

FRIENDS OF PUTNOE WOOD and MOWSBURY HILLFORT

Minutes of the General Meeting held on 24 May 2022 via Zoom.

Members present: Lynn Caudrey, Martin Fannon, Sue Fannon, Anne Lilliman, Mick Lilliman, Dave Parratt, Diana Readhead, Peter Stathers, John Wallace, Marion Wallace, Chris Wedge, Helen Wilkie, John Wilkie, Allison Wilkins, Andy Wilkins.

- 1 **Apologies for absence** were received from Jon Bishop and Fiona Bucknall
- 2 **Minutes of last meeting held on Tuesday 22 March 2022.** The minutes were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.
- 3 **Update from Country Park Guardian.**
Helen read a written report from Jon as follows.

'Both sites are looking fantastic this spring. The woodland flowers in Putnoe were stunning this year, starting with the snow drops then through to the bluebells etc in the coppice plots. The early purple orchids were back again in the glade and further afield in the wood.

The Hillfort is also in good order, we had the site visit from Tim Hopwell at Natural England and he was suitably impressed with the hillside meadow and how it is developing as a wildflower meadow. The extended CWS survey is underway by Lizzy Dobbie at the Wildlife Trust. Once the final written report is complete this will be submitted to CWS panel for consideration. I suspect the whole area managed by the group will become a CWS site.

During the meeting we were joined by Slawek Utrata from Historic England, again he was suitably impressed by the site. There are some decisions to be made about ongoing stewardship plans, I suspect the decision will be to continue with the current regime. There was talk again of desilting the ponds, but I suspect the work required to make this happen will, in the long run be detrimental to the site, and not be economically feasible.

Keep up the good work everyone. Without all your continued efforts both sites would be much worse off than they are.'

- 4 **Future Tasks and Events**
John Wallace reported. Work on both sites will be restricted in order to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

4.1 Mowsbury Hillfort. Future tasks include: cutting back vegetation from the southern boundary path to provide a minimum one-meter width; continue butterfly survey; continue collection of golf balls; inspection of old neglected orchard to assess work required in the future; prune stone fruit trees in orchard in June/July, if required.

4.2 Putnoe Wood. Future tasks include: pulling small balsam; cut back impinging vegetation along paths; clean information boards.

5 Financial Matters

Peter reported.

Financial Report as at 16 May 2022

Category	Brought Forward £	Current Balances £
Money held in bank	257.86	257.86
Petty cash	0.00	0.00
Total	257.86	257.86

Transactions since last report:

No activity recorded

Income:

Total Income £0.00

Outgoings:

Total outgoings: £0.00

Month Net change £0.00

Comments:

Problems with transfer of account management transfer from John Wilkie to Peter continue, and therefore, to date, Peter had not been able to access the account to get an up-to-date status. Documentation had finally been received to apply for on-line banking.

5.1 Defibrillators. Marion reported on the need to renew the time-expired batteries in the defibrillators the Friends had contributed to in Bedford and Mowsbury Parks in 2016. The chest pads had a shorter life and these needed replacing too. A contact at Bedford Borough Council had recommended Janet Dickinson as a suitable person to deal with the fund raising for the batteries and pads. Marion has met Janet and she agreed to organise the fund raising and take on the care and regular checks of both defibrillators. Janet has set up a 'Just Giving' fund raising for the replacement batteries and chest pads. Another related change is the Ambulance Service has now taken over registration of the large number of defibrillators installed throughout the country.

Peter raised the question of how the Friends can maintain an income in order to finance future donations or agreed expenditure.

ACTION: Helen to include future funding on agenda for next meeting.

6 Reports from members –

6.1 Report on meeting of 9 May with Natural England, Historic England and the Borough Council regarding the Higher-Level Stewardship agreement for the Hillfort -- Dave. A copy of Dave's report on this meeting, sent to Friends on 10 May 2022, is Appended to these minutes. Regarding the Higher-Level Stewardship agreement (HLS) which ends next year, and the replacement scheme, Dave was of the opinion that rolling

forward the existing Agreement was the easiest option to pursue and likely to be the Council's preferred option, but no decision had been made to date. John Wallace commented that the original HLS Proposal to deepen ponds 3 and 4 after hydrological and archaeological survey work, would be likely to present a major operational problem, and a limited investigation to look at the underlying archaeology may be a more realistic option.

6.2 Planned visit to hillfort by Ravensden Primary School – Marion and Helen. –

Marion reported that a meeting with the Deputy Headteacher of Brickhill Primary had, to date, not resulted in any follow-up by the school. However, she and Helen had visited Ravensden Primary on 10 May and met with the Head of History and Deputy Headteacher who were keen to arrange a visit to the hillfort as part of their local history and natural history work with year 3/4 pupils. This had led to a site visit planned for 30 May which Helen will lead. The school extended an invitation to the Friends to attend their village Centenary Celebrations on 7 July when work by the year 3/4 pupils following their visit to the Hillfort will be displayed.

7 Any Other Business

7.1 Friends WhatsApp Group. Andy reported that he had started to set up a Friends WhatsApp Group (PWHFriends) which would have the benefit of being a means of sharing information via a secure platform.

7.2 Website Images. Andy reported that the Image Site will be closed down by the current provider with effect from August. He is exploring alternative means of storing and displaying images. All alternatives are payment sites averaging £9 to £10 per month.

7.3 Green Flag Judging. Chris reported that the judges were due to visit the Hillfort on 25 May. She thanked Anne and Mick for carrying out a litter pick the day before the judges visit.

8 Date of next General Meeting

Tuesday 19 July at 7.00pm by Zoom.

APPENDIX 1

Report by Dave Parratt on a Meeting held on 9 May 2022 at Mowsbury Hillfort with Tim Hopwell (Natural England), Slawek Utrata (Historic England), Geoff Saunders, James Lynch, Jon Bishop and John Wallace. Report emailed to Friends on 10 May 2022.

The purpose of the meeting was primarily to discuss the Higher-Level Stewardship agreement (HLS), which ends next year, and the replacement scheme. This will help to guide the updating of the Hillfort Vision.

We were able, however, to also receive feedback on the current site condition; and to discuss the potential repair of footways; the badger activity; flying golf balls and the potential for further archaeological investigation of the site.

On the HLS, the Council will have several options (Tim Hopwell will outline these in more detail to James Lynch). Essentially, extend for a year, roll forward the existing scheme for 5 years (with or without amendment) or apply for funding under the new land management scheme. The easiest option is to roll forward the existing scheme - but this has very little money attached to it. Amending it or seeking a new funding agreement will require a great deal of paperwork (with no guarantee of success).

Tim, Slawek and Geoff were very complimentary about the general condition of and our stewardship of the site.

From an archaeological perspective, Slawek and Geoff welcomed the removal of dead hedging and opening up of views across the island. The opening up of a view from the raised walkway outwards towards Cardington would aid the interpretation of the site. Further clearance of scrub from this part of the rampart would also aid interpretation. Leaning or dead trees which pose a risk to the moats/island should ideally be removed or reduced. Jon indicated that the two sick pines would need to be surveyed for possible removal. James will ask Nicky Monsey, tree officer, to view both trees and quotes will be obtained for the agreed tree work, from two suitable contractors. This would be an autumn task.

From an ecological perspective, Tim advised the removal of scrub to open up areas around ponds 3 and 4 (once the bird nesting has ended). The clearance of fallen materials and cutting back of nettles from around the ponds was seen as good practice. Both aimed at increasing biodiversity. We discussed the original Stewardship Plan proposals for work on the ponds to deepen them (after hydrological and archaeological survey work). Funding for this work is not currently available. It would also be practically difficult to achieve with a high risk of damage to the site, both flora and fauna and the archaeology. So probably will not be pursued.

On badgers, Natural England would need to be consulted and licence obtained for any interventions. James mentioned that intervention at Foster Hill Cemetery due to grave damage, required digging of a new set and fencing. This was expensive and took a long time to achieve. James suggested that, as a first step, the Friends plot the location of the known sett plus current areas of badger activity and monitor future digging for a 12-month period. Jon suggested that, rather than filling in new holes, as they start we place a log over these and see if they are disturbed by badgers.

Slawek agreed that footways can be repaired where the holes pose a hazard, utilising chippings or soil from outside the scheduled area. Badger latrines can also be filled. This does not need specific HE approval as it is an H&S issue. Ash from the fire site would not be acceptable as a fill material.

On further archaeological investigation. We might be able to pursue some limited survey work on the ponds through discussion with James on the possibility of Council funding. A major dig would not find favour. Survey work utilising ground penetrating radar would require approval. But this is likely to be supported by HE if carried out by an appropriately qualified team. Also, community test pits on the meadow area would be possible, as not requiring HE approval.

On golf balls, James suggested we might consider holding the collected balls hostage, to encourage Fusion to take the issue seriously.

There was no easy answer to dealing with rabbit damage. Which is for the landowner to address.

A useful meeting that clarifies some issues. Any message from us for the social media will need to be carefully worded.

Dave