

# Friends of Gedling House Woods

## Annual Report 2023



*In this edition . . .*

**New planting** – trees are now growing in cleared areas from 2021/22 . . . .

**A dry summer** – effects of a hot, dry summer were clear in the meadows . .

**From muddy path to steps** – a main woodland path is now usable in wet weather . . . .

**Wood lane verges** – marginal woodland is reducing in height . . . .





## *Many thanks for volunteer help from the NHS Supply Chain*

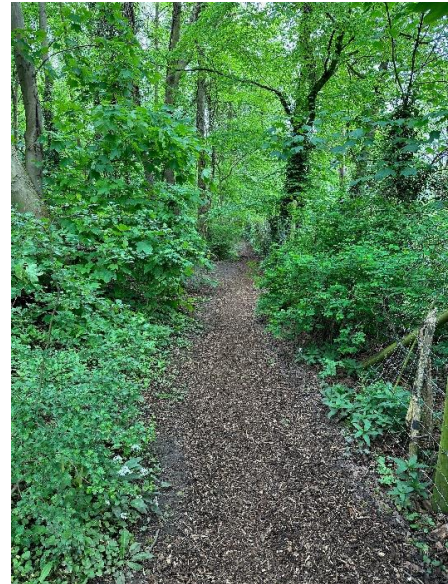


Following the recent work to install a stepped path through the woods, May saw a small group of volunteers from the NHS Supply Chain offer a day of their time to support FGHW. The team spent the day helping to lay a wood chip path at the bottom of the woods, along our boundary with the former Coach House.

The meadows were too wet to allow a heavy tractor and trailer to deliver the chippings to

the far side of the meadows, so the team of three loaded our smaller trailer with bags of wood chippings at the entrance at the top of Yew Tree Lane for us to deliver them to the far end of meadow 3. The team then filled wheelbarrows and laid the chippings across the entire path from the corner of meadow 3 to Colliery Way.

They also helped bolster the newly installed stepped path through the woods by back-filling the wood chips that had been displaced during a particularly heavy downpour.



We would like to thank the volunteers for their time and efforts in helping to build this new path, and especially Nicola Stapleton for organising the session.

It would have taken us a significant amount of time to complete this ourselves, so we are really grateful to them for providing their volunteer time.

The new path has settled down well and is now withstanding the rain more successfully. It will make it easier to explore the woods following wet weather and help keep visitors to the established pathways.

## *Membership update*

Our members continue to support us with 77% renewing their membership for the 2023/2024 membership year. With five new members so far this year, we are seeing good levels of support. We have enhanced the frequency and quality of our email updates to keep members abreast of what is happening across the reserves. We maintained the membership charge at the previous level in recognition of the squeeze most households are currently experiencing. We hope this has contributed to the high renewal rate. We thank all of our members for their continued support.



## *Calendar 2024*

The new FGHW calendar will be available in the autumn, in good time for Christmas gifts.

Price will be £5 to members, £6 to non-members.

# *The past year in the woods and meadows*

## *Progress with woodland and meadow management plans*

Each year, we revise the management plans for the woods and the meadows to reflect new decisions, changes in how we tackle tasks and eliminate activities that are no longer needed. We work to a very detailed set of plans so that our core team of volunteers know what needs doing and when, and who to contact where others outside the group are involved. You can find a summary of both of these plans on the FGHW website:

<http://www.fghw.org.uk/about-gedling-house-woods-and-meadows/managing-the-woods/>  
<http://www.fghw.org.uk/about-gedling-house-woods-and-meadows/managing-the-meadows/>

## *Planting in the woods*

In the winter of 2021, with the help of some members who volunteered their time over several weekends, we cleared an area of old and declining woodland near the top of meadow 3. Two of the key objectives were to remove a very large den, often used for activities not compatible with a nature reserve, and to increase the diversity of our native tree species.

In all, we planted over 120 trees around the woods, most of them in this small sunny patch over looking meadow 3. Before and after pictures show the transformation. They are growing well.



One of our constant pre-occupations is protecting newly planted trees, both from rabbits (the guards shown in the right-hand picture do that) and from people who walk through the area. To avoid this happening, we installed a short length of stock fence, with some hawthorns to provide added protection in time. This area now contains 24 silver birch, 20 wild cherry, 15 goat willow, and 12 hawthorn, along with 2 rowans.

Members will have noticed that many of the trees we planted a few years ago as part of the Woodland Trust's [I Dig Trees](#) project have not been successful. We are now sourcing our young trees from relatively new tree grower in Cumbria (<https://www.treegrowers.co.uk/>) whose young saplings have much stronger rootstock. The success rate has been much better.

## *Planting woodland flowers*

The bluebells we planted in 2021 have not developed as quickly as we might have hoped, probably due to the long hot summer in 2022. This year's cooler and wetter spring should provide the boost they need to spread further. In any case, it takes about 5-10 years to establish a spread of woodland bluebells.



*Fascinating fact: we think of bluebells liking the habitat of partial shade in deciduous woodland but they also grow surprisingly well in more exposed conditions. Ramsey Island, for example, off the coast of Pembrokeshire, hosts acres of bluebell growing among last year's brown and fallen bracken stems, with ferocious onshore winds and full sun.*



Thanks to Pete Wood and his stalwart help in January and February, more snowdrops have been spread around the woods. Moving snowdrops after flowering (known as “in the green”) means they can establish themselves over the spring and summer, and then flower in early spring the following year. They spread with ease and the process involves digging up a large clump, splitting it for several sites elsewhere and replanting a small bunch in the original site to maintain the spread of flowers there. This has worked successfully in the fenced triangle near the main meadow gate on Wood Lane, where snowdrops have developed well in the last two years.

### **The 36 Steps**

During the spring we installed a new stepped path running from the entrance to the woods at Yew Tree Lane down to the entrance to meadow 2. The path is steep and became very slippery with mud after rain, so we put in 36 steps to make the path more useable. We did think about making it 39 steps, as in the John Buchan novel, but 36 it was. It took something like 8 full person-days, spread over 4 weekends, to complete the job, which was one of the largest we have taken on ourselves. A total of six members were involved at different stages.



Each step is made from a 1.5 metre piece of treated decking board and 2 short posts. The 36 boards (all donated) and 72 short posts (all cut from our own broken or sawn-off posts no longer in use) saved us a considerable amount of money. A total of 144 screws (we had to buy these) were used to attach the posts to the boards securely. Each step has been back-filled with wood chippings (also donated).



Feedback has been positive, so far, and the steps have survived a couple of downpours relatively unscathed. We suspect they will need an annual autumn top-up of chippings.



## *Environmental grant from Nottingham City Transport*

Andy Newton's long connection with Nottingham City Transport (NCT) led us to apply for a £250 environmental grant, introduced to compensate for the recent loss of trees at NCT's Trent Bridge Depot, on the basis that if you cut down one tree, you should plant two more to replace it. The grant gave FGHW the opportunity to buy some more mature trees than we can usually afford when planting.

One was a 3 metre Wild Cherry that has been placed in the hedge along the bottom of meadow 1, filling a gap where the original planting at the beginning of the century did not work. Two others were Beech, about 2.5 metres tall, and these were planted along the main woodland path alongside Wood Lane, at the corner opposite number 35. We also took the opportunity to plant some Hawthorn there, which will help fill the newly planted area over the coming years as the Beech establish themselves.





The planting of the Beech trees took place at the end of November 2022, with the assistance of David Astill, Managing Director of NCT, and Anthony Carver-Smith, Head of Marketing at NCT. NCT arranged for a few pictures to be taken of the planting, two of which you can see on the previous page, with more on the [NCTX Facebook page](#). FGHW would like to thank Nottingham City Transport for this welcome donation to our woods.

### *Improving marginal woodland on the boundary with Wood Lane*

Our woodland management plan involves creating marginal woodland on our boundaries with roads and meadows which is lower in height than the central area of the woods. This allows us greater diversity in the species we include. Starting at the top of Wood Lane a few years ago, we asked Gedling Borough Council to remove a number of sycamore trees that overhung the lane itself as well as the gardens and buildings opposite. This opened up the area and we planted Hazel, Hawthorn and some Rowan, all of which are low-growing and provide flowers and berries to support wildlife.



We have also changed the way the hedgecutting is done down the rest of Wood Lane. Our contractor cuts the vegetation on the verge to the edge of the roadway, tapering in slightly with the second and third higher cuts (this is called a 'batter'). This is done in the autumn and we follow that up during the winter with removal of the largest, and usually self-seeded, trees to maintain the marginal area at a reasonable height.

At one point in the lane, opposite 41/43, the verge and woodland edge was very thinly planted. A small number of dog walkers were parking on the verge and taking their dogs into the woods through the fence. This was damaging the planting already established, and so we have put an additional stock fence there and replanted with Hawthorn, in addition to the existing Hazel, to try and re-establish this area as part of the marginal woodland again.



The photos show that this has been successful and this area is no longer being used as a route into the woods.

### *The boundary with the Gedling Access Road (Colliery Way)*

VIA East Midlands provided further trees for the bottom corner of the woods alongside Colliery Way in the winter of 2022. To deter visitors from trampling the new planting along the GAR boundary, VIA kindly funded a new stock fence for nearly the length of that boundary. Members will recall the continued vandalism of the blue rope fence we installed.

The use of that corner for an over-the-fence access route to and from the woods seems to have reduced considerably, too, following additional fencing and planting. We hope the Wild Garlic will regenerate that area.





## *Annual tree check*



The annual tree check took place in the winter, with the usual removal of dead branches and felling of unsafe trees – the so-called three Ds – those that are dead, dying or diseased. In addition, the team undertook some crown-lifting along boundaries and removed a number of the taller trees overhanging Wood Lane. This was done to support our move to a lower strip of marginal woodland on its boundaries with the lane and meadows. This work leaves the woods and trees surrounding the meadows in great shape for the spring.

We use experienced contractors for this task and, if you can find the tree climber in the photograph, you will see why!

## *The impact of the climate on the meadows*

The long dry summer had a dramatic impact on the meadows in 2022. When cut in early September, the contractors managed to pick up hay for 15 bales, when we normally reach well over 50! The very dry weather does mean that seeds ripen well, however. This helps to increase the number of wild flowers that drop seeds for germination in the following spring.

We have seen considerable variation in the predominant wild flower species in meadow 3 since the very varied first year of flowering in 2015. The photographs show the predominant wildflower in May/June in each year. Ox-eye Daisy appears to favour cold, wet springs,



June 2015 Very mixed



May 2016 Ox-eye Daisy



May 2017 Buttercup



June 2018 Knapweed



May 2022 Buttercup again



May 2023 Rough Hawkbit

such as we had in 2016 and 2023. Ox-eye Daisy was hardly apparent in 2017, when the Buttercup took over, or in 2018, when Knapweed staged a breakthrough. Ox-eye Daisy made a comeback in 2023 (as it did on local roadsides), while the predominant wildflower in May, for the first time, was Rough Hawkbit. Ox-eye Daisy was a close second.

A number of species have arrived in the meadows since the seeding of meadow 3 in 2014. Hedge Bedstraw (white) an upright relative of Lady's Bedstraw (reclining and yellow) has appeared in meadow 3 again, and red Poppies are now showing in meadows 2 and 3. Yellow Rattle has spread extensively into meadow 2 and, where we sowed Yellow Rattle among the ant-hills in meadow 3, that and other wild flowers, including Mallow, have thrived and reduced the dominance of the very thick grass. We've also seen Mouse-eared Chickweed.

## *Regular maintenance of the meadows*

One of the key tasks we undertake is regularly brushcutting and strimming the meadow borders so that the hedges are not allowed to spread over into the meadows. We carry this out



every month or so in the summer and, since we started doing this, the job has got quicker. We have discovered that regular maintenance pays off. What originally took two mornings' work is now done in a couple of hours! We also decided to allow the hedges in the double fenced areas to fill the gap between the fences and to ask our contractor to cut them at a slightly higher level, both designed to increase the availability of the hedge for wildlife. We may well take the hedges higher still in the next autumn cut.

## *Sheep*

The sheep were with us this year for eight weeks, from the third week in November to the third week in January. We had 52 sheep, a mix of Cheviot and Suffolk. The Cheviots have white faces and the Suffolks have black faces. We've had neither breed on site before. This year's flock were slightly older than those we had last year and therefore a fair bit bigger.



We combine meadows 2 and 3 for a five-week stay so that the sheep have access to the water in meadow 2, and we then move them for a three-week stay in meadow 1. At the end of the process, the grass is very much shorter and the plumper sheep hardly fit into the trailer that collects them. We transferred the flock on New Year's Day this year, with the help of an eight-year old and his family. All went smoothly, and was done without a sheep dog in sight!





## *Battery power - decarbonisation*

FGHW uses machine tools for much of our work, from mowing and hedgecutting to strimming and brushcutting. The recent availability of high-capacity lithium-ion batteries has led us to invest in battery-driven hedge cutters, both long and short reach, instead of those driven by two-stroke petrol engines. It will be some time until our larger machines can be powered by batteries, but we have made a conscious decision to replace all our smaller, two-stroke machines with battery power in the next year or so. This will create less pollution. These battery machines are also lighter, quieter and more convenient to use.



## *An update on the future of the nature reserves*

You may well be aware that our licence agreement with Gedling Borough Council ends in December 2024 and our contract with the Rural Payment Agency (RPA), part of Defra (originally with Natural England), ends at the end of September 2024. We may well be eligible for the Countryside Stewardship scheme for the meadows in the future, but it is likely we will be offered an extension of our existing contract within the next 6-9 months. Gedling Borough Council has indicated that they expect to go forward with a new licence when ours ends, and we will need to make sure this is in place before we begin any extension or new contract with the RPA.

## *Social media*

You can keep up with news about the woods and meadows on our website, on Facebook on Twitter, as well as through our regular members' newsletter.



[www.fghw.org.uk](http://www.fghw.org.uk)



[groups/fghw](https://www.facebook.com/groups/fghw)



[@fofghw](https://twitter.com/fofghw)

## *Recent comments from visitors to the woods and meadows*

"Please pass on my thanks to all who helped with mowing the paths today. I like it that the paths are cut wide enough for two people to walk side by side." – local resident

"Thank you for putting the new steps in. I can get down to the meadow much more easily now!" – local dog walker



## *Thanks to our volunteers*

Much of our maintenance work is undertaken by a small group of experienced volunteers – mostly drawn from the FGHW committee – and we thank these and other members who give willingly of their time, mainly at weekends. We are also very grateful for the help given to us by regular visitors to the nature reserves who unfailingly collect litter from the woods and meadows, and notify us of any issues they notice. We have a remarkably litter-free environment, compared with other sites, and we appreciate this help greatly.

At two points in the year – late summer and in the winter – we always need a large group of people for specific tasks – raking cut hay into bundles from under trees so it can be included in the baling, and winter clearance. If you are interested in helping us with these two major pieces of work, do let one of the committee members know and we'll keep you informed about dates and times.

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## *The aims of Friends of Gedling House Woods*

*A reminder of what we are here for . . .*

To protect, maintain and develop the local natural environment of Gedling House Woods and Meadows Local Nature Reserves and their immediate surroundings, including wildlife, woodland, meadowland, hedgerows, trees and verges.

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### *Photograph acknowledgements*

*All photographs by Andy Newton (AN), Frank Knowles (FK), Paul Sargent (PS) or Dan Straw (DS) with the exception of those noted on page 5 which are included by kind permission of Nottingham City Transport (NCT).*

**Front page:** (clockwise spiral from top left): Robin on fence in November 2022 (FK); woodland walkway in December 2022 (FK); meadow 3 in full flower with Rough Hawkbit in May 2023 (FK); constructing the steps in April 2023 (FK); and Horse Chestnut flower at the main meadow entrance in Wood Lane in May 2023 (FK)

**Page 2:** three NHS Supply Chain volunteers and two pictures of the path they laid in May 2023 (all DS)

**Page 3:** cleared woodland area to the north east of meadow taken in March 2022 (FK); and same newly planted area towards the top of meadow 3 in February 2023 (DS)

**Page 4:** snowdrops in January 2022 (FK); three photos of the newly installed steps in April 2023 (L to R – (FK), (FK), (DS)); FK cutting posts to size for the steps in March 2023 (PS); posts loaded in the FGHW trailer in March 2023 (DS); and constructing the steps in April 2023 (FK)

**Page 5:** (clockwise spiral from top left): growth on the Wild Cherry in the meadow 1 hedge May 2023 (FK) ; planting the Beech in November 2022 (NCT); the same Beech in May 2023 (FK); the planted area following the NCT planting day in November 2022 (FK); and Andy Newton supporting the second Beech during planting in November 2022 (NCT)

**Page 6:** (from top and L to R): the marginal woodland area/hedge bordering Wood Lane in June 2023 (FK); the newly installed stock fence on Wood Lane in February 2023 (FK); the same piece of fence shown in June 2023 (FK); and the new fence installed along the GAR in August 2022 (FK)

**Page 7:** contractor in tree on meadow 1 boundary in February 2023 (FK); and six photographs of meadow 3 from 2015 to 2023 (all FK)

**Page 8:** Cheviot and Suffolk sheep in November 2022 (FK); gathering the sheep to move them to meadow 1 on New Year's Day 2023 (AN); the sheep emerging into meadow 1 on the same day (AN); and sheep grazing in meadow 2 in November 2022 (FK)

**Page 9:** Clockwise from the top left corner in the main block: jay in the woods in June 2022 (AN); sheep in December 2021 (AN); peacock butterfly in August 2021 (AN) yellow rattle in June 2022 (FK); white rose in June 2022 (FK); bramble flower with bee in June 2022 (FK); meadow cranesbill in June 2022 (FK); pink rose in June 2022 (FK) – all included in the 2022 Annual Report.