did not necessarily mean that the trees were dangerous, some would be felled but some just needed work on the canopy. Bill pointed out that there was a tree on the path past Field Pond that looked dangerous. Sarah said that The Countryside Team would be out in the next week doing this work.

Publicity

The group discussed ways of bringing knowledge about the Friends to a wider audience and encouraging new members and volunteers for tasks. Ian has been looking into using the local free press e.g. The Guardian has a column "Clubs A-Z" which invites local groups to have an article put in. Sandy suggested the Borough publication "Insight". Sarah said there is to be a mention of the Friends in the next issue. Sandy also mentioned contacting the Press Officer for Epsom and Ewell Council.

Volunteer Budget

The Council's payment of £1 per volunteer per day, and Friends turning out for tasks, means that we have already earned £30 with hopefully more to come from our February task.

Sandy's role

Sandy is responsible for co-ordinating the work of various groups of Friends in parks across the borough, FEPP (Friends of Epsom and Ewell Parks), Friends of Ewell Park etc. so that volunteer work can be shared and evenly distributed. He is organising a networking meeting for all the groups, possibly in June. He suggested that FEPP volunteers could help to put out clues for the Horton Park Easter Egg Hunt on 8th April, volunteers needed from 9a.m.!

Minutes on website

Brendan suggested that a public copy of the minutes should be available on the Friends website instead of the present arrangement where only members with a user name and password could access them. Ian pointed out that it would be wise to make some sensitive details only available to members. Agreed. Peter will edit the full minutes and publish the public version.

Newsletter

The newsletter will be distributed to all listed members prior to the AGM in April, with membership forms and a reminder that fees are due. Anyone not paying fees will no longer be a member or receive the Newsletter. Brendan pointed out that if members want a newsletter they need to contribute to it. He appealed once again for Friends to write an article, however small, and also asked again for someone to offer to write up Nature notes.

Bats – Farmstead Belfry

There had been some vandalism last weekend, padlocks had been removed and a crowbar used on the door. Someone unknown had made the door secure by bending over the padlock hasps so it couldn't be opened. It is not known whether anyone had been inside but there were no bats when the building was checked. New padlocks will be fitted and Sarah will put up more noticeable signs to explain that it is a bat roost and they are a protected species. It was suggested by member that the signs should also point out that there was nothing else of value within the building.

Sarah will be putting up bat and bird boxes as soon as Health and Safety issues can be sorted out.

Dormice

Alison has been checking the dormice boxes. They are being used by wood mice and some birds have used them in the spring. She is trying a new Eastern European design to avoid this. She had reported that the only vandalism had been by squirrels who had chewed and stolen the strings attached to the doors.

Entomology

Sarah has been out in the park with Ian Menzies. They found the eggs of the Brown Hairstreak butterfly on blackthorn. This is quite a rare butterfly. The work that has been done on cutting back the hedgerows results in new growth which encourages it. It has also been found on the Common and the Hogsmill.

Annette found a Horseshoe ladybird (*Clitosthetus Arcuatus*) which is very rare and easily overlooked because it is so tiny (size of a money spider.) It is brown with a horseshoe shaped mark on its back. It shelters in ivy during the winter. Sarah also found a Heather Ladybird, black with red spots.

Birds

A tawny owl can be seen quite easily in the coppiced area in Butchers Grove. There is another in the tree opposite the dipping platform at Field Pond. Little owls have also been seen and Great Spotted Woodpeckers are very active and noisy.

Student Volunteers

Sarah expressed congratulations to Nescot students who have done great work on scalloping the hedgerows. This year's group have been extremely capable and hard-working. She was also very impressed by a group of 30 students from Blenheim School who came on their Citizenship Day and cut three scallops in one day. Sarah said that the volunteers this year "have been brilliant."

Members asked what the benefits of "scalloping" were. She explained that the centre of the overgrown hedges were full of dead wood so cutting back all the way along would not provide shelter or food for wildlife. By cutting bays alternately, into half the thickness of the hedge, you maintain the wildlife corridor and encourage new growth. It was a way of preserving ancient field boundaries and preventing them becoming bands of scrub.

Tasks

Stewart Cocker has said that the hedgelaying was "wonderful, amazing." Brendan pointed out that Tasks also attract and renew interest from the Public in the park. They can see work going on and are made aware of how much is done to keep the park the way it is.

February 18th Sunday – Information Centre - finishing the display and cleaning the second room, and if weather permits painting window frames etc. Also fencing round toilet block needs renewing, weeds cut back and general tidy up of the area. Meet at Information Centre 10 a.m.

March 18th Sunday – Litterpicking and general tidy up before new growth gets too high. Meet at Ruxley Lane Notice Board 10 a.m.

April 29th Sunday – Workshop Task with Lower Mole Volunteers. Making new signs and orienteering posts, possibly seating. Meet at LMV Workshop 10 a.m.

May 8,9,10th – mid-week – Deer fencing with LMV. Sunday task to be decided next meeting.

June – possibly fixing posts for photographic points. date to be decided.

July 1st Sunday- Ragwort pulling Many more volunteers needed. Brendan will contact Equus, Stables etc.

August – Holidays so none.

September/October – Possibly thinning Godbolds Copse.

November - Tree Planting on Horton Lane Boundary to fill gaps.

AGM – 3rd April

Brendan's 3 years are up so will need nominations for Chair. Also – Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Officer need to be chosen.

Nominations for Chair should be sent to Pat Lowe, e-mail p.lowe976@btinternet.com or by post to 3 Fairfield Close, Ewell, KT19 0EG.

AOB

Dead badger. Ian and Sandy reported that a badger from the Country Park had been run over in Horton Lane. It was a male weighing about 30 pounds. It looked as if it had stood and faced an oncoming car. Sandy had had an anonymous call reporting seeing it dead. Ian and Sandy have found a new large sett with more than three entrances.

Dates

Please see Tasks list

February 18th – Carriage Drive

April 8th Sunday – Easter Egg Hunt. Starts 2 p.m. in the New Room.

6th May Sunday - Springtime Woodland Walk. Starts 2 p.m. Information Centre
- Donkey Day in the Totem Pole field

Next Meeting

AGM & meeting combined Tuesday 3rd April 07 at 7.30pm in the New Hall

Members are asked not to use the Rangers Car Park for meetings. Please use the public Car Park and Sarah promises to make sure no-one is locked in.