

**Notes from the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group (FTNCG)
Trustees and Officers Meeting held at The Downen Residence
from 7pm Wednesday 31st May 2017**

Present: Shlomo; Lorraine; Josh; Phil; Rose; John G; Alan; and Jes [8]

Apologies: Ross; Rich; and Mark [3]

Alan provided a Spa Ponds Warden Report which was followed by discussions, and the following points were made:

- Himalayan Balsam has returned to our site, spreading primarily from neighbouring sites.
- Trustees are grateful to Ian whose recent strimming has helped open up the bridleway.
- Motorbikes remain problematic in the area, although they are not using the Spa Ponds site itself as much as they have in the past.
- Vandals damaged one of the horse stile barriers and they have thrown a concreted post into the River Maun which needs removing (by the Environment Agency or Via EM?).
- We are starting to see an increase in litter (associated with the good weather), and increased use of the 'picnic area' including (controlled) fires.
- As anticipated, there is a need to support our Wardens with balsam pulling and litter picking - in this respect it was suggested (in Jes' absence) that Jes might be in a position to head up some fortnightly sessions, especially during July and August (when schools break up and before the balsam goes to seed).
- It was suggested that signs could be put up on site with photographs of Himalayan Balsam explaining why they should be pulled and inviting the passing public to help with our efforts to manage the balsam.

Trustees and Officers then considered events that have taken place since our previous Trustees meeting (of 14th September 2016), including:

- Correspondence between FTNCG and both Forestry Commission and Nottinghamshire County Council in relation to the prospect of seismic testing (associated with fracking) on Forestry Commission managed land adjacent to Spa Ponds.
- John C and a colleague kindly provided FTNCG with a potential logo for Trustees' consideration. The design was discussed, with some Trustees observing that the swan photo had originally been chosen due to its high contrast (it works well as a black and white image, which is good for non-colour printing) and was retained as an act of defiance (after the swan was shot), but that as the image lacks any trees or deer if we were to choose an image for a new logo we would probably not choose a swan. It was also noted that the existing logo projects an image of an approachable community group, and that it is increasingly recognised as associated with FTNCG.

Action: Shlomo to thank John C and his colleague for their highly professional efforts.

Phil provided a comprehensive update on water quality testing, noting the following:

- The quality of the water impacts directly on the habitat and the wildlife, including the creatures and plants that live at Spa Ponds.
- Results (circulated) since January 2017 indicated levels of turbidity (which Phil explained) and phosphate testing (associated with eutrophication).
- Eutrophication seems to have been addressed by EMEC work that increased the light reaching the water, particularly in Ponds 3 and 4 (those nearest the River).
- Ammonia results show that all ponds are healthy (as is our bit of the River Maun)
- pH testing has proved useful, and the pH levels are now easy to compare, so that a 'faulty' result is easy to recognise, allowing for re-testing.
- Phosphate testing is necessarily limited due to cost; results so far are reassuring.
- Slow-moving watercourse means any pollution incident could be serious.

Phil also shared his (positive) experience of attending the Water Catchment Partnership meeting - including coming away especially pleased about the relative health of the water at Spa Ponds.

Trustees also discussed Mark's tree recording, which is ongoing as Mark continues to be active with the Woodland Trust, and Trustees were excited about Mark's forthcoming tree training session entitled: "Time travelling with trees". It was noted that Mark, accompanied by Shlomo and Josh, met with Rachael Cranch (Community Woodland Officer with the Woodland Trust) to show her around Spa Ponds. Rachael urged FTNCG to apply for a £1,000 grant to help with our Wetland Habitat Recreation project.

In relation to the work carried out at Spa Ponds by EMEC, Trustees felt that we had received good value for money. It was noted that the next phase could entail removing trees around Ponds 1 and 2, as well as possibly some or all of the conifers near Pond 0.

Actions: Renew efforts to find out the Forestry Commission's harvesting plans. Consider inviting Robert Vane (from the Waingroves group) to help remove unwanted trees. Consider how tree removal could be part of the Wetland Habitat Recreation project.

Trustees and Officers then considered FTNCG Funding, noting that:

- Our application for £5,000 from the Yorkshire and Clydesdale Bank Foundation does not appear to have been successful.
- It seems worthwhile applying to the Woodland Trust, as advised by Rachael Cranch.
- There is a need to arrange a visit to the NatureScape offices in Langar (NG13 9HP) to discuss the Wetland Habitat Recreation project.
- When planting in the future it will be important not to jeopardise any heritage assets.

Trustees briefly discussed the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported Spa Ponds Heritage Project. The Heritage Project Management Group meets frequently to help project delivery. A full programme of events is planned. We are on course to deliver all promised outputs for the HLF. The Heritage Project is proving very rewarding as well as very time-consuming.

Preparations for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held Wednesday 5th July 2017 were progressed, with prospective Trustees signing the relevant form to enable Rose to formally nominate them at the AGM. All present received the Accounts and endorsed the draft Report, granting Josh and Shlomo permission to make minor amendments as required (to reflect the status of current funding bids).

Lorraine updated those present regarding discussions with MBArchaeology's Matt Beresford exploring the possibility of FTNCG continuing to work together with Matt to help identify and protect the heritage assets at Spa Ponds beyond the end of the Heritage Project. Formalising the relationship between FTNCG and MBArchaeology could entail agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding and/or co-creating some form of partnership agreement. We anticipate receiving a draft from Matt in due course.

Working together with Matt FTNCG could, for example, arrange for the analysis of one or more 'core samples' from Pond 0 and/or Pond 1. The results of such testing could help inform our management of the site. Such considerations will form part of the Heritage Management Plan that is being produced as part of the Spa Ponds Heritage Project. This Heritage Management Plan will include observations and recommendations from MBArchaeology.

Tentative date for next FTNCG Trustees and Officers meeting was set for Wednesday 13th September 2017.