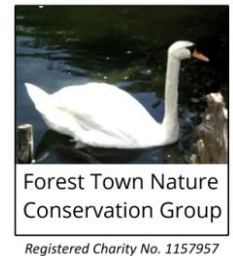


Minutes of FTNCG Virtual Trustees Meeting Thursday 6th August 2020

Present: Shlomo Downen (Chair), Josh Downen (Treasurer and Secretary), James Healy (Vice Chair), Lorraine Downen, Diane Simpson, Mark Fretwell, Phil Goodall and Robert Martyr (Keep Britain Tidy)

Apologies: Alan Alberry, and John Gibson



Agenda circulated in advance of the meeting:

- FTNCG's current financial position
- Keep The Forest Buzzing project
- Spawn on the Maun project
- Woodland Management Plan for Spa Ponds
- Rural Payments Agency (RPA) Countryside Stewardship Funding
- Pipe and Path project
- Other projects
- Other updates

Shlomo: Meeting an opportunity to make decisions that can be minuted. Having investigated the Charity Commission rules, regulations and current advice, Josh established that FTNCG is entitled to deviate slightly from the rules in our constitution so long as there are good reasons and any discussions between, and decisions made by, Trustees are minuted. FTNCG's most recent Annual General meeting (AGM) took place on 8th June 2019, and theoretically this year's AGM should be held not more than 15 months after that date, but this period can be extended by agreement of Trustees if the extension is in the best interests of the charity.

Following discussions about the impact of Covid and the need to hold a virtual AGM, Trustees agreed that this year's FTNCG AGM should be held on-line from 9am on Wednesday morning 16th of September, which amounts to an extension of approximately one week.

Decided: That the FTNCG AGM would start at 9am on Wednesday 16th September, and that this year's AGM would focus on the business of the AGM, with no attempt to make it into the usual social occasion.

Shlomo proposed we replace the hard copy signature requirement for prospective Trustees to confirm their willingness to serve as Trustees of the charity with an e-mail from or on behalf of the Trustee saying they would be happy to be put forward / serve.

Decided: That email confirmation would be acceptable, as proposed.

Note: All Trustees present at the meeting confirmed their willingness to stay on as FTNCG Trustees. It was also agreed to invite Dennis to become an FTNCG Trustee. Lorraine confirmed John Gibson's willingness to stay on as a Trustee of FTNCG.

Action: Shlomo to approach Dennis about becoming an FTNCG Trustee.

Finance update

FTNCG currently has £3,070 (bank and cash), of which £500 is from the Mansfield Building Society to pay Andy Hollis (Ecologic) for hedge training and support. This leaves around £2,500 in the 'general fund', broadly allocated as follows:

- £500 - Running costs
- £500 - Site improvement works
- £500 - Contingencies
- £1,000 - Match funding (inc. for EMEC Pipe & Path project)

Keep The Forest Buzzing (£2,434)

Rob Martyr made successful bid to the Wheatcroft Fund. The £2,434 received from the Wheatcroft Fund has been transferred to Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) to ensure Rob can help deliver the project. The project entails planting grass and wildflower seed at Spa Ponds to attract bees - funds include buying tools and seeds, hiring machinery, and paying for Rob's time, including time to train the group in identifying relevant plants and surveying the bees.

It was noted that insurance relating to machinery will be the responsibility of KBT, and that the project/funding end date is: 29th October 2021, with a monitoring report to be submitted to the Wheatcroft Fund when funds have been spent or within 1 year of receipt (19th June 2021), whichever is sooner. Shlomo explained how the bid refers to 30 participants, and this level of delivery may require Rob to train up one or two groups of 5 or 6 with someone taking a video of the training that could then be used / made available to train others.

Rob spoke of how he sees Spa Ponds as an ideal site to host pollinator corridors to provide a lovely long stretch of flowers for pollinating insects. Rob also elaborated upon the notion that this opportunity is not just about the physical delivery of the project, as the funding also provides the group with invert survey equipment such as the expensive fragile netting, that will enable us to carry out surveys. FTNCG will be shown how to conduct 10-minute pollinator monitoring surveys, as part of the national citizen science effort to study pollinator decline. FTNCG could monitor 1 or more of the 14 flowers and the time bees spend on the flower. This works will continue beyond the lifetime of the project, so the project will also pay for the purchase of the best available monitoring and ID books.

In response to a question from Shlomo about next steps, Rob set out how FTNCG Trustees need to discuss how we deliver the training (as mentioned above, potentially in groups of 5 or 6, in sessions that are recorded, etc.). Rob also explained the benefits of being under KBT's wing, as KBT can get better prices on seeds, books and equipment. Rob emphasised how the project needs to be a collaborative group-led project.

Rob clarified that the next step is to select areas for pollinator flowers. These areas may require rotavating, which could in theory be carried out as soon as this October, but the ideal time to plant is February to early March. In response to a question from Phil, Rob confirmed that the wild garlic seeds could also be planted around this time.

Rob very kindly agreed to visit the site with Shlomo (and others) for a walkover to help us identify ideal locations for planting wildflowers. This visit could take place in September.

Action: Shlomo to suggest some dates for Rob to visit Spa Ponds in September.

Rob explained how the walkover would entail looking at the soil, but that in his experience of previous visits to Spa Ponds he didn't see any issues with respect to the soil's suitability for wildflowers, e.g. no highly acidic soil or extremely dry areas, meaning Spa Ponds can be expected to be well-suited for planting a wide variety of wildflowers.

Shlomo noted that a 'comprehensive' and well-prepared site walk-over would make the best use of Rob's time to progress multiple projects at once.

Spawn on the Maun (£3,751)

Shlomo noted how FTNCG has observed the alarming way that the River Maun has been getting ever wider, imperilling the bridge, etc., and how this widening has given rise to an urgent need to narrow the water and shore up the banks. This would quicken the flow of water, not only protecting the banks but also revealing more of the river bed which would then allow fish to spawn in the stretch of the Maun near Spa Ponds.

Rob's bid to the Severn Trent Community Fund was successful, and the £3,751 that recently arrived in FTNCG's has now been transferred to KBT (grant letter dated 20th July 2020). The project entails installing a series of brash bundles to protect the banks of the River Maun near Spa Ponds - funds include cost of buying brash bundles, posts and rope; hiring a petrol-driven post-knocker; paying a chainsaw operative and project manager (Rob); and securing a permit from the Environment Agency (EA). Once again, insurance relating to the use of the machinery will be the responsibility of KBT. In addition to the permit, we may also need to formalise the informal permission from the neighbouring land owner. This project's final completion report is due on or before 31st August 2021.

Rob elaborated, explaining how he was concerned about the banks and build up of sediment and damage being caused by Himalayan balsam [and also by Signal crayfish]. The project is about preventing excess sediment going into the river, and making the river 'wiggly' to increase oxygen and reinvigorate breeding fish, prevent bank erosion, create emergent vegetation so the bank will self-repair, and clean up the pebbles. Rob noted how it is good to have neighbouring landowners on board. The project will help protect the bridge, which would cost tens of thousands to replace. NWT carried out similar work near Spa Ponds, and this project will contribute further to catchment-scale restoration.

Sensitivity with respect to the timing of the project will be needed to prevent disturbance to trout and other wildlife, although it was noted that breeding birds do not use the stretch of the Maun. Rob explained how the EA want to avoid work being carried out between 15th October through to 1st March. So this project could start at some point between now and 15th October (or from July if we are worried about birds such as warblers or kingfisher).

In response to a question about delivering this project over two days, e.g. Friday and Saturday, Rob said that as his job role is to support community groups he could work during a weekend. The project would require teams of around 6 volunteers (plus Rob). So long as the posts are put in the rest can be done on a more ad-hoc basis.

Diane noted that as this work seems to be fairly urgent, it would be best to attempt to progress the project sooner, i.e. before 15th October 2020, rather than leave it until 2021. This would depend on Rob's ability to secure a permit from the EA.

Lorraine asked a question about trees that Rob may wish to drop before the bird season, and Rob agreed that this was an important consideration, suggesting that he could bring a chainsaw to use after the site walkover, or FTNCG could pay Andy to cut and hinge two and let them fall in the river 'naturally'. Shlomo confirmed that FTNCG would prefer for Rob to do this, as the work agreed with Andy is different work.

Action: Shlomo to confirm dates with Trustees and then with Rob. Trustees subsequently agreed that this project could be carried out on Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd October 2020, weather permitted, assuming Rob is able to secure a permit from the EA.

Woodland Management Plan for Spa Ponds (£1,000)

Shlomo briefly set out how the purpose of the Woodland Plan is that if we tell the Government how we will manage the woodland then we can be paid to manage it in the way we said we would. But in order to put it in a form for the Government to formally approve we need Rob's help. Rob explained how the Plan would be the first step towards FTNCG obtaining (five years' worth of) Countryside Stewardship funding. FTNCG needs a Woodland Management Plan with the quantity of trees to be managed expressed in tonnes, the type of habitat we are managing, etc. Rob went on to confirm that he is now being funded (by KBT) to help FTNCG write the Woodland Management Plan. This means that when FTNCG is paid the £1k this money would be free to use for other purposes, as the Plan would be then have been delivered. Shlomo suggested that this money could potentially be used to pay Rob for help with further surveying work, but that Trustees should hold off including this money in our budgeting until it has reached our bank account.

As previously circulated, it was noted that Rob was responsible for the successful bid to Rural Payments Agency (RPA), and that the Woodland Management Plan will be a subset of FTNCG's site management plan, forming the basis of any contract with the RPA, and that the Plan must conform to UK Forestry Standard and be subject to Forestry England approval. The Woodland Management Plan needs to be completed by 30th June 2022 (although if we wanted to use it as the basis for a Countryside Stewardship application, it would need to be sooner than this).

Rural Payments Agency (RPA) Countryside Stewardship Funding

As was circulated in advance of the meeting, in addition to Woodland Management funding FTNCG is eligible to apply for Countryside Stewardship funding which could include some capital (improvement) work and (possibly) also some money for water quality surveys. If FTNCG's application is successful, the RPA would pay FTNCG once-off amounts for improvement and survey work and annual funds to maintain and improve the site. This application is currently on hold pending the completion of the Woodland Management Plan and the development of a capital works programme.

Shlomo explained RPA funding is paid after some work has been carried out. Rob described how Natural England (NE) and Forestry England were willing to pay FTNCG, but the NE advisor said there are many options for long-term RPA funding for FTNCG and because they are not in a position to carry out a site survey (due to Covid) they advised FTNCG to apply for additional funds, e.g. for preventing erosion, run-off from road, etc. as this could result in a 5-year agreement to pay us £1,600 / £1,700 per annum.

Rob said he carefully considered NE's advice and felt it best not to rush in and accept a lesser agreement at this stage. If FTNCG accepted an agreement that covered only the management of the ponds it would be hard to enter into other agreements. Because FTNCG does not yet have a Forestry England approved Woodland Management Plan FTNCG could not yet apply for Woodland Management funding. As things now stand, FTNCG is in line to receive considerable regular income from 2022 for the management of all the habitats at the Spa Ponds site, not just the ponds. Deferral means FTNCG can be funded for woodland edge and woodland management as well.

Shlomo thanked Rob for brokering the best deal for FTNCG, saying that in his view it is well worth waiting a year to be set up well for five years. Rob described as a 'softener' to the blow of delayed payment that NE and Forestry England both agreed that the Spa Ponds site is of high conservation value. Rob also noted that long-term maintenance is costly and FTNCG benefits from a regular and reliable income, as we are sustaining an important area.

Phil added his thanks to Rob, noting how FTNCG benefits from Rob's enabling attitude, that is proving to be a catalyst for great change. Rob shared how he works on many sites, including big national ones, and he loves working in Forest Town with FTNCG. Sites like Spa Ponds deserve environmental funding and support, so Rob is happy to get us what we are entitled to. Shlomo celebrated the way that this approach is drawing funds from outside into Forest Town for the benefit of the whole local community.

Pipe and Path Project

As set out in the notes circulated in advance of the meeting, FTNCG's bid to Severn Trent Community Fund is on hold until 21st July 2021 as the fund only pays for one project at a time. The project would entail raising the pipe and path between ponds 1 & 2 and related works. EMEC provided costings that amount to £10,200 comprising of £2,400 machinery hire; £2,400 materials; £5,400 labour costs. There would likely be an element of match funding of between £500 and £1,000 from FTNCG for the project required by any funder due to the scale of the grant sought. Options include waiting to re-apply until July 2021 or finding other funding sources. Shlomo explained how the Veolia Environmental Trust could provide £12,000 but would require £3,000 in match funding - and FTNCG does not currently have £3k to progress this application. Esmée Fairbairn is not accepting new funding bids at the moment. An application to fund the Pipe and Path project has been submitted to the Ernest Kleinworth Charitable Trust, and we await the outcome. A decision is expected sometime after the 20th of August.

Other Projects

FTNCG received £500 from the Mansfield Building Society (MBS) Community Support Scheme for a Hedge Project with Andy Hollis (Ecologic). The funds will pay Andy to help volunteers improve hedge technique. Match funding of £500 has already been spent, as promised in the bid. There is no deadline specified in Grant Award Letter, but FTNCG would like to spend it by end of 2020 if that works for Andy. MBS wants photos of relevant activity that they can use, rather than a grant funding report. If relevant, we should inform MBS of upcoming events (like the Spawn on the Maun work) so they can send volunteers

Rob left the meeting (as it was after 5pm)

Other Updates

Further to the discussions minuted above, Trustees considered additional questions arising in relation to FTNCG's AGM and Report & Accounts. It was agreed that if / when we want to have a webinar with presentations that can be an activity that takes place apart from the AGM, with this year's AGM being reserved for essential business. Shlomo clarified that the AGM would consist of a Zoom meeting lasting no more than 45 minutes, and that FTNCG Members would be welcome to attend. Trustees agreed with Shlomo's proposal to extend everyone's membership for another year, with voluntary donations welcome but not related in any way to members' membership status.

Trustees also agreed with Shlomo's proposal for Trustees to respond to the draft Report & Accounts by e-mail once this has been completed and circulated.

Jez asked about a site visit from Natural England, and Shlomo shared his understanding that the visit would take place after FTNCG submitted a Woodland Management Plan, and that NE is not visiting site at present.

Jez shared his recent experience of strimming the nettles near the Clipstone Drive entrance to Spa Ponds. Shlomo suggested we could discuss the possible use of a rotavator to knock back the nettles. It was agreed that the rotavator would not be required to prepare the ground for wild garlic seeds, as the intention is to plant these seeds around the Chestnut walk. Phil noted that the wild garlic will self-seed once established.

Shlomo thanked Mark for taking and sharing photographs of the site. With less frequent visits to the site the sharing of photos is proving all the more valuable. Mark asked about Forestry England plans for further felling. Jez noted that new pink markings had recently appeared on some trees along the path. Shlomo undertook to approach Forestry England to ask about their management plans - explaining that he hoped to connect with Val at the forthcoming Landowners meeting scheduled for Thursday morning 3rd September. Trustees agreed that the level of damage caused to our site by the Forestry England work was unacceptable, and must not be allowed to be repeated!

Jez flagged the growth of Himalayan balsam on the island, and asked if Shlomo could approach EMEC to see if they can do something. Shlomo suggested chasing up Chris Jackson to see if this could be part of his organised balsam work this year. Shlomo also noted that this could be something to add to what we discuss with Rob in September.

Action: Shlomo to touch base with Chris Jackson before ringing EMEC (to also explain that we don't yet have the funds in place for Pipe & Path project).

Shlomo noted that Rob wanted some upstream and downstream photos taken from the bridge, and asked trustees who take photos to pass them on for Rob.

Action: Next time anyone is at Spa Ponds take a photo in each direction and send it us.

Shlomo noted that a bid had been made to the Severn Trent Water COVID-19 Recovery Fund for an unspecified amount of general funds that could be ring-fenced for match funding, e.g. Veolia Pipe & Path. After the meeting concluded notice was received from Severn Trent that this bid was unsuccessful.

Jez asked those present about their availability to volunteer to help with the revetment (Spawn on the Maun) work in early October (weather permitting). Phil noted that Les Warren has said this work could be quite demanding, especially if the water is cold. At the moment Phil is not in a position to take part, although Neal might be up for it. Shlomo also volunteered, as did others.

Shlomo noted that the EA permit costs a modest amount of money (circa £100), but is in project budget. Safety first, so if either the weather or COVID-19 prove to be problematic then we have to be prepared to drop or change our plans at short notice rather than take unnecessary risk.

Action: Once Rob has confirmed his availability for Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd October then Shlomo will write to FTNCG members and supporters asking for volunteers, even if some are unable to commit to being there for a full day.

Phil went on to share how he hoped to train up two or more people to take over water quality testing work, but that due to family commitments he does not expect to be available to do this until October at the earliest. Shlomo suggested that when Phil is ready then we could video Phil's training session to allow for those who were not physically present to benefit.

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 5:30pm