

# Friends of Sharphill Wood

2021 Annual Report

*May 2021*

**Founded 22 January 2008: Thirteenth Annual Report**



Due to the Covid-19 lockdown there were no ordinary meetings of the Friends of Sharphill Wood for April and May 2020 and we missed the 12 May Annual General Meeting. Thereafter we held Extraordinary Meetings on 25 June and 22 July via Zoom and resumed Ordinary General Meetings, again via Zoom, on the second Tuesday from 8 September making 10 in the year to 11 May 2021. The Officers elected at the Annual General Meeting on 14 May 2019, Phil Miller (Chair), Chrissie Wells (Vice Chair), Chrissie Wells (Treasurer), Jo Miller (Publicity Officer) John Elwell (Work Party Coordinator), Richard Elliott (Deputy Work Party Coordinator) and Mike Rivett (Deputy Work Party Coordinator) and Bill Logan (Secretary) were carried forward. There were 78 Friends on the circulation list in May 2021, up from 63 in 2020.

## **Management Developments**

We were able to meet on 26 August 2020 in the wood to discuss our 2018 – 2023 Management Plan with Paul Phillips of Rushcliffe Borough Council and Ben Driver of Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT). The visit didn't lend itself to addressing the plan in detail so we surveyed our recent works. Before that we noted that parts of the buffer zone whips appeared to be doing better than others with 50% dead in some areas. As far as the whips we had to dig in because of the halt on regular work parties were concerned, we thought these could be salvaged for later planting.

We discussed whether the whips on the boundary should be coppiced, but Paul said there was a danger that, being east facing, to do so might kill them and so it was agreed to leave them. Were we to require more whips for shady parts of the boundary in future years, it was suggested we go for more shade tolerant species. Later inspection of the whips showed that many have not survived. We considered the lean-to den areas created during lockdown. It was agreed that planting of under-storey, fencing the area off if possible, in the area around the badger sett should be done, but the other area left to allow for the inevitable building of dens. The den off the main path to the east was examined



and subsequent to the visit RBC arranged a staff day to clear it away. We considered whether more gravel should be laid on the paths, but Paul said this was not in keeping with a natural space. If people can't negotiate muddy paths, they should not visit the wood. The Friends raised the problem of people going off piste when the path is too muddy, but agreed they would attempt to lay desire lines to discourage walking off the path. It was agreed that the bollards at the Wheatcroft end were too far apart to prevent motorcycle access and Paul arranged for Streetwise to rectify this.

Paul arranged for the supply of anti-litter notices now placed at each of the official entrances.

We were able to meet with Bovis and the Council to assess what needed to be done to complete the boundary fence, which would have dog-friendly stiles at the west and south unofficial entrances, but work has yet to be done and we are pressing for another update.

Winter usually sees a reduction in incidents of antisocial behaviour, but lockdown has led to a number of incidents reported to the Council and Police.

We were awarded a Biodiversity Grant by the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group to buy whips, guards and canes, but as we were unable to plant them, the grant has been deferred to the 2021/22 year. Unfortunately, the collapse of a badger tunnel under the central path has meant it being partially blocked. We await approval by Natural England and advice from NWT's ecology consultants before a remedy can be determined. We also await an on-site meeting with the Area Rights of Way Officer – Rushcliffe Via East Midlands Ltd who will be responsible for carrying out the work.



Our usual informal social at The Test Match had to be cancelled and we held an ordinary Zoom meeting instead.

## Publicity

The Publicity Role, although not based in the wood, covers a lot of areas that are unseen within the Group. Jo looks after all contact from the website, emails, messages, and Facebook. She directs contact received to the relevant officer in the Group. It involves admin, creating and designing posters for the notice boards, printing and laminating them. The most visible part of her role is updating the website and Facebook page. Recruitment of new volunteers is also incorporated into this. The Facebook at present has 256 followers which is increasing year on year.

Over the last 12 months Jo continued to update the website and Facebook page with information related to covid restrictions and work parties provided by officers of the Group. This work has been aimed at making the website as user friendly as possible. Jo updates the pictures and information on the Facebook page to keep our followers engaged and enthusiastic about keeping us updated about any issues that arise within the wood.

## Nature Surveys

Nest box inspections could not be carried out during spring 2020. Likewise the spring bird surveys that had been conducted the previous two years from late March to early June could not be repeated in 2020. However, John did note his observations during weekly exercise walks during spring 2020, and as a result was able to publish a report '[Spring Birds at Sharpill Wood 2020](#)', albeit with less quantitative information than normal.

Notwithstanding the Covid-19 restrictions, Richard was able to carry out a further flora survey in the wood during 2020, to complement earlier surveys. The 2020 weather was characterised by an extremely wet winter, spells of warm and then dry weather in spring, followed by a generally warm summer. As in 2019, there was plenty of moisture in late summer and many of the woodland plants continued flowering through September and into October. The species recorded in 2020 included 91 species of wildflower, 27 species of tree and 13 species of grass, sedge, rush and fern (a total of 131 species), including some not previously recorded. The flora survey involved 14 visits by Richard between February and October, clocking up 30 volunteer-hours. The 2021 survey is currently underway.

## Work Parties

Coronavirus restrictions throughout spring/summer 2020, and at times during autumn/winter, meant that scheduled work parties were reduced to 4: in September, October, December and March, plus an additional work party early in January. Furthermore, the September work party was limited to 6 volunteers, but thereafter we operated 2 groups of up to 6 (although weather on some occasions limited participation). Much of the work involved the whips planted inside the eastern boundary fence: removing encroaching vegetation, checking canes and guards were in place, and planting the heeled-in whips that we had been unable to plant the previous winter because of lock-down. The additional work party at the start of January was called because we had just received 10 canopy trees from Rushcliffe Borough Council, and these needed to be planted in our third "trial planting area" on the west side of the main path, about half-way down. Fortunately we had cleared this area at the December work party. We also carried out



some repairs to path edging in the north-east corner, as well as a number of smaller tasks. John, with assistance, had two visits in the winter to service the nest boxes. During these various sessions, and taking into account low risk work (such as site inspections and litter picking) carried out by individuals or pairs on other occasions, we clocked up 222 volunteer-hours on site.

### **Finance**

During 2020 our needs were minimal, the largest item being for Public Liability Insurance although Zurich Insurance kindly delayed requesting their annual premium. However one unexpected requirement was for Personal Protective Equipment. As well as sanitizers, the Friends decided to lend out equipment to regulars to obviate the need for cleansing such items as helmets. To cover our needs, Rushcliffe Borough Council (Councillor Robinson) kindly provided us with a grant for £395.23 which will be invaluable when we start needing, for example, protective helmets to lend out. Councillor Major also helped us out with the aforementioned Public Liability Insurance. What whips were planted were supplied by funding from Councillors Wheeler from the previous year.

We did secure £586.00 from the Rushcliffe Biodiversity Fund, for hedging whips for Autumn 2021, however, as mentioned earlier, due to the circumstances surrounding the viability of work parties, this grant was not drawn down. A revised request will need to be submitted if we wish to renew this for Autumn/Winter 2021/22.

Sadly, the Legendary Collins Cash and Carry had to cease trading at the end of the financial year. They have been marvellous benefactors in the past and our good wishes and thanks are due to them. However due to logistical issues, we had already started to hold meetings at the house of a Friend, again without any cost to the Group. TCV (Trust for Conservation Volunteers) have received funding from People's Postcode Lottery, so therefore they have again been able to provide their usual support through free membership (normally £38.00). Thanks to Gordon Dyne for once again acting as our Auditor and for his prompt support.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are again due to 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. Special thanks to David Nicholson-Cole who provided us with Zoom access allowing our meetings to recommence.

**Phil Miller (Chair), Chrissie Wells (Vice Chair & Treasurer), Jo Miller (Publicity Officer), John Elwell (Work Party Coordinator), Richard Elliott & Mike Rivett (Deputy Work Party Coordinators), and Bill Logan (Secretary).**