

Friends of South Norwood Country Park, AGM

11am, 20/2/21

Held online, on Zoom. Details were available in advance from the Secretary on friendsofsncp@gmail.com

11am First Zoom call

We opened the call a few moments before 11am; we started the meeting shortly after 11am.

There were c. 22 people on the call.

1. Welcome (Sue Takwani, Chair) 11:05-11:10am

Sue welcomed everyone and asked everyone to mute their microphones. She outlined the agenda for the meeting and highlighted that there would be a question time after the break, at the start of the second Zoom call.

Sue then outlined the rationale for FoSNCP and a brief survey of our normal activities, particularly for those joining the AGM for the first time:

Brief introduction to the FoSNCP

FOSNCP was set up 6 years ago as a voluntary group, to help with the restoration, maintenance and conservation of the Country Park, which is a local asset for wildlife. We are an enthusiastic group and anyone who signs up to email list is a member.

We mainly do this conservation work through our workdays.

We do some fundraising, receive grants – from this we provide maps, notice boards and information lecterns.

We organise wildlife walks and history talks.

The Park is run by Croydon Council; our workdays are led by the warden; we hope that in the new financial year we will be able to have warden provision reinstated.

Ian Glover – who until recent Council insolvency was the warden – is part of Friends group; he still oversees our workdays voluntarily, providing expert guidance and oversight. We would not be able to operate without this.

We still have support of Meike Weiser (Community Conservation Partnership Officer at Croydon Council), which is brilliant. She is currently overseeing maintenance of the park, through the Council's Ground Maintenance team and The Conservation Volunteers (TCV).

Sue referred any questions to the opening of our second Zoom call; and stated that an update on the warden situation would be given then.

2. Report on 2020 and preview of 2021 (Chris Peskett, Treasurer) - 11:10-11:35am

Chris reported our – and the Park's – activities during our 6th year, since the last AGM:

Workdays

We had our first workday, in **March**, at Harrington Road, one of the worst spots. We cut back brambles and cleared litter, before we had to pause all activities under the first Covid-19 lockdown.

Chris described how many people had really appreciated park during the early months of lockdown especially, with lots of people there every day, and wonderful blossom.

In **May**, we knew the swans had been nesting, as 5 cygnets were spotted, soon down to 4. Greylag geese had goslings, but they didn't survive; Egyptian geese tried but failed. It was a wonderful time in the park with life happening.

Everyone loved spotting the kestrels – it was hard to tell how many heads there were in the nesting box.

June found us still in lockdown but able to see other things – beautiful butterflies; cinnabar moth caterpillars; luminous blue damsel flies over the lake.

July saw us able to resume workdays, at distance and within the 'rule of 6'. We worked with invited people only, in 2 distinct groups, all spaced 2 metres apart. We cleared scrub (which was up to our shoulders!) from around little trees newly planted in the previous autumn. We were surrounded by banks of rosebay willowherb.

In **August**, we started to work for 2 Saturdays a month, given we'd missed so many. We normally work on the 2nd Saturday – this was the start of using the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month, enjoying coffee afterwards outside when we can.

For our **August (1)** workday, we cleared more scrub from around trees; some of us worked in the streams (by the Goals football pitches) clearing overhanging foliage and helping the water to run more freely – it is now flowing very freely indeed! We could see leaves of marsh marigolds, and hundreds of toads (identified by Rob Spencer who was the senior warden, still with us at that stage).

August (2) involved more stream-clearing, one of which was still very boggy; we also cleared some invasive Himalayan balsam. There wasn't much this year, but we do try to keep on top of it; the streams flow into Chaffinch Brook which flow into the River Beck to the River Ravensbourne. We're in the Thames catchment area, hence trying to keep invasive species under control.

September (1) - was litter-picking on the notorious path 666! It was a terrible mess, and the site of an encampment. Some of us worked on Westgate Road too. This is one of the entrances to the park and it is a frequent site for fly-tipping. We found a keyboard, a broken chain saw, an Uber Eats box and two doors! More rewardingly, we found some wonderful bracket fungi.

September (2) - found us clearing reed beds around lake; we cleared channels so water could flow from the lake into the wetlands; we coppiced willows, so they weren't encroaching into lake and to let sunlight through to the reedbeds; in environment garden we removed some of reedmace and grass in the pond and we cleared around the fruit trees. Sadly, the lining of pond is damaged – so

will run dry. The wardens normally top it up manually. During our labours, a fox came to join in – and have a drink from the bird bath.

October (1 & 2) – we took up residence on the mound/viewpoint, which was created from hardcore from bombed buildings in WW2. It was landscaped in 1987 before the opening of the Park in 1989. We cleared brambles which had rather encroached, hoping that wildflowers would grow. Slashers, which aid safe social distancing were in operation! We exposed the stone steps to the top of the mound which had been completely covered.

November (1) - was still bramble-clearing, with the arisings put along the treeline at the top. The view was fantastic.

November (2) - we turned to clearing the scrub islands – bramble and hawthorn were encroaching along one of the main paths and bramble was spreading in the meadow. While we were doing this, Ian educated us about the good microhabitat for beetles, moths and mammals (eg voles - which the kestrels like to eat!). When we cut back, as proof, a plume moth appeared.

December (1) - we returned to tree-planting. We have planted every year except for one. We receive free trees from TCV (The Conservation Volunteers). TCV have distributed over 1M trees. We plant slips – and this year about 200 in number – between the main path and the cemetery. Trees we've previously planted here have done really well, so we infilled gaps and replaced where others hadn't survived. We planted mountain ash, bird cherry, hazel, common crab apple, grey willow, common dogwood and goat willow.

We saved blackthorn and hawthorn to plant in gaps in existing hedges. We fill these to protect birds (lots of gaps have appeared in lockdown).

We don't like plastic, but we do use the plastic sleeves to protect the baby trees – these protect from mice (even though we don't have rabbits); canes help us to find the trees for future scrub-clearing.

January and February – we were in lockdown again and our workdays were put on hold; but life continued in the Park – not least a dunnoek.

Future workdays

When we can resume, we will trim the hedges in the environmental garden; prune trees, clear ivy – we may be too late for some of these tasks this year. We'll continue scrub-clearing and litter-picking.

Other activities and news from the year

[QR codes on posters](#) - we started this as a new initiative in October, providing some information via QR codes on posters in the Park. First, we took people to our Facebook page. Here you'll find first-rate photographs posted there – if you haven't had a look yet, do!

We will be producing a calendar to raise funds for the park; the committee will be finalising details for this – and collecting pictures for it – at a later date.

In November, the QR code on a poster took visitors to a checklist of birds so that families could learn about different birds in park – those you can and can't see easily (like the water rail).

New benches – in December, TCV installed the 2 new benches ordered in March. We may now need 2 more.

Repairs – yesterday, a local builder and volunteer – Mick – repaired fencing over stream with treated wood he had left over; the Council had put a temporary barrier in place; many thanks to Mick.

Visitor centre – this was sadly badly damaged by fire on Good Friday; hopefully by summer 2021 we will have it back. Quotations are coming in; extra work is needed for it to meet current regulations.

Wardens – we lost our warden, Rob Spencer in September 2020, as he returned to university; and then also his assistant Ian Glover when the Council had to cut all agency staff in the recent financial crisis and cuts. However, we are hoping that Ian will be able to reapply for the post in the new financial year.

Dumped fridges – on the road into the park was so extensive that it became a crime scene.

Illegal parties on field at front of the park and in Ryeland Fields – led to huge amounts of clearing.

Bird feeding – we do this every day, whatever the weather; and we 'watered' the wardens when they were camping in the kiosk with no utilities. A robin waits for us...

3. Treasurer's report (Chris P) - 11:35-11:40am

For the financial year to the end of December 2020, Chris gave the following report:

Income was recorded of £4,276.

£4,000 from Croydon Council (delegated ward budget) - thank you to Woodside Ward; got in just before the Council went bust. We have plans for the expenditure of the grant, but this is on hold until we have a warden back in place. It will be on things like new fencing.

£276 came from donations.

Membership fees are a voluntary £5 - thanks to those of you who have paid; if you haven't paid and would like to, there are details of how to pay on the website. Helps with various things we need to do. Is voluntary but much appreciated if you can.

Outgoings

Amounted to £613 – mostly on bat detectors (3) which we were going to use on walks which were subsequently cancelled. But we hope we might be back up and running for May 2021?

The rest of the expenditure was on our bee project, bird food, and a few bits of equip/tools.

Cash funds – £5,731 in the bank (most of which is earmarked for planned expenditure).

We then had a 5-minute break.

11:45am Second Zoom call

Before opening the floor to questions, Sue updated everyone on an issue which had raised some concern before the meeting:

Paths – during the pandemic, the Park had seen a rise in the number of visitors, and it had been a lifesaver for many. We are really fortunate to have the Park. But, like most green spaces, the increased use has taken its toll, particularly on the paths. These are usually muddy in the winter but they're clearly currently worse than normal. However, there is good news – Meike Weiser, Community Conservation Partnerships Officer at Croydon Council, is putting in a bid to the Environment Agency for a grant from their Sustainable Urban Drainage Scheme (SUDS). Information is available on request – we can supply a link. In the shorter term, hopefully once it stops raining the Park will dry up into the summer. Where paths have widened with people social distancing – this damage will repair itself to some extent. In the meantime, wellies are the best option.

4. Question time (max 15 minutes) (Sue) - 11:45am - 12:05pm

Sue then invited questions from those present, either verbally or via the chat function. She offered the option of emailing any further questions if we ran out of time.

Funding (Will) – Thanks for all the work that's been going on, with many more visits to park. Is there more money available nationally?

Sue replied that lots of the funding we've received in the past has come from grant-making bodies. She reported that she is due to go on a fundraising course being run by the London Wildlife Trust. Chris P added that if anyone wants to assist, please let us know – as we're all busy! It is difficult at the moment to submit any proposals, as we don't have a warden. Will ventured that he would love to help.

Action: Sue follow up Will for fundraising help

Allowing Park to regenerate (Anne) – Thanks too to everyone. She hopes to come to workdays and is glad to hear about hedging being repaired. Are there any parts of the Park that can be sectioned off to give areas a chance to regenerate? Ian replied that he has discussed this with Meike. One possibility is the wetland area (only 2 entrances, could be blocked off) - and this is the most sensitive area. Maybe a halfway house would be to close over the winter and reopen in spring.

Action: carry forward - closing access for regeneration - for warden's consideration once in post

Pitch and putt (Anne & others) Enquiries had been made about the pitch and putt area before the meeting. Sue underlined that it is not under Friends' remit – it's run by Croydon Council –and it's very unlikely it'll re-open under staff. We understand that if there's an individual enterprise which wants to run it, the Council will consider; if no-one comes forward – it could become part of Park. Anne reported that she had been in touch with Meike – who had been very open about the situation.

Sue underlined that the Friends' remit is conservation and restoration of the Park.

Carol noted that the fencing of the pitch and putt area has been broken and that dogs and dogwalkers are in the area much of the time. Sue agreed it was being used as an extension - and that we were aware there are issues over emptying the bins – access is difficult.

The general mood seemed to be that something needed to be done with the area; Sue reiterated that if people wanted pitch and putt to remain, they needed to act themselves.

Rats (Jonathan) – Does anything need to be done about rat population? It seems to be expanding.

Ian commented that he's not able to answer at the moment, as he isn't able to be in park every day. We will need to be in touch with Meike. If they have reached unsuitable levels, action may be possible in the next financial year. Levels are controlled at other sites.

Increased feeding of the birds on the lake may have contributed.

Sue said she would contact Meike about this for SNCP

Action: Sue to contact Meike about rat population.

Suggested arts project, to bring in children (Norman) - introduced himself as a newcomer to the area, with the wild Country Park being the reason he came. He would love to be a volunteer!

He makes and creates art in strange places and wondered if this could be a possible project for the Park. He creates stories about dragons, fairies and gargoyles – for young people to come in, walk around. Interest in educating younger people in this context – capturing natural sciences in artwork. He explained that he works with the library in Crystal Palace; currently involved in a project with old and young people in isolation. It's quite a busy year for applying for funding but he would help put an application into arts council.

Action: Sue to email Norman to investigate arts project and funding further.

On wanting to **volunteer**, Sue explained that numbers were limited at the moment, even when workdays could happen. When we restart, we will investigate forming a rota or a waiting list. Please watch out for emails from the Friends.

Photos - (Paulette) Added her appreciation for all the photographs over last few months, saying that it really lifts spirits. Many thanks.

Banking - a question was asked about online banking – asking for a payee name. Chris P answered that the account name is: Friends of South Norwood Country Park and that it is a business account.

Warden (Heather) - asked what will happen if we can't have a warden. Sue answered that we don't know – we will have to see how the next few months go.

Midweek working party (Howard) – When working parties resume, is there an appetite for a midweek working party? Sue said we could revisit this once we have a warden. We need to have an expert available which is why we currently meet on Saturday.

Action: carry forward - interest in midweek working party - if/when we have a warden.

At this point, Sue invited people to email any further questions.

5. Election of officers, committee (Sue) - 12:05-12:15pm

Sue reported that there are currently 8 people serving on the committee of whom 5 are officers (executive committee).

The executive committee consists of the Chair, Sue Takwani; Vice-Chair, Chris Claridge; Treasurer, Chris Peskett; Secretary, Ian Glover and Minutes Secretary, Leonie Mason.

Other committee members: Sundeep Takwani; Paul Scott, John Hufton (warden Rob Spencer left during the year)

No nominations had been received and all existing members have agreed to stand again.

The new committee therefore comprises (proposers and seconds noted):

Officers:

Sue (chair) – Chris P; Chris C

Chris C (vice-chair)– Sue T; John Collis

Chris P (treasurer)– Sue T; Heather Hardie

Ian (secretary)– Sue T; Carol Turner

Leonie (minutes secretary) – Sue T, Sundeep T

Other members:

(Sundeep, Paul, John) were happy to remain on the committee.

Jonathan Tolhurst had agreed prior to the meeting to join, to help with the website.

Sue invited others to join.

[Post meeting note: Will Hoyles and Norman Murray both offered to join the committee in the few days following the AGM. Both have been gratefully accepted.]

6. AOB - 12:15-20pm

With a few moments left, we returned to an outstanding question:

Fly-tipping (Jonathan) - can anything be done to tackle fly-tipping at the entrance?

Paul Scott, who is also a councillor, answered that these are often professional, criminal operations; if they see CCTV (which is also expensive to install) they simply go somewhere else. Best thing to do - if you see fly-tipping taking place, take what details you can, whilst staying safe; report it to the Council. The Council has been reasonably successful in prosecuting when there is detail - they have crushed quite a few fly-tipping vehicles. However, the recent fridges that had been dumped had already been stripped of valuable material. CCTV was on the school building, but operators covered up their number plates.

Sue then thanked everyone for coming to the AGM, saying that hopefully – next year – we would be in our renewed Visitor Centre and able to serve coffee and cake.

John Collis proposed a vote of thanks to committee, which was seconded by Will.

Sue acknowledged that many other people were involved too and thanked widely. She closed by saying that we'd be back in touch when we can open up workday volunteering; in the meantime, stay safe, have a lovely day and enjoy the Park.

The meeting closed at approximately 12:20pm.