

Friends of Sharphill Wood

2017 Annual Report

May 2017



Founded 22 January 2008: Eighth Annual Report

There were 10 meetings of the Friends of Sharphill Wood in the year to 9 May 2017. The Annual General Meeting on 9 May 2016 elected Phil Miller (Chair), Mike Rivett (Vice Chair), Chrissie Wells (Treasurer), Jo Miller (Publicity Officer) John Elwell (Work Party Coordinator) and Bill Logan (Secretary). In addition, the meeting appointed Richard Elliott and Ben Betts as Deputy Work Party Coordinators and agreed to amend the constitution to reflect these additional posts.

There were 99 Friends on the circulation list in May 2017.

Management developments

Sharphill Wood has been included in the Borough's Public Spaces Protection Order. This is an area that can be designated by Rushcliffe Borough Council where anti-social behaviour has been causing a nuisance or annoyance. In the designated area, police, police community support officers and council officers have certain powers to help tackle anti-social behaviour. This follows our lobbying of councillors, police and fire services to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour - particularly camping, the lighting of fires and littering - in the wood. We have reported incidents of anti-social behaviour to the Council or emergency services during the year and have recently begun distributing "NeighbourWood Watch" cards to regular visitors to the wood alerting them who to contact in the event of an incident.

We have been discussing with the developers what mitigating measures will be put in place to help protect the wood when the proposed houses and school are built. We are pleased that, in addition to a buffer zone to the east and north of the wood, a fence will be erected around the wood, reinforced with further hedge planting. The developers have also agreed to distribute a “welcome pack” to new residents with details of the Group, Rushcliffe Borough



Council and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. We continue to press the Council on our proposal that the community park be extended to the Spinney rather than ending in line with the wood.

We have had a meeting with Rushcliffe Borough Council and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust to review progress with the Management Plan and other concerns. We discussed our programme of removing non-native species, particularly sycamore, from the wood and agreed that we should continue with this work. We also considered the state of the rights of way, which are extremely wet, particularly in the winter and as a result the Council have provided 4 tonnes of gravel to lay on the paths. We are discussing the content and design of two interpretation panels we hope to place at the main wood entrances.

We have begun recording the number of hours spent by officers on the work of the Group, in addition to the hours on work parties and other maintenance work in the wood. Since January [] hours, including [] on work parties have been spent on running the Group and pursuing the best interests of the wood.

Publicity

This year we have been awaiting the arrival of our new website. The year has been spent making sure our current website and our Facebook page were dynamic and effective. Our Facebook page now has 122 people who like it and regularly view it. These people are not just from Nottingham but are from all over the world with our articles being viewed by 70+ visitors. New articles and pictures to keep interest in the Group have regularly been added. Articles for the West Bridgford Local News, outlining what we do as a Group, have frequently been published. Maintaining the website involved keeping people informed about what we are doing, requesting their input and encouraging new volunteers. The group email box was also monitored and incoming emails forwarded to the relevant officer for action. We have regularly updated and replaced posters in the notice boards in the wood showing, for example, dates of work parties and walks.

Nature surveys

In March 2017, we commenced a flora survey in the wood and its immediate boundary with the surrounding fields. A second survey was carried out in April, and we plan repeat surveys in each of the following months, from May to September. We are using the expected flowering period of species previously recorded in the wood as background information.

It is some time since we have had a fungi survey and the Notts Fungi Group were approached to see if they could fit one in for us. It was too short notice, so we have asked whether they would kindly consider us for next year.

As regards invertebrate surveys, we have never been able to commission anyone to carry these out. We therefore approached Dr Ruth Blunt, who carries out or supervises general survey/identification/ecological work and she coordinates a lot of the teaching of environmental science and environmental biology at Nottingham University. She says there are possibilities for project students etc. Both of those degree courses are based at University Park so the students may be close to Sharpshill and work may be able to start in June 2017.

Nest box inspections were carried out again during spring 2016 and results were submitted to the



British Trust for Ornithology nest record scheme. Sadly, bad weather during May seemed to have a major impact on tit breeding both here and elsewhere in the region, so figures were disappointing.

We had only three successful nests (2 Blue Tit and 1 Great Tit), and two of these appeared to have only a single fledged chick each. Our treecreeper nest boxes have still not been used. A single informal bird survey was carried out in May, when a few birds that are less common at this site were detected: Mistle Thrush, Willow Warbler and Bullfinch.

Work Parties

During the period May 2016 to April 2017 we held 11 scheduled Sunday work parties, and remarkably we had reasonable weather on each occasion. Although in the past we have generally skipped December, this time we held a work party on the second Sunday of December and the intention is to make this a regular fixture. Over the 11 work parties we had 91 volunteers (about 8 per work party) and clocked up 309 volunteer-hours (about 28 volunteer-hours per work party). We also received additional help from the Meadow Covert scout troop at the February work party, adding a further 36 volunteer-hours. Seven visits for nest box inspections in the spring and two visits in the autumn for nest box cleaning and repair involved a further 39 volunteer-hours, making a grand total of 383 volunteer-hours. This is considerably down on previous years, partly because of fewer participants and partly because people often had to leave early.

During the spring and summer months there was less to do, and much of the time was spent attending to whips planted in recent years by re-instating canes and guards and removing encroaching weeds. At the June work party we were fortunate in having the use of three scythes from Notts Wildlife Trust, kindly brought along and demonstrated by Nick Mills from Skylarks. This proved to be an efficient, quiet and eco-friendly way of dealing with weeds along the sides of the main path. During the autumn and winter months the main focus has been on plugging various gaps in the western boundary, for which purpose we installed a substantial number of posts and used these to support dead hedging. Material for the hedging was taken from fallen timber (particular from storm Doris in February), from Sycamore and Norway Maple removal, and from coppicing of a small number of Hazel and Wych Elm stands. We had whips donated by both the Woodland Trust and the Trust for Conservation

Volunteers, and we planted these mostly along the western boundary, particularly on the outside of dead hedging.

The muddy state of the paths is an ongoing problem, and part of the solution is spreading stones. An initial tonne of stones delivered in early 2016 had been distributed to some stretches of path near the southern end, and helped to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of the solution. However, it was agreed that a much larger quantity would be needed to give sufficient treatment everywhere it is needed, and we would need this deposited in or just outside the wood rather than at the bottom of the hill. We finally managed to get a few tonnes delivered to where we wanted it in March 2017, and some of this has already been deployed, thanks largely to the efforts of David Nicholson-Cole. Some effort has also gone into scraping mulch away from a couple of the worst areas. We have now abandoned the spreading of wood chip on the paths, and instead we have started to use it as mulch for planted whips.



Nest boxes were cleared out in November, and hinges had to be repaired on several. A few nest boxes that had hardly been used in recent years were moved to form a third walk to the east of the main path. Other tasks during the year have included litter picking, tidying up after parties, removing ramps made for BMX bikes, path edging near the north-east corner, and repairing vandalised dead-hedging.

Community participation

We attended the St Paul's Church and Skylarks open days where we had a stall and provided quizzes with prizes, which proved popular and helped raise the profile of the Group.

We also hosted a session of the 12th West Bridgford Brownies in the wood and are very grateful to Lynn Victor of Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust for leading the informative and popular activities on the evening.

Chrissie Wells regularly attended the West Bridgford Local Area Forum where she raised our concerns over anti-social behavior and the building development.

Finance

The total asset balance at the year-end was £914.58. Out of that sum £387.58 is unrestricted, that is it is not specifically earmarked for any purpose paid for with a specific grant. The following funds are restricted:-

£150	Grant from Councillor Wheeler (Notts County Council towards Interpretation Panels)
<u>£377</u>	Grant from Councillor Khan (for Insurance 2017 and TCV membership)
£527.00	

Our main requirements during the year were for path and boundary maintenance, although the delivery of gravel is funded by Rushcliffe Borough Council. However part of our Management Plan states that we should liaise with NWT and RBC to provide Interpretation Panels. These are quite costly and difficult to design however we have a design and are currently raising further funds towards the cost of two Panels.

As regards purchases, we are now in possession of a really smart banner which we have used at events to draw attention to our stall. It is strictly for indoor use, however we did use it successfully at an outdoor event in the summer.

Mr. L.W. Baily kindly donated £ 50 for the cost of maintaining the paths, as a regular Wood user and dog walker. Another windfall came from the Cooperative Bank. We complained about aspects of the online banking service and they refunded us with £50. Also Mr. and Mrs. Frank Collins graciously continued to provide funding in kind by offering their home for our regular meetings.

These donors are thanked profusely for their kind contributions.

Acknowledgements

The Group would once again like to thank Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, especially Ben Driver, Paul Phillips of Rushcliffe Borough Council and Gordon Dyne of the South Notts Group for their continued advice and support. Also, thanks to the many volunteers who helped at our work parties. Phil Miller (Chair), Mike Rivett (Vice Chair), Chrissie Wells (Treasurer), Jo Miller (Publicity Officer), John Elwell (Work Party Coordinator), Richard Elliott (Deputy Work Party Coordinator), Ben Betts (Deputy Work Party Coordinator) and Bill Logan (Secretary).