

Forest Town Nature Conservation Group (FTNCG)
Annual General Meeting (AGM)
Forest Town Welfare
from 7pm on Wednesday 22nd May 2013



Present: Alyson; David; Lorraine; Josh; Shlomo; Ian; Colin; Christine; Margaret; Helen; Val; Arnold; Dorothy; Richard; and Megan [**15**] and NWT's Ruth Testa

Apologies: Jeff; Malcolm; Pauline; Jim; Phyllis; Geoff; Rose; Barry; Alan; Betty; Ron J; Lee; Ron T; Chris; Michael; Ann; Andy; and Frances [**18**]

Welcome

Lorraine welcomed members to the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group's second Annual General Meeting.

Review of the FTNCG's second year

Shlomo outlined some of the Group's highlights, including the way we were made to feel like honoured guests during our guided walk around the Attenborough Nature Reserve, and how this was followed some months later by Nigel's uplifting and informative talk about butterflies and dragonflies; Dorothy's inspiring story about how she became involved in bird watching and recording for the British Trust for Ornithology; the sense of community at our White Gates Christmas Party; and the joy of correctly guessing the name of a plant as part of surveying the hedges along Stinting Lane. Shlomo also noted how it is good to see the impact of our balsam pulling at Spa Ponds. Christine added that a highlight for her was the guided walk around Budby, and Andy showing us a nightjar up close.

Membership Report

As of 11th May 2013 the Group had 33 members

Finance Report

Josh reported that on 20th May 2013 the Group had £1,131.03 available in the bank, and £40 cash in hand, giving us a total of £1,171.03. Our most recent expenditures were for our insurance (£177.31); membership of The Conservation Volunteers (£38), membership of NWT (£33) and a £50 donation to the Cedar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Site Management Report

Shlomo gave a brief account of our Groups' relationship with the site known as Spa Ponds, or Gara Ponds. This site has been managed for the past 29 years as a Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT) nature reserve, but the Trust has never owned the site. The site owners put the site up for sale as one of several plots in January 2012, but apart from Shlomo's offer of £1, no interest was shown for the Spa Ponds plot.

The prospect of buying the site has been the topic of much discussion by the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group. Various options were explored, including attempting to buy the site to then give it over straight away to the Trust. It was explained to us how grant funding to help pay for essential work on the site, such as dredging, would be easier for our group to access than it would for the Wildlife Trust.

Many questions were raised by FTNCG members, and these were shared with NWT's Sites Committee and with the landowners via their land agents. It became clear that the original suggested price of around £60,000 was unrealistically high. It also became apparent that NWT is keen to enter into a long term lease with the current or future landowners to continue to manage the site. NWT also made it clear that if FTNCG were to buy the site and then subsequently find ourselves unable to fulfil our responsibilities as owners, then the Trust would be willing to take over the ownership of Spa Ponds.

Shortly before Christmas Shlomo was contacted by the land agents and invited to increase his offer. When this was raised to £5,000 the owners clarified that they were looking for at least £25,000. It became clear that if the FTNCG is to buy the site we would need to fund-raise. We began to explore a number of fund-raising ideas, including running raffles, and asking for pledges that would only be called in if we had an offer accepted by the site owners. To date we have raised nearly £50 through raffles and other cash donations, and we have received pledges of around £4,500.

Shlomo explained how an idea for a Spa Ponds project has been included in a major funding bid as part of the Sherwood Landscape Partnership's Heritage Lottery application. This bid is moving forwards with no guarantee of success. If the Sherwood Partnership's bid is granted we could see funds being made available to work with the community on Spa Ponds natural heritage, i.e. nature conservation work on the site, and cultural heritage, i.e. learning more about the medieval ponds themselves. Although the bid is to be submitted by the end of this month, it will be several months before we find out if the bid will succeed in reaching the next stage, and even if that is successful it would not be before 2015 that the funds would become available.

We are obviously not sitting back and waiting for the result of that funding application! Instead we are progressing as best we can with the resources available to us in relation to the conservation and enhancement of the site's natural assets and by finding out more about the site's illustrious history as part of Clipstone Park. This history will be the focus of our meeting on Wednesday evening 17th July, when our new friends from Mercian Archaeological Services will share their initial research findings.

Also, our first push with the Spa Ponds Appeal will now be followed by a greater effort to involve a wider number of supporters from within and beyond the community of Forest Town. Much of the FTNCG's existing account balance will be ring-fenced for the Spa Ponds Appeal, and we hope to raise more funds for general purposes for the Group as well. At our 17th April meeting it was agreed that FTNCG would pledge £1,000 to the Spa Ponds Appeal and in the short-term £750 has been ring-fenced for this purpose (and further money would be ring-fenced when it became available).

We also continue to benefit from the involvement of our wardens, who frequently visit Spa Ponds, and the site continues to be a focus for enhancing biodiversity through managing the balsam, and tracking anti-social behaviour on and around the site. In a recent conversation with the police Shlomo was asked to emphasise the importance of reporting each and every incident using the 101 number to ensure these are registered. This adds weight to our argument that policing Spa Ponds should be considered a priority. The site certainly remains a priority for the FTNCG!

Chair's Thanks

Lorraine, as the outgoing Chair, described how our second year as a Committee has certainly been challenging, and in some instances less fun than expected. We have weathered the storm, emerging undeterred. Lorraine thanked her fellow Committee members and the general members for their ongoing support and understanding, noting that together we have done some good conservation work, learnt a lot, and been very busy. We have put in many hours pulling balsam, and our efforts to purchase and improve Spa Ponds are really exciting. Lorraine expressed her hope that we can find a sustainable and nourishing level with the conservation work, creating new traditions in our community that allow us to make seasonal efforts that are effective and fun. Lorraine finished by thanking to Dave and Alyson, without whom we would not have formed our Group, or had such a solid and effective first two years. Dave and Alyson were then presented with this year's Chair's Award.

Vote on Motions

Lorraine introduced this year's motions. She recommended the new constitution to members, and she explained the reasons for the proposed changes (see the e-mail message circulated in advance of the AGM for further details).

All four of the following motions were passed unanimously:

Motion 1: To adopt the proposed constitution to replace the existing constitution;

Motion 2: To elect the following Committee to serve the functions as per the new constitution: Shlomo Downen, Ian O'Brien, Lorraine Downen, and Josh Downen;

Motion 3: To provide the Committee with a mandate to continue to move forward with fund-raising for the purchase / improvement of Spa Ponds, including local information sharing to increase community awareness of the site and its special features;

Motion 4: To provide the Committee with a mandate to open a sub-account to hold all funds raised as part of the Spa Ponds Appeal, and to take instructions from our independent auditor regarding the correct procedures to account for these transactions.

Note: Subsequent to the vote, and in accordance with the newly adopted constitution, Richard was co-opted onto the FTNCG Committee.

Forward Programme

Hedge surveying along Stinting Lane – dates and times to be arranged.

Wednesday (evening) 29th May (from 8 pm) -

Guided walk around Rainworth Heath and environs. Meeting up on Pit Lane.

Balsam pulling at Spa Ponds -

Saturday 15th June, Sunday 7th July, and Monday 8th July, all from 10 am.

Wednesday (evening) 17th July 2013 from 7pm at the Forest Town Welfare -

Presentation on the History of Spa Ponds by Mercian Archaeological Services CIC.

Close of the AGM

The AGM was immediately followed by a presentation by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's Western Reserves Officer, Ruth Testa.