



Season's Greetings to all FTNCG Members and Supporters

Hello and welcome to this festive foray celebrating the fantastic work our community has achieved over the past year at the special Spa Ponds site. This all helps put the forest into Forest Town. We started off 2024 with a series of Facebook posts for what is now called the 'Spa Ponds Photos and Heritage' Facebook group, telling the site's story from its pre-historic origins and its time as common land, through to its use by royals and aristocrats, all the way to its more recent ownership by farmers and, in 2014, its purchase by the local community who now own and manage the site.

Whoever has owned it, the site has long been a key part of the local community, with our Oral History Project capturing the childhood memories of the site all the way back to the 1930's. It has long been a great place that people of all ages could walk to and enjoy for free, whether it be parents and their children or groups of kids from the same street or school – you just had to remember your jam sandwiches and, in some cases, a bottle of pop.

We've been working with our volunteers, corporate volunteers, and professionals over the past year to further improve the site for humans and wildlife alike. So, let's run through the seasons...

Last **Winter** we took some time off in December for a break after our November work replacing stakes in the dead hedges, managing the Hazel Wood and clearing parts of Pond Hill Wood for future planting. However, in January and February we got back to work planting hedgerow trees and straightening the stream as well as creating a path in the Hazel Wood to expand the Chestnut Walk. Those who were free on the right day were rewarded with a session where we learned about bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) from County Recorder Margaret Crittenden.

Then with **Spring** in our step we did litter picking, installing new signs, extending the Chestnut Walk up to the hedgerow, raking and clearing and seeding a new area through the Hazel Wood. After a May away, we then had a **Summer** of balsam pulling, including work with the assistance of Chris Jackson's County-wide team. We also held our history tours of Spa Ponds as part of Heritage Open Days – it was great to introduce people both familiar and unfamiliar with the site to the rich history of the area and we hope to be running it again next year. Some of what we learned will make its way into a new post to the Spa Ponds Heritage Facebook group in January 2025.

As Summer gave way to **Autumn** we undertook more work with Andy Hollis and Sam on the stream and bramble removal. And now with **Winter** having returned once again we are working with EMEC to let more light into the entrance to the site to help the plants and remaining trees.

Some work is for all seasons, and throughout 2024 we had the assistance of our volunteers and some local residents, keeping an eye on the site, letting us know of any issues. We also had our water quality testing led by Sam and Callum, with Dennis helping keep photographic records – see www.foresttown.net for a newly updated selection of his 'Then and Now' photos of Spa Ponds.

Wow, what a year, and what a community! On behalf of our fellow FTNCG Trustees – Alan Alberry, Mark Fretwell, Phil Goodall, Sam Nicholson, and Dennis Platts – we thank you for your support in 2024 and wish you and yours a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year. And, for the new Spa Ponds volunteers for whom this is your first such newsletter: Welcome to the family!

Shlomo, Lorraine and Josh (FTNCG Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer)