

Friends of South Norwood Country Park, AGM - 11am, Saturday 29/2/20

**The Visitor Centre, South Norwood Country Park
Albert Road SE25 4NF**

Doors were open from 10:30am. We served tea, coffee and cake, and members received a free FoSNCP tote bag with their subscription. Some paid membership directly online.

c. 15 attended, including from the committee: Sue Takwani, Chris Claridge, Chris Peskett, Leonie Mason; committee/wardens: Rob Spencer and Ian Glover.

1. Welcome (Sue Takwani, Chair)

Sue thanked everyone for coming and braving the weather, even with the draw of cake. She outlined the agenda for the morning.

2. Report on 2019 and preview of 2020 (Chris Peskett, Treasurer)

Chris opened her report by reminding us that it had been the Friends' 5th birthday on 4 October 2019.

She welcomed questions from the floor as she presented, and gave the following report (summarised):

- Review of Workdays in 2019

We met between 10am-12pm every second Saturday and gathered after workdays for coffee and biscuits. Here are the specific tasks covered by month:

March: Environmental garden – trimming hedges; this is to keep the level low for the bees. Cuttings are put underneath to stop dogs getting in; Tricia (Patricia Pelican, beekeeper) bought a solar fountain for the bees, to aid their drinking through the year.

April: Westgate Road litter-picking. This is one of the big problem areas. It was so bad, Ian had to get Croydon Council's fly-tipping hotspot team in. However, in amongst the 26 bags of litter, he found three-cornered leek.

May: scrub-clearing – Elmers End - around the new trees planted near here. We do a lot of it as it's really important to protect the tiny whips we plant. If too much scrub grows, it chokes them easily. Chris showed a picture of a freed-up broad-leaf lime.

June: Three-rivers clean up, working with Thames 21 to tackle rubbish and invasive flora on the rivers Ravensbourne, Pool and Quaggy. Culverts in our park drain into them – and we love wading! This is an annual, community-led event involving many volunteers – including community groups, the scouts and local businesses. So far, the accumulated numbers across the project are: 8,000 volunteer hours; 53,000 Himalayan Balsam plants cleared; 2,500 Giant Hogweed plants cleared; 1,250 bags of rubbish, not to mention various motorbikes, carpets, sofas, mattresses...

July: Himalayan balsam clearance from the culverts, following June's work. We pull it out, and stamp on its roots – it then rots on the banks. A robin came to sing and to pick up what we were disturbing.

August: Ryelands Field scrub-clearing again.

September: Clearing sight lines on paths and wetlands. Important for safety, being able to see dogs, people and cyclists. The cyclists said thank you! Whilst we were doing this, we were treated to the sight of a heron flying over and a kestrel coming in to land.

October: Clearing of wildflower meadow – this was a new area for us to work on, near the car park. We cleared away the brambles so that the primroses can be seen when they come up in the spring. There are lots of spindle trees there. Apparently, if they flower early, a plague is coming. Hmm!

November: Preparing ground for new trees on two new sites.

While we did this, we were also able to start opening the visitor centre during our workdays on a regular basis – many thanks to Carol and Angela. They give out nature checklists for children and help people find out some of the park history.

November extra day:

Having prepared the ground, we were then able to plant our new trees. We were given 100 trees through TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) – from the Mayor of London; 30 more trees were also donated from Chris C's daughter's work place, CGI. This was all part of the national tree-planting week. Overall, 25,000 trees were distributed by TCV, then planted by more than 230 community groups across the capital – every London borough gained new trees. Over 40 groups held open volunteering events over the weekend – we numbered 25, including children - people really enjoyed it!

The species we planted (fruiting and hedgerow): hawthorn, blackthorn, common buckthorn, spindle, hazel, dogrose, common dogwood.

And, stop press (February 2020) we have been given more trees, as Whitehorse Recreation ground had too many: 75 more – including downy birch and mountain ash. Sue will collect and Rob Spencer, Ian have volunteered to plant next week. They will go in hedgerow gaps; bolstering the two sites planted this year.

Altogether, that means we will have planted 205 new trees in total this year.

December: continued scrub-clearing for the wild-flower meadows - for the primroses.

January: 24 bags of fly tip cleared at Elmers End. The foxes had had fun ripping the bags. Plus 3 bikes...

February: clearing ivy, from the ground and off trees – helps the spring flowers: violets, arum lily (otherwise known as lords and ladies) and bluebells.

- Future work days

14 March – Environmental garden – hedge-trimming

11 April – clearing brambles & litter-picking at Harrington Road

9 May – scrub-clearing around new trees (the ones we planted last year)

- Review of other events and news in the year

South Norwood Community Fair, 30 June: we were able to have a tent and stall, set up and run by Chris C, Sue & Sundeep Takwani, and Rob Little. Our tombola, with unwanted Christmas presents as prizes was very successful. We made £154, and attracted people to the stall. From comments made, it was clear that everybody loves the park - 'it's the best thing in South Norwood'.

We hope to do this again, so please collect items and unwanted gifts, especially for kids, and bring them to a workday.

National Park City: London gained national park status, as the first city, due to the amount of tree cover it has. We were able to have our Friends' logo included.

Feeding the birds: they eat a lot of food - 2 full feeders each day. Sunflower hearts, fat balls; During Christmas and NY, the Friends came and topped up the feeders. On Sunday mornings, Chris P fills them up. Commonly seen: blue tits and great tits; dunnocks on the ground; blackbirds, robins, pigeons and parakeets.

Carol asked how many months of the year do we put out food? Just September through to March.

New noticeboard: opposite Belfast Road, at the Westgate Road entrance. A local builder helped us to install - we had to dig down a metre. On it, we've put a notice for this AGM, and a map for the park. Violetta, one of the key litter-pickers, is often there. The noticeboard was her suggestion as many of the young mums she spoke to didn't know what was in the park beyond the playground.

Bat detectors: we bought some, for our regular, popular, bat walks.

Bees: Ian Glover gave a summary of the current health of the bee colonies. We had 4 colonies going into winter; because it's been so wet, the beekeepers haven't been able to do a full inspection yet. Bees are coming and going from 3 hives; 1 may not have survived (but it was a weak one). We didn't harvest honey last year – there wasn't much and so we left it for the bees, and left them with lots of food over the winter. We don't know why honey levels were so low – we are changing our approach for the coming year, so we will see what happens.

- Review of walks 2019

Dawn Chorus - this happened as in previous years.

Lakeside Walk (new for this year) happened on 23 March led by Adam Asquith - Pond Project expert from TCV. He shared his insights into the 3 ponds/lakes in the park. Chris read the report from the website:

"We started with the pond in the environmental garden behind the Visitor Centre. He

introduced us to a plant that is not seen in every pond – water plantain – which bears white flowers in summer. We learnt how the reeds provide shelter for the amphibians including a good population of newts and dragonfly larvae.

A stroll through the park led us to the main lake where Adam explained a bit of the history surrounding the lake's existence. From farmland to sewage farm, the lake was the main filter bed but irrigation problems meant that the sewage was not draining well. After just over 100 years of use, the sewage farm ceased existence in 1967 and the area was regenerated as grassland and eventually became the Country Park as we know it.

Walking around the perimeter of the lake we learnt about TCV's conservation work to protect the wet areas and hedgerows and prevent the whole area naturally becoming woodland through ecological succession. One annual task is to cut down the willow to stop it from re-seeding and encroaching the lake. The hybrid hedge around the lake constructed from any cut-down wood not only creates a barrier to protect ground-nesting birds but is itself a good habitat for insects.

Our final stop was in the wetlands area near the site of the old manor house. Many local residents are aware of its existence but may not be aware that there is a pond near there. Unfortunately, it tends to dry out but when wet, is used by frog spawn and dragonflies. A most enjoyable walk uncovering further delights in our local nature reserve."

Chris showed us a picture of the water plantain from the walk and explained that TCV come in to work in the park every 2 months. Chris was delighted to report that some of wood left from coppicing was put to use in the South Norwood Leisure Centre Garden.

Froglife: Adam also arranged for some of us to attend an educational morning presented by Froglife, to help us identify the different amphibians that are found throughout the UK. There was a quiz afterwards. It was particularly good for learning about newts!

Bat walks – led by Meike Weiser continue to be very popular. Lots of children come. In May, 43 adults and children came, meaning we had to take turns on the pontoons. We will need to organise registration for the next one, as not everyone can see. Chris referred us to the reports on the website but highlighted the sightings/hearings of the common pipistrelle and Leisler's bats.

Woodside Walk and Talk happened in June, led by local historian John Hickman– this was a new walk and talk for us.

10 met outside St Luke's Church, where we spotted a stag beetle. Without giving away too much for those who'd like to go on the walk in the future, John explained the history of the church and changes that had been made to it. We stopped by the Woodside station building, the nearby 2nd council estate in Croydon; Woodside Fire Station and ancient woodside (the Great North Wood) on Long Lane. We learned about a toll road and a race course in the area and a ramp at the station for the horses to get up. The current Woodside Cup in racing comes from here. We then walked through Ashburton Park, and learned about the manor house there; we ended the walk at the war memorial on Woodside Green.

A huge thank you to John for his support and delightful tour – he's a wonderful raconteur.

Chris P raised the need for evidence from the community to be supplied to the Council showing that local green spaces were important. This evidence would in turn be provided by the Council to the

Planning Inspector, this would give them 'Local Green Space designation'. SN Country Park already has protected status so did not need to be included.

- Future walks

Chris highlighted the following forthcoming walks

Saturday 28 March, 2pm – Ponds, Streams and Wetlands walk (including pond-dipping). Suitable for families. 1 and ½ hours

Friday 1 May , 8.30pm - Bat walk. Details on whether and how we limit numbers tbc.

Sunday 3 May, 5am - Dawn Chorus. This is a walk where quiet is needed - please don't bring dogs.

Saturday 9 May, 2pm - Mini beast and wild things in the Country Park, for families. This will be going off the main paths - wellies are needed! Run by Ian and Meike. Children over 5 welcome.

3. Treasurer's report (Chris P)

1 January – 31 December 2019

On 1 January 2019, we started the year with £1,028, brought forward from 2018.

We closed the year with £2,068 to carry forward 2020.

Income of £2,833 income consisted mostly of grants; of £1,793 expenditure, the biggest payment was for the Westgate Road entrance noticeboard. Other smaller expenditure was for insurance, and tools (notably a pole saw); £300 was spent on bees and bird food and £67 on the website.

4. Election of officers, committee (Sue)

Sue reported the following:

There are currently 9 people serving on the committee of whom 5 are officers (executive committee).

Executive committee, consisting of the Chair, Sue Takwani; Vice-Chair, Chris Claridge; Treasurer, Chris Peskett; Secretary, Ian Glover and Minutes Secretary, Leonie Mason; and Rob Little, in charge of the website.

Other members: Rob Little (looks after website); Sundeep Takwani; Paul Scott & Rob Spencer

We meet once a quarter in the pub on a Monday evening. Otherwise we communicate by email.

All existing members have agreed to stand again – with the exception of Rob Little – we are yet to hear from him). The new committee therefore comprises (proposers and seconders noted):

Sue (chair) – Ian; Chris P

Chris C (vice-chair)– Sue; Ian

Chris P (treasurer)– Ian; John Collis

Ian (secretary)– Chris P; Carol

Leonie (minutes secretary) – Paulette, John Hufton

Rob (in charge of website, if he's happy to stand again) – Sue, Ian (Sue to check if he still wants to stand)

Other members (Sundeep, Paul, Rob S) were happy to stay on the committee.

Sue invited anyone else interested to join the committee - John Hufton volunteered: proposed by Leonie; seconded, Sue.

John Collis proposed a vote of thanks to officers and to Chris Peskett especially for her presentation.

Action: Sue to contact Rob Little

Action: LM to circulate dates of future committee meetings to the committee.

5. AOB

There was no other business.

Rob Spencer then led a walk for a brave few, 4 in total.

Post-AGM note

In the light of COVID-19, no committee meetings have taken place since the AGM and the committee have operated via email; all the advertised events have been cancelled; workdays have also been cancelled. From August 2020 we are hoping to re-commence workdays for limited numbers, and in line with government advice. Please keep checking the website and watch out for emails for further details.