

Harlow Biodiversity Partnership

Minutes

Meeting Held 9th June 2016

ATTENDANCE LIST:

NAME	ORGANISATION REPRESENTED
Darren Fazackerley	Harlow Council
Patrick Bailly	Harlow Council
Josey Travell	ECCO
Colin Lincoln	Harlow Wildlife Project
Mike Barham	Wildspace and Greenteam Volunteer
Sally Naylor	Greenteam Volunteer
Andrew Tomlins	Harlow Conservation Volunteer
Cllr Tony Hall	Harlow Council
Cllr Jean Clark	Harlow Council
Derek Harris	Harlow Allotment Association
Nicola China	Essex County Council
Dean James	Harlow Council
Eric Gammer	Resident
Derek Barry	Harlow Badger Group

1. Apologies

- Suzanne Prunty Kier Harlow
- Linda Hamlin – Harlow Conservation Volunteer

2. Minutes of Last meeting – agreed

- Himalayan Balsam control – the plant has yet to grow so the work has been rescheduled for later in the year.
- Bee orchids are present in the area once more.

3. Flood Alleviation Project

- NC and DJ introduced the Flood Alleviation Project for Harlow

In 2010 it was agreed that Essex County Council were to be responsible for managing local flood risks. In 2013, surface water management plans were completed in Harlow which highlighted 2 high risk areas. ECC are now assessing these management plans for each site, to see if they are financially viable. ECC are looking for feedback from residents to see if they have missed anything. The sites under scrutiny are HAR2, using the Kingsmoor playing field and a bund to store water and HAR 6, which includes constructing a bund at Nicholls playing field and the land off Kiln Lane, along with installing new culverts at North Grove

- HAR2's initial approach is seen as financially viable and should provide protection to 28 properties, whilst also reducing levels of water overall in the area.

ECC aim to refine this option to see if anything more can be done.

CL – asked how regularly these protected properties are currently flooded? DJ -2006/2007 was the last significant flood, therefore potential for these properties to flood again in the future.

CL- asked will this management plan hope to hold excess water on the Fennells Field playing field. DJ- ECC want to decrease rate of flow to mitigate flood risks. Currently management plan involves a bund feature at Northern border of field as an option. All ideas at the moment are based on modelling. Options are being considered and refined before a decision is made on which feature is best to install.

PB – asked if the feature in the playing field will add any biodiversity value to the site, and will this be considered in the design? DJ – biodiversity does get considered during the planning stage. If there is an opportunity to increase biodiversity value of the area alongside the installation of the defence system, this will add weight to the design scheme of the feature. Increasing biodiversity improves funding opportunities. NC – ECC are open to ideas and suggestions on ways to increase the biodiversity value of the area through this programme. DJ – pressing ECC to do site visits especially at Parndon Wood Nature

Reserve in order to attempt to alleviate flood risk at this site also. ECC understand the role of SSSI and the associated issues with carrying out work in this area.

DF -asked if Fir Park properties were also being looked at in this scheme? DJ – ECC have looked at alleviation features along Fir Park Road and other areas and these have been included in draft reports. NC – next phase of study will be to see what combination of the available options work best. DJ - there is also a need to highlight Essex Highways to look at their own infrastructure to participate in the flood alleviation scheme. NC – Any options found will be highlighted to Essex Highways, but they are under no obligation to adhere to theme.

DF -asked if Rye Hill Road area, currently outside of the target zone, but still a large area. Can this be included in the catchment zone? DJ- this is being considered as a catchment for other areas, however, this is also an archaeological site and has issues for development. NC – critical drainage areas are highlighted through looking at various features, such as the topography of the land too.

CL – asked if the main pond in PWNR could be de-silted to hold more water from Rye Hill, could this be considered? DJ -yes this could be considered in the plan, however, it must be financially viable. This could also be looked at as part of a separate scheme if it is not viable for this project.

PB – asked if watercourses are provided with silt traps, these can make any defence systems more effective. However, this would need to be worked in partnership with local farmers. There are cultivation issues with the water tower releasing water across farmland. Water ideally should be intercepted before it reaches PWNR. NC – Happy to explore working with local farmers and the water towers as a defence option.

TH – asked if ECC are aware of the knock on effect these defences may have on other areas, such as the crematorium in Harlow, which suffers with flooding. Have the crematorium been included in the planning talks? SN – asked that as the Fennells Fieldplaying field in Kingsmoor is already a wet site, do ECC foresee this being completely wet as part of the works? NC – installing a Bund as a flood feature only makes the fields wet for a few days whilst the water can slowly drain. Water should not affect the local land use for the area.

SN – asked if the safety issues for having standing water in this area, even for a short period of time, if they have been considered? NC – Safety information boards would be supplied to the area. The feature is designed to fill slowly, to allow people to move away from the site and to allow them to get out of the area if they need to.

DF – asked that as the hedgerow at the boundary of the field is important to local people; the maintenance and access to the hedgerow

needs to be considered in the planning of the feature. NC – this can be discussed when the designs of the feature have been decided upon.

AT – highlighted that from a residents point of view, some may be frustrated at the area being wetter and at the loss of the ground from a sports use to a nature area. NC – it is hoped that the space can be used in a variety of ways and this has been noted and used in the designs of the feature.

- HAR 6 site

NC – The findings of the initial assessment are that there are a number of ways in which the flood risk can be alleviated in this area. Nicholls Field playing field sports pitch area could benefit from having a bund installed, as this pitch floods regularly. ECC hope the use the allotment site to the west for this feature to be installed as this area is currently underused. ECC hope to use half this area to divert and hold water to protect the newly developed sports pitch. DJ – internal talks with the leisure team. Studies produced suggest that not installing a bund may have a small detrimental affect to the pitches, increasing as time progresses. This is not ideal after the recent investment in the sport pitch area. In the allotment site, the northern end is already very wet. The allotment association is pushing to get these pitches re-let, but if there is not a good take-up, it is hoped the area can be used to alleviate the local flooding through installing a bund. ECC would like to know peoples' ideas on these suggestions.

DH – asked what is a bund? DJ – a bund is a mound type feature to create a natural barrier to water flow. It is hoped that where the bund joins at the carpark, the water will back up to be held on the playing fields for option 1, or option 2 is to create a depression in the allotment area, where water will naturally collect. By installing a bund with this depression, water should be held and released more securely and at a slower pace.

DH – asked if the northern end of the allotments is used for this feature, won't the remaining allotment area be at risk from the flooding too? DJ – we may be able to shape the land so this does not happen.

CL – asked if the whole area put forwards was needed for the project to work. NC - Yes, other options have been investigated and in large flooding events, using the allotment area, combined with landscaping, was the best option to reduce flooding to the regeneration area of the sports pitches. If this second option is agreed upon, the remaining allotment land will be protected from flooding.

DH – asked if the allotment area was a statutory site? DF - Yes and DJ and NC are aware of this. DJ – yes we may be able to protect the remaining ground. We need to find common ground for both the leisure zone and the allotment group.

DF – asked if the current drainage ditches could just be maintained? DJ – ECC are working to maintain these and enhance what is there already. DF – noted that ECC may need to re-site the footpath which currently runs close to the proposed bund site in order to create and widen the ditches. DJ – ECC are happy to see if the allotment sites can be let out and used before going ahead with this option.

DH – asked what size of land ECC are looking for? DJ – this is still under discussion and the maps supplied are simply an example to show the draft ideas so far for the two schemes. CL – noted that if the allotments could sacrifice a small percentage of the allotments, it may be beneficial to have the bund place there in order to dry out the remaining allotment land. NC – agrees that this is the idea and what they hope can be achieved. The cost is still being considered for the size of the site needed to this scheme though as topography and ground water levels need to be considered.

DH – asked what the timescale of the work would be. NC – the site is at high risk so ideally; they would look to start the work early 2017 if possible. The sooner the work can start; the sooner the protection can be offered.

DH -asked if it would be wise to offer allotment plots at that end of the allotment then. DJ -this timescale is something we can be firmer with once we have resumed talks with Harlow Council, which we are keen to do as soon as possible. ECC are happy to look at the size of the plots at a later date too and to gather opinions at a later date.

AT -asked if ECC will have a site visit for this site, noting that it is easier to discuss issues when you can see them. DJ – ECC are happy to carry out site visits.

MB -asked how the water will drain, as the surrounding fields in the Toddbrook area are flat. NC – this is part of the next phase of planning. We are hopeful that culverts will help in the urban areas but nothing is confirmed in how to link to the current rugby club drainage.

MB – noted that a long established meadow is being turned into a sport facility and that any defences installed should be as natural as possible to compensate this urbanisation.

4. ECCO update

- School visits have been increasing this year, with June being fully booked up and only 2 dates left available for July. Josey has created a new learning visit information pack and site specific spotter sheets which she hopes schools can use during their visits. This year has also seen a rise in the number of visits from youth clubs, such as those from the Scout and brownie movement. This has seemed to be the result of positive feedback and the reserve is being recommended between used groups as a good place to visit.

- Litter and fly tipping seem to be decreasing from the carpark area. This could be due to the lighter evening's not allowing people to dump rubbish under the cover of darkness.
- Forest school – Josey has completed her training and is awaiting the result of the coursework, which she hopes to gain by the end of the summer. She is also working with another trainee practitioner from a local school who is using the woods for their own school sessions.
- The Honey is set to be harvested at the end of June and then jarred, ready for sale in July. Unfortunately, due to the weather over the winter months, we lost a hive. This seems to have been a common occurrence with the hives at other sites. We hope to replace the lost hive with a new queen soon.
- ECCO passed a food hygiene inspection, ranking a hygiene level of 5, the top level.

5. Harlow Council update

- Councillor Danny Purton is newly appointed as Portfolio Holder for Environment.
- Kier are currently cutting grasses and have been told to avoid cutting any wildflowers down. They are due to start hedge face backing soon in order to stop obstructions.

In April it was noted that Kier carried out over-zealous weed spraying in the town. Subcontractors were talked to.

- Green Flag Award; full site inspections occurred on 17th May 2016 both at PWNR and at the Town Park. Currently awaiting feedback, results should be released early July.
- Funding; £30k has been awarded to spend on biodiversity improvement projects within the area. Kier contract is due to end June 2016 and progress has been made to set up Harlow Trading Services to take over the workload. Discussions are ongoing and the aim is to improve effectiveness and ground maintenance.

6. Wildspace

- Busy as always. Firewood processing is nearly complete and the issues with the deer in the coppice areas has been addressed which is an important part of the woodland management plan. Fences have been used to protect the coppice areas both in PWNR and railings have been erected to protect the vulnerable areas in Hospital and Ridsen Woods. These can be reused in the future and can be easily transported.
- Capel Manor College is still being involved in Latton Woods for their courses.

- Stort Valley Meadows has seen the volunteers clear the brambles and brash and maintain the trails and carry out litter picks regularly. There has also been progress at Parndon Lock Meadows, with contractor completing the work to allow grazing to occur. 250m of new fencing has been installed from the volunteers and the contractors. This is to keep a herd of English Long Horn cattle grazing at this site. The next project here is to install a bird hide.
- Mark Hall Woods has seen the volunteers working to open up the rides and glades.

DB - asked if the issues with human waste had been solved. PB – fences have been installed by the layby in question to stop access from lorries parked there, and a hedge has been planted. However, it is agreed that these measures are unlikely to stop the problem. Open to suggestions.

AT - asked what the mitigation work was? PB – road network development improvements on the A414 carriageway will affect the environment. To offset this work, a figure is produced on removal and therefore work done in other similar sites carried out. E.g. if work occurs in a broadleaf woodland, then another similar broadleaf woodland will have beneficial work done in it to offset this.

- It needs to be highlighted the important and great work the volunteers have been doing in the last year in and around Harlow. They have been increasing their volunteer hours from half a day to nearly 2 solid days of work, which allows huge amount of work to be achieved. The volunteers are a fantastic asset to Harlow and do a wonderful job in conserving the natural beauty of the area.
- Wildflower Meadow Project
 - i. Funding streams – an application for funding from the Tesco bags for help environmental and community scheme has been submitted. A response should be received by the end of August to see if this project has been selected for the final 3 places. It is then down to the public to vote for 1st 2nd and 3rd rankings out of the final projects, which determines the amount of funding given. Councillor Jean Clark, on behalf of this group is willing to write a supporting letter to Tesco stating the group's full support of this project.

7. Any other business - None

Meeting closed at 9:00pm.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 10th November 2016, at 2pm, at Parndon Wood Nature Reserve.