

Friends of the Flitch Way

Notes from Committee Meeting of Tuesday 22nd March 2016

Venue 1 Lawn Hall Cottages, North End, Great Dunmow
Present Chairman Stan Davies, Vice Chairman Alan Trigg
Secretary Wendy Moss, Treasurer Margaret James
Committee members Val Blamire, Bob Lucas, John Moss
Ranger Tom Hamilton. Guest Sandra Reynolds

The minutes of the meeting of 12 January were agreed.

Matters arising from the minutes

Referring to Val's comments under AOB regarding the sponsored run, Stan said that he had received confirmation from Braintree & District Athletic Club that the event would take place on Sunday 17th April. Beneficiaries from the run would be the Friends and the Breast Reconstruction Unit at Broomfield Hospital. Stan has sent a letter of thanks and asked whether volunteer marshalls were needed on the day. If the answer is yes, Wendy will e-mail members asking for names.

Chairman's report.

As he would be stepping down as Chairman at the AGM, Stan thanked the committee for the support and guidance given to him over the time he had been in office.

He said that he was sorry to be leaving at a time when the biggest threat to the Flitch Way was taking place from the proposed development at Brook Green. Stan thanked Andrew Adair in particular who had taken on the role of lodging the Friends' objection to the application and who continued to do a lot of work connected with it. Other objections from the general public and environmental bodies continued to be submitted to BDC and he was heartened to note the technical and detailed content of many of them. Wendy said that she had been contacted by the Brook Green Action Group who were holding a meeting at the Village Hall at 7pm on Wednesday 30th March to discuss what was currently happening. Friends have been invited to attend and several members said that they would do so. Information on the proposed development and how to object is posted in the carriage and we have a link on our website.

Tom said that ECC Country Parks will make their response in due course.

Essex Wildlife Trust are one of the organizations to have lodged an objection with BDC and Wendy had written to them asking for their support for having the whole of the Flitch Way designated as a Local Nature Reserve. A response has been received which will be passed to Andrew Adair for him to consider and respond.

Tom said that the Flitch Way was already designated as a Local Wildlife Site, centred on the address of Takeley Station. Although a Local Nature Reserve had a higher status, he suggested that applying to have the whole of the FW designated might be too ambitious and consideration might better be given to listing a specific place such as the Dunmow Cutting and Boardwalk first. Wendy will wait for the application forms to be received when the matter could be discussed again.

Treasurer's report.

Margaret reported the current bank balance to be £6,776.

Discussions with NatWest bank have taken place and they are happy to open a current and separate savings account with 2 out of 3 named signatories. Given possible changes of committee members at the AGM, the changeover from Co-op Bank to NatWest will be delayed until after the AGM, it was agreed.

Secretary's report.

3 new carriage volunteers have been recruited since the last meeting, Wendy reported, together with 1 new person for FW work parties. 64 membership cards were in the process of being issued and 91 invitations to the AGM will be sent out on 26th March.

Wendy gave the sad news that one of our members, Jo Jocelyn, had recently passed away and the committee asked that a card of condolence be sent to her husband, Ron. Margaret reminded the meeting that we had previously agreed to do so in all cases where a member of the Friends died and that action was confirmed.

On a lighter note, Wendy reported that the Friends had been successful in being awarded £12,000 by Tesco from their 'Bags of Help' scheme whereby customers voted for their charities of choice to receive funds from the sale of plastic bags in the stores. The donation will be used at Langford Halt to provide benches, information panels and footpath re-surfacing. Tom had also been successful in being awarded £8,000 from his application for similar work to take place at Garnett's Wood. Funds will be available from mid-April and a separate meeting to discuss the detail of how the money is to be spent will take place, before the AGM if practicable, as soon as the funds are received.

Wendy said that many complaints, written and spoken, continued to be made about the state of the FW adjacent to the travellers' site at Felsted. Despite every effort on her part to get Steve Andrews, the ECC Traveller rep at County Hall, involved in getting the path cleared, nothing had yet been resolved, the 'buck' having passed to the Rangers by him. Tom said that he would be taking Tim Dixon, Country Parks Manager, to see the site prior to discussion with Steve Andrews. Tom encouraged people to continue to complain to County Hall about the traveller site and its effect on the Flitch Way. Wendy will forward any complaints received.

P3 report.

Stan reported on Pete's behalf on what had been done since the previous meeting, as follows:

Jan 13. Stow Maries. Continuation of general clearance along the old railway line.

Jan 20. Great Tey. Heavy clearance of sunken lane with 3 bonfires on the day.

Jan 28. Great Tey. Continued heavy clearance at sunken lane. 2 bonfires.

Feb 3. Cold Norton. Continued general cutback at old railway Small bonfire.

Feb 10. Cold Norton. Replaced bridge and hand rail. Cleared footpath through wood.

Adjusted 2 gates. Cleared rotten tree from bridleway and opened up totally blocked footpath onto golf course.

Feb 17. Debden Green. Replaced 1 bridge. Installed 1 and re-instated 2 way markers. Cleared another long footpath.

Mar 10. Bartholomew Green. Cleared several large fallen trees and field edge.

Mar 17. Dengie. Replaced rotten bridge with 5m slatted bridge. Looked at another bridleway

for clearance later.

Stan acknowledged the scope of work done by the P3 volunteers which he knew was much appreciated by footpath users in the areas where work was done.

Ranger's report.

Thanks were given to all the FW volunteers from Tom and Country Parks for the valuable work which they continued to do.

Although no Rangers would be available over the Easter school holidays, Tom mentioned several work areas for the forward programme. These included footpath clearance westward towards Takeley station, the section beyond Crumps Farm which would involve replacing rails and building steps and light clearance at White Colne along the Colne Valley Railway trail.

Tom said that he was sorry about the reduced Ranger input over the winter with no chipper or felling work having taken place. He hoped that matters would improve next year.

Tom said that he had chipper certificates for Alan and Bob.

Clare Bunn, senior Ranger will go on maternity leave in June/July. Tom had no knowledge of temporary cover being provided in her absence.

He was shortly due to show his manager, Jennie Duffy, the Flitch Way and agreed that it would be good for her to come out on a work party to meet the volunteers.

Tom confirmed that it would be in order for volunteers to do willow weaving at Great Notley on Thursday 24th.

Sandra said that the recently formed volunteer group at Dunmow had asked whether they could do some clearance at Langleys. Tom felt that the area he thought they were referring to would require surveying first, likely to be scheduled for the coming winter.

Sandra also referred to the footpath at Flitch Green suggested as an alternative to having to pass the travellers' site and where a kissing gate had been installed which was preventing cyclists or pushchair users from getting through. Tom said that nobody was claiming responsibility for putting it there and its source was a mystery. Enquiries as to ownership and where it had come from were continuing.

Continuing with the Felsted/Flitch Green area, Sandra said that Andrew Adair and William Chastell were in discussion regarding the possibility of having the bridge at Flitch Green replaced. It had been removed many years ago to accommodate lorries delivering to the sugar beet factory at Felsted. Although a lot of work would be needed to determine the route of the path to be followed on the station side of the road if the bridge was to be rebuilt, it would help solve the problem of the very steep path leading off the FW which led directly onto the very busy road at the bottom of the slope.

Tom felt the possibility of the bridge being re-built to be remote. He added that Sustrans had made a proposal to do so about 10 years earlier, at which time they had a bridge ready to install but that had obviously never happened.

Railway carriage.

Stan gave thanks to Pam for maintaining the volunteer rota and to the volunteers themselves for spending time in the carriage to greet visitors. Brian and Roy also deserved thanks for looking after the model railway each Wednesday and solving any problems as they arose. Stan said that he had asked Brian and Roy to let him know if there were any

items they needed for the model.

As discussed at the previous meeting, the new heaters weren't perfect but provided sufficient background heat to protect the items on display. On colder days, the fan heater was being used by volunteers if required to raise the temperature. The vents beneath the seats have been blocked off and the door moved from the centre of the carriage to the eastern end. Volunteers needed to close over the internal doors at either end of the carriage when it was open to visitors. It was agreed that matters would improve anyway with the change of season.

Margaret advised that donations made by visitors to the carriage were sufficient to cover heating and insurance costs.

Stan said that some work needed to be done on the carriage in the near future. In particular, although it remained weatherproof, the roof needed scraping and re-painting and the bodywork needed examining for any areas of corrosion. Andy Horder had agreed to do any work needed on the bodywork and some volunteers had put their names forward to work on the roof. For the roof work, scaffolding towers will be hired to allow safe access. It was proposed to do the work in the week following the schools' Easter holidays and Wendy will e-mail volunteers accordingly.

New website.

Sandra explained the difficulties in getting information on the original Friends website in order to set up the new one. That has been achieved and, although not yet available for general access, she gave a demonstration of the many new features available on the new website. Work continued on transferring information and all agreed the new website to be brilliant. Thanks were given to Sandra for all the work she continued to do in order to make the website accessible, informative and enjoyable. It transpired that other than an initial cost for setting up the old website, no other expenses had been incurred since that had happened. That will change with the new website which will incur a registration charge and a monthly charge in the region of £5-£6. Sandra asked for any photographs of the FW in spring and summer to be sent to her for inclusion.

Annual General Meeting.

Date confirmed as Friday 13th May at the Discovery Centre. The speaker will be Carol Jolly of Essex Tourism. With regard to the availability of crockery for teas etc, Wendy will speak to the people taking over the café at the Discovery Centre. Volunteers will provide cakes etc as usual.

Letters going out to members will ask for nominations to the committee but all current members confirmed their willingness to serve another year. Sandra has agreed to join the committee and will take over part of Wendy's current role as secretary. Alan will take over as Chairman and Stan will be vice chairman.

Any Other Business.

Wendy gave Tom details of the survey she and John had made of the Langford Halt site showing potential areas of the pathway requiring remedial work, together with suggestions for benches and other work.

Wendy also advised of an e-mail from the leader of Dunmow Beavers who had held one of their meetings in the carriage. Some of the Beavers had subsequently undertaken a

sponsored bike ride on the FW and had raised £147 towards Friends funds. Contact had also been made by BDVSA asking whether anything was available for approximately 20 volunteers to get involved with at the end of May. A litter pick along the track was felt to be appropriate.

Margaret has booked the boat trip from Paper Mill Lock for Thursday 14th July. 31 people have so far booked against a maximum number of 40. A provisional booking to visit Ingatestone Hall on 7th September has also been made.

Val suggested a couple of flower surveys be made at Langford Halt as the information gained could be used on the interpretation panel planned for the site.

There being nothing further to discuss, Stan thanked everyone for attending and Bob and Sue for their hospitality and closed the meeting at 9.10pm