

## Friends of Gedling House Woods Annual General Meeting

14<sup>th</sup> June 2021 7.30 pm

**Attendees** – John Lesquereux, Joyce and Peter Smith, Connie Cole, Andrew Topliss, Andy Newton, Craig Bowen, Paul Sergeant, Chris Hollingsworth, Carol Whiteley, Frank Knowles, Nikita Ward

**1 Welcome** Frank Knowles welcomed members to the meeting and explained that no meeting was held in 2020 because of the Covid- 19 lockdown.

**2 Apologies:** Claire Topliss, Mark Kight, Carole Cook, Susan Davey, Stan and Sandra Bannerman, Evelyne Potter

**3 Minutes of the last AGM:** these were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

**4 Election of committee members:** The existing committee continued to operate over during the last year but elections were called for. Nominations were received from seven members of FGHW (all existing committee members) for the seven places on the committee and therefore were elected unopposed.

**5 Election of officers:** Frank Knowles was nominated and seconded as Chair by members in the meeting and, with no other nomination, was duly elected for a period of two years. Frank nominated Craig Bowen as Treasurer and Nikita Ward as Secretary; these appointments were confirmed by the meeting.

### **6 Treasurers Report**

Craig Bowen presented the previously circulated 2019/20 accounts and these were approved by the meeting. The accountants still had not provided a set of accounts for 2020/21 and Craig noted the following draft figures: End of year balances: Treasurers account - £3,072.60; Business interest account - £33,122.84

2020/21 income/outgoings: total income - £4869.55; total outgoings - £4200.77; giving us a £668 deficit

Craig informed us he moved money into a business interest account a couple years ago which has earned us interest of £6 in the last year.

Memberships are paid by BACS transfer if possible. This is much easier than cash or cheques. The treasurer's report on all expenditures are provided at committee meetings throughout the year, covering, petrol costs, materials and spare parts, etc.

John asked what the income streams are for the future and will it be secure for the next few years. Frank advised there has been an increase in income this year as we received a late payment from the Rural Payments Agency. It costs about £8-10,000 a year to maintain the woods and meadows. In lieu of the budget set out in our agreement which Gedling Borough Council (GBC) no longer provides, GBC pay for some items that need a certificated contractor (major tree work and herbicide spraying) and service our machinery. Therefore, we receive in kind what used to be in cash. Frank also noted income this year might dip slightly due to fewer school visits because of the lockdown.

Our Natural England agreement providing £3,000-£4,000 a year ends on 31 Dec 2024. Our licence agreement with Gedling also ends at this time. Defra is introducing a new environmental land management scheme which places greater emphasis on the environment rather than farming for food. Details of this are not yet available.

**7 Accountants:** RJ Bailey accountants were reappointed as auditors for the next year.

## 8 Chairman's Report

Because we provide a voluntary service, FGHW committee members were exempt from some lockdown rules and were able to conduct a full programme of work. New members have now joined us as volunteers and so we've been able to move forward quite strongly.

Throughout lockdown, the use of the meadow increased a lot. There were some concerns in winter at the state of some of the paths from the excess use and the heavy rain. However, now it's summer they have recovered well. Frank noted that the Peak District National Park has put in paths to prevent damage to the environment – if the woods become very popular we may have to consider paths in the woods (but not in the meadow).

1,000 bluebells have been planted alongside the removal of some Spanish and hybrid bluebells, done to preserve the native species.

Some trees have selectively been taken down on the verge of Wood Lane due to the risk that they could damage properties on the other side of the road if they fell. This has allowed for new planting of species such as hazel and rowan.

Trees from The Conservation Trust (TCV) have been placed in parts of the woods where the trees are thinner: oak, beach, hornbeam, silver birch, alder.

### *Comments from the meeting*

Chris noted that lots of puppies were bought in lockdown which has led to lots of new faces. People Chris has spoken to found Gedling House Woods on Google Earth by searching for green areas near where they live. He noted that people been tied down so much during lockdown and had been looking locally for places to go.

John noted that using the meadows for 'professional' dog walking creates opportunity for FGHW to recruit new members. The advantage of this is that the dog walkers would have a stake in the meadow and its wellbeing, a sense of possession and may perhaps create a sense of care. He also noted that it can be difficult to get money out of people for membership. This has been considered by the committee and Chris has had discussions with the dog walkers. Chris noted that professional dog walkers are willing to contribute and become members. FGHW would take this forward. Frank noted that a few years ago we had some very serious run-ins with dog walkers; going into the meadows containing sheep, which was concerning. Our relationship has improved with them now.

Three people have approached Chris with suggestions for cleaning the water troughs weekly. They would need showing the system. More and more people seem interested in contributing to the maintenance of the meadows. Some dog walkers will pick up things such as dog waste when they see it, whether it's theirs or not. The same with branches on the meadows – last year kids were dragging huge logs onto the meadows which were difficult to move.

Frank gave his thanks to Chris and Andy for building a positive relationship with the dog walkers.

Craig noted we have a page on the website (not live just yet) which will have a voluntary donation option. People are advised to pay the amount and let the committee know you have so we can account for it. Frank has given some extra wording for the page and Craig will add this.

Andrew raised a concern regarding the verge along Wood Lane; the road is very narrow by the house and people parking there are making it impossible to get through. This is an issue for Wood Lane Association to deal with. Andrew also raised that a lot of litter is being dumped near the rope swing inside woods and considered whether to encourage people with a sign not to litter.

Consideration was made to whether the large den is still being used and if the children using it are creating the litter. Frank had spoken to students who use the meadow after school and want to keep den there. They seemed a lovely bunch but other people could be littering. People will

continue to keep an eye out. Frank noted that police had toured local parks looking for knives. They didn't find any here but did dismantle half a dozen dens due to the risk they generate anti-social behaviour. committee members noted that children have been building and using them for a significant time and there have been few issues so far. Frank and Andy had done a den trail and removed two inappropriately placed but had left the large one near the top of meadow 3.

Craig mentioned that we have asked GBC for a second bin by the main gate – Frank reminded GBC today.

Frank said we knew we would lose some land to the Gedling Access Road but weren't aware of the extent of sycamore removal along the boundary. In making the cutting contractors would cut through the anchor roots of the sycamore, making it unstable and raising the risk of trees falling into the GAR. They have been removed and all stumps have been ground down. Mitigation replanting has seen 30 small trees and 280 saplings planted. The committee is having to liaise with Balfour Beatty and VIA England constantly to ensure we achieve a successful outcome.

#### *Comments from the meeting*

Andrew T asked whether there will be a small tunnel for badgers as there are near the lagoons. Frank advised there will be fencing with badger proof fencing near the cutting, but there are crossing points further up the GAR. There are badgers on other side of the GAR on the farm. Connie noted that lots of badgers and deer already getting onto the road. Frank stated people are seeing deer in the woods as well; high fencing is needed to prevent this.

Frank note that discussion still going on about the corner of the woods by the road which, close to the large concrete wall currently being constructed – the ground may well be levelled out here.

Frank noted that FGHW is trying to get more woodland flowers in the woods. Volunteers have split and replanted cyclamen and there are plans for snowdrop spreading in January as well as another 1000 bluebells further up in the woods. The spread of bluebells planted last year is thin but will keep developing. They take approximately 5 years to mature. The replaced rowans at the top of Wood Lane are doing well.

We used a new contractor for the baling in the meadows this year with a rectangular bale. The larger baling machine has caused more work for FGHW in the corners due to its being unable to make sharp turns. We are therefore removing it to a compost heap in the coppice.

In summary, the meadows and woods management regimes have been successful this year.

#### *Comments from the members*

Andrew T noted the fence on Military Road has fallen in many places and asked if it can be removed now hawthorn is there. Frank advised this fence and verge belongs to the academy and they are aware. They have quotes for repair and replacement but there are some legal issues with covenants which need sorting first.

Andy Newton introduces his dragonfly article from the annual report. He said we have had many different types of dragonflies in the meadow – at one stage there were 10 massive hornets, too. Dragonflies are usually found near water but there isn't any in the meadow. They presumably find it i from people's gardens and Andy is looking into whether the GAR lagoons could be a source.

This year, there haven't been as many and Andy noted most of the wildlife seems to be two months behind to what it was last year.

Considerations were made that things do change year to year. It was a lot hotter earlier in the year last year.

## **9 Any Other Business**

John thanked the committee, stating the report is brilliant, giving a graphic picture of work undertaken; everyone is very grateful for everything.

Frank stated that Lambley Parish Council has asked for help writing a management plan for their reed pond and FGHW was supporting them. Frank visited with the environmentalist and is helping to make a plan. Craig suggested we should share historical photos.

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