

HARLOW BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

MINUTES OF MEETING 5TH NOVEMBER 2013 AT 2.00PM HELD AT PARNDON WOOD NATURE RESERVE

THOSE ATTENDING:

Darren Fazackerley, Bill Weston, Mick Westby, Mike Levett, Pauline Tidmas, Andrew Tomlins, Lauren Hull, Colin Lincoln, Tony Hall, Cllr Jean Clark, Cllr Edna Stevens

Janet Cable – Minutes.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Lenny Collins, Chris Rees, Jan Wragg, Derek Barry

Notices – Mike Levett, Landscape & Biodiversity Officer started on 2nd September.

He previously worked at Barking & Dagenham as a Ranger and has 17 plus years in project work. He has also worked at Essex Wildlife Trust and has a vast background in biodiversity.

All in attendance introduced themselves to Mike.

1&2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

Agreed as a correct record.

Item 7 Oakwood Ponds – Have not heard anything. Councillors have a small amount of money for environmental improvements and Oakwood Ponds were put in as a priority. Darren said that Ray Matthews had been poorly. Are looking at pond restoration and ward improvement programme. There is no scope for new schemes just those already in place. Additional funding needs to be sought. Do not know how much of the £20,000 has been spent. Kingsdon Lane Pond has a fallen willow tree in it which is still there.

Chestnut paling has been done and a good job has been made of it.

Darren is meeting with the ward sponsors re: costings for ward improvement schemes. If a ward has underspent the money will be returned to central funds.

Oakwood Ponds – would it be better to make it a Heritage Site?

Harlow Biodiversity Partnership has agreed its priority sites, Oakwood Ponds was not one of these and the site is not a county wildlife site.

There are 42 county wildlife sites. Is there a map which identifies all of these sites? Yes and it has been previously distributed at this meeting.

The Greenspace Infrastructure has been circulated to Councillors but it is not a public report. Hopefully the report on this can be brought to the next meeting. Planning also to attend.

Archaeological Project meeting – funding for the project was declined. The Roman Temple Site has been put forward as a site of interest that volunteers will undertake work on to improve for biodiversity.

Badgers, are they protected? Yes highly protected. They can be a big issue with Planning.

Harlow Badger Group set up in 2010 have given a wealth of knowledge.

Hare coursing – 3 people have been arrested from Harlow for hare coursing on Gilston Park. The court date is 21st November.

Under item 8 Any Other Business there was an article in the Star about a resident being fined regarding horses.

Also someone was fined and barred from keeping animals for 15 years re: a horse which fell over a cliff. The RSPCA are saying that the tethering of horses is a dangerous practice.

Mrs Tidmas reported that her husband has been trying to get information from Essex County Council but is getting no feedback.

Justin Hopwood at Pets Corner charges £1.80 per child per visit or £3.60 including activities. There is an educational post in the lottery bid. See minute item 3.

3. **ECCO UPDATE**

Had a very successful summer.

1136	July)	
1657	August)	3412 visitors
619	September)	

In October the Halloween event brought in 1,000 people. This was the first chargeable event since ECCO took over and the money raised will go back into next year.

Easter, Halloween and Christmas are the three chargeable events.

Birthday parties – 15 this year and also chargeable.

23 school visits, more booked before now and Christmas.

Charging £2.00 per child for 3/3 ½ hour visit. As previously mentioned Pets Corner are charging £3.60 for similar events and so we need to discuss charges in January.

The Centre is open 27 hours to the public, which has been since April. This will stay the same for the rest of the year.

Thursday opening times were 4-9, this has been changed to 3-8. Saturday is 11-6, this is changing to 8-3 or 9-4.

A new trail is being installed in Parndon Wood. The trail has been marked and the volunteers are working hard. There is a need for a bridge. It will be open June/July and closed March to June.

Logs are doing very well, also with logs from other locations.

Coppicing is about to start.

Bat detectors have been purchased for Bat Walk. This has enabled us to charge. The detectors were purchased from the fire money.

Q. Have we got rid of all the wood which was stored (Milled oak)?

A. There is still some which people can buy.

Q. What is a bat detector?

A. It picks up the frequency of the bats flying around.

4. **KIER HARLOW**

No representative attended and no apologies but as already mentioned Ray Matthews is poorly. Joshua Tinker intended to come but with the storm of last week he is extremely busy. So far there are 70 trees which have come down and still more are being found.

Kier have cut Hawkenbury meadow and an external contractor will cut and collect on Stort Valley Meadows. Trees came down in the Reserve as a result of the October storm which meant it had to close for a day.

Kier have worked very hard over the last 10 days and Mike co-ordinated the work and Colin reported the trees down, a good team effort.

5. **NATURE RESERVES UPDATE & WILDSpace! REPORT**

Please see report by Mike Levett and Lenny Collins.

Mike reported that the system is working well.

At the present time the management plan for the site is being revised.

Q. Could you please explain about bramble and bracken bashing.

A. We are trying to get rid of it as brambles are so aggressive.

Q. Can the brambles be painted with poison to get rid of them?

A. The 5 year plan comes to an end this year. Coppice management will be introduced. We are going to discourage deer into the Reserve which has increased the bramble. We may have to exclude deer from a zero management policy. We will try to get Natural England down to discuss and get advice.

You can do bramble control chemically but it may not be the best way forward. Culling still takes place. Bramble is also a main food source.

Trail – Natural England consent is needed.

Provisional Green Team Programme, on second draft at present.

Harlow Conservation Volunteers – work programme to the end of July.

Jean McAlpine Park. National Tree Week – tree planting by Harlow Conservation Volunteers between 10-3pm on 24th November. Encourage Duke of Edinburgh Award participants and uniformed organisations to get involved..

Tree planting. Simon Thomas from Tim Moya Associates is eager to participate in the event on 24th November. To create a poster and get it circulated.

6. WILDLIFE PROJECTS GROUP UPDATE

There is a footpath problem with water laying on them. Some of the paths have been raised and resurfaced.

Meadows, need to maintain them but this requires an ongoing revenue cost.

Orchid meadow has been cut and now just waiting for material left on site to be removed.

Himalayan balsam is very invasive. It is hoped to attack it again and get on top of it.

Notice board has been delivered. This will contain information about the site and volunteer events.

Veolia have a plaque which will be put up in recognition of the funding for the project.

Funding for community spaces will be ending and it is not known how the money was spent.

Project to restore half of the area with wildflowers. Mark Hall estate to be visited for ideas.

To the right of the zig zag bridge there are hardly any flowers. Suggest to strip the brown grass off to sub soil – will establish in 2 years, although Darren has reservations about this.

Rebecca Banks has left Essex Biodiversity project. Mark Iley will come down to give advice. Need to consider management costs of maintaining a wild flower meadow. There has been budget reductions. Sustainability – where is the money going to come from. There is a budget of £10,000 and £2,500 has been spent on cut and collect. This will have to be done every year. There could be the possibility to purchase equipment for the volunteers to cut themselves but we will still need to collect.

Could there be good quality hay coming off the field?

Could animals be allowed to graze? This creates more issues eg fencing etc.

When there is only a £10,000 budget must ask ourselves can we commit ¼ of the budget. Need to look at all options.

In the days of Robin Bletsoe the grass was left long in Foldcroft and the children loved it.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Netteswell Plantation – a foul water manhole is pumping water out. The Environment Agency have contacted Thames Water. Both turned up and were there well into the evening. To be followed up.

Volunteer leaflets – there is a shortage of leaflets to distribute. Plenty were lost in the fire. Colin suggests one leaflet to cover all groups and he is currently putting something together.

Lauren is happy to talk to anyone who may wish to link in with ECCO, to produce a leaflet.

As previously mentioned a huge amount of leaflets were lost in the fire and there is no budget. Possibility of putting leaflet on the website, linked to ECCO.

Water Voles have been seen at the Town Park and Canons Brook.

At Parndon Moat Marsh there is somebody living there.

There is also an encampment at the woods by Mead Park Depot. Darren will report this to Marysia Rudgley.

Should they be looked at as homeless? Community enforcement deal with them and give advice.

Proposed dates for 2014:

11 March at 2pm

10 June

4 November at 2pm

10th June meeting – 2pm or 7pm.

Generally agreed 7pm a good time in June for an evening meeting.

Q. Long grass – newspaper reports with cuts in Local Authority spending why is the Council still cutting banks, no one goes there?

A. Lots are planted with daffodil bulbs – they are left February to June and then cut. This year bulb flowering was delayed so did not cut until after 25th June.

Meeting closed 4.05pm.