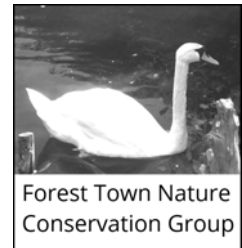


Notes from Forest Town Nature Conservation Group (FTNCG) Open Committee Meeting 2nd March 2016



Registered Charity No. 1157957

Trustees Present: Shlomo, Lorraine, Josh, Alan, and Rose [5]

Trustee Apologies: Ross and Rich (who sent his love) [2]

Others Present: Barry, John G, Mark, Kevin, Celia, Pauline, Malcolm, Ann, Dennis, Thomas, Katrina, and John C

Membership & Finance Updates:

On 1st March 2016 FTNCG comprised **45 members**, and had a total of **£3,950**.

Since our 2nd December 2015 Open Committee Meeting FTNCG has received donations from Mansfield District Councillors Bennett and Walker. ASDA received and displayed our "Thank you" letter. Members are invited to become Trustees.

Spa Ponds Site Management

Update from Wardens Alan and Barry. Recently completed work on the steps near the river has been vandalised, with concreted posts uprooted and thrown in the river. There is now a need to secure logs using wire.

ACTIONS: Seek Chris's advice when he is next on site. Shlomo to contact Forestry Commission re: their use of CCTV in the vicinity of Spa Ponds. Act on the identified need to secure logs using wire.

Shlomo noted that since we started the Saturday sessions with Ian and the Friday sessions with Rich more than 200 FTNCG volunteer hours have been delivered (over and above Barry and Alan's many hours).

Brief update on the recent paid-for work and on Chris' offer to walk around the site.

Shlomo explained how the Section 106 money associated with the Loggins Garage apartment development is not now expected to materialise (the business is being sold). Shlomo shared some information about hedge laying grants (intended for farmers), but it appears Spa Ponds would not qualify as not enough work needs carrying out on the site.

Preparations are underway for the next wave of tree planting. We are expecting to receive a Woodland Trust Wetland Pack of 105 (free) trees that like wet ground, including: 30 downy birch, and 15 each of goat willow, osier, hawthorn, rowan and hazel. "These trees absorb water and their root systems break up soil to help water penetrate the ground more deeply, so plant this pack to help dry up an area where water collect easily. These trees will also do well along water courses..." Rich will be joining us for a work session on Sunday morning 6th March from 10am - Noon. We expect the delivery of trees sometime between Monday 7th March - Friday 11th March. We will be planting trees on Saturday 19th March from 10am - Noon.

The Groups need for volunteer First Aiders was discussed and several potential sources of training were identified, and a number of volunteers offered to attend a one-day certificated training course.

ACTIONS: Shlomo to research opportunities and report back to potential volunteers.

Spa Ponds Heritage

Mark described being a Tree Verifier for the Woodland Trust and his efforts to carry out Ancient Tree Recording. Mark has logged more than 100 trees on Spa Ponds. Unusual (non-native) species found by Mark at Spa Ponds include Turkey Oak (at least 3 specimens, each several hundred years old) and Paper Bark Birch. These discoveries raise questions about how they were introduced to Spa Ponds. Theories include the desire of the Duke of Portland to show off Spa Ponds and other parts of his estate.

The prospect of undertaking visits to local history libraries and archives was discussed. Pauline and Malcolm advised bring pencils (as some archives do not permit pens) and recording not only the documents that were helpful, but also the documents that were unhelpful (to prevent wasting time on them in the future). In addition to the libraries and archives listed in the recent e-mail message, the Local Studies Library in Nottingham and the Chesterfield and Newark libraries could be added to our list. It was agreed that a visit, probably to the Local History Library in Mansfield Woodhouse, would be arranged for Friday 8th April, with a potential second research session on Friday 22nd April.

The progress being made on a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid was discussed. Meetings have taken place between FTNCG and Matt Beresford (a local historian and community archaeologist) about a year-long project that would focus on producing a community-led Heritage Management Plan for Spa Ponds. This Plan would complement our Habitats Management Plan for Spa Ponds, and would help ensure our nature conservation work does not inadvertently damage the site's heritage value. The importance of focussing the scope of the initial project to ensure goals are achievable was noted, as was the importance of not rushing into a project beyond our capacity to deliver. It is clear that the Group cannot expect to master hundreds of years of history in a year-long project. Reference was made to the significant amount of groundwork that has already been carried out to build the Group's capacity to work on heritage aspects of Spa Ponds, and how this could be extended with the support of experts.

Matt (MB Archaeology) would offer professional hand-holding and training, so FTNCG members and others from the wider community could develop skills to continue to research the site's history (and to improve upon the Group's ability to confidently and responsibly manage the site's heritage assets) even after the project is completed. Matt would also help us interpret the available Lidar (special aerial photography) to help inform our Heritage Management Plan.

The HLF funding would cover most, but not all, of the associated expenses of the project, and the project would require a high degree of buy-in from at least a core group of enthusiasts from FTNCG. Several FTNCG Members expressed a desire to take part in the project and to learn heritage research skills together in a group setting. It was noted that the project provides an opportunity to involve people beyond FTNCG (including potentially some who may take the lead on future heritage projects instead of FTNCG), and that the timing of the project coincides with the 700 year anniversary of the year we believe the ponds were first built (1316).

The prospect of recording oral histories was also briefly discussed.

Local Plan Submission

Shlomo briefly described the content and importance of FTNCG's submission, available: www.foresttown.net/nature/FTNCG_Local_Plan_Submission_from_February_2016.pdf

Forthcoming Activities:

- Planting trees at Spa Ponds on Saturday 19th March, from 10am - Noon
- Toad Counts: March / April 2016
- FTNCG Meetings: Wednesday evenings 6th April, 4th May (AGM) and 15th June
- Research Sessions: Fridays 8th and 22nd April (To be confirmed)
- Trustees Pre-AGM Meeting: Mid-April (To consider Report & Accounts)
- Balsam Pulling: from around May
- Bat Walk with Ruth: Friday 13th May 2016, from 9pm
- Moth catching session with Ian: late May / early June (depends on weather)
- Trustees Meeting: June (Focus on Autumn Programme and Spa Ponds management)