

Friends of Worts Meadow
Minutes of a Meeting
Monday 31 January 2011, 7.30, Landbeach Village Hall

1. Welcome, Introduction, Apologies & Agreeing Chair and Minute taker

Present:

Charlotte Lowry (CCC), Sandy Shattock (CCC), Ian Webb (Wildlife Trust – newt specialist);

Alan Wyatt, Neville Diver, Frances Dipper, Dannie Gambell, Ray Gambell, Melanie Hale, Robert Humphrey(RH), Robert Stripe(RS), Guy Warren, Graeme Bilton, Ann Bilton (Landbeach residents)

Apologies: John MacMillan (CCC), Claudia Downing, Anne Bulman, Steve Anderson

Robert Stripe agreed to chair the meeting and Melanie Hale agreed to take minutes.

Charlotte welcomed everyone and introduced Sandy Shattock.

2. News from the County Council re. cuts affecting the Friends group and Worts Meadow – Sandy Shattock, Head of Environment at the County Council

Sandy said that the service that she and Charlotte are in (“Environment Management and Climate Change Service”) is facing cuts from April 2011 and in April 2012 it is going completely.

This means we will be losing Charlotte in May 2011 and Phil Clarke the following year.

As far as Worts Meadow goes, the site will still be owned by CCC County Farms Estate and will be managed and tenant-farmed as before but we will be losing the liaison provided by Charlotte, however the Group will be able to liaise directly with County Farms Estate in future.

Sandy said the service has always had a very small budget and, being public sector, is unable to apply for grant funding.

However, we (Friends of Worts Meadow) will be able to apply for grant funding, as long as we organise ourselves as a constituted body.

3. Discussion re. 2

The Chairman thanked Charlotte for all her help and support over the last year and expressed regret at hearing the bad news.

Sandy asked how we would like to manage WM in future?

Ray commented that there are overlapping responsibilities on the site. We need to be clear who is responsible for what. For example, is County Farms responsible for bridges as well as hedges?

Frances said she would like to see a list stating “County Farms does *a,b,c...*” and “other things such as *l,m,n...* are the responsibility of the local Friends Group”.

CL commented that, under the Stewardship Scheme, County Farms Estate (CFE) is obliged to do certain things – hedge work, for example – but WM is a very small part of a big estate.

RS commented that we weren’t always happy with the hedge work in the past.

ND commented that he saw the farmer as being responsible for maintenance of hedges, ditches etc. and the Friends Group more like custodian.

GW (both dog-walker and naturalist) queried whether the cows would always have to be there? GW also asked if we wanted a bridge across the moat whether we could apply for a grant for that?

SS said that in future the Friends group would negotiate more for themselves, dealing directly with CFE. It is an example of Localism and part of CCC’s big push to get local people to make more decisions.

RG sees it as important to become a formal body of some kind with a constitution. Then ideally CFE would seek our approval when they plan to do things. As an LNR (Local Nature Reserve) we should also be in a good position to ask them to do things.

Charlotte reminded us that John MacMillan, CFE, has attended the previous meetings (today he is unwell) and is taking an ongoing interest.

Alan: When we decided to become an LNR the idea was that it opened doors to other sources of finance. Is that correct?

Sandy: Yes. The two big sources are the Lottery Fund for small programmes and a BBC scheme for small sites, also there are sources like the Landfill Tax Community Fund and the Aggregates Tax Community Fund.

Ian Webb commented that he was involved in other sites with CFE and that they do listen to local people. There are various LNR groups around the country.

Maybe it would be a good idea to link up so that everyone knows about grant possibilities.

RG: Can we clarify the current status re. becoming an LNR?

CL: It is ‘with Legal’ and should be officially designated as an LNR this/next week.

RS: We need a name as the main point of contact at CCC when Charlotte leaves.

CL: Probably Phil initially, then John MacMillan when Phil leaves.

SS proposes that they record a list of useful name and contacts for us and produce a handbook/cheat-sheets to ease the transition.

This met with approval.

How to actually run things?

FOWM will now need to be more formalised with at least a treasurer/secretary. It could be done through the Parish Council.

RS reminded the meeting that at the last meeting it had been decided not to have a formal constitution.

However, circumstances had changed.

FD asked if the Parish Council could discuss this at their next meeting? Yes, on the Agenda for Monday 7 February.

RG said it doesn't have to be complicated – just a chairman and secretary. The main thing is that there is a point of contact.

RG said he is prepared to volunteer as the point of contact.

It was asked whether we would need to take out insurance?

SS said yes, it would be necessary to take out insurance to cover the group's activities, it is relatively inexpensive, and possibly it could be done through the Parish Council if they are willing.

CFE would still be responsible for the things they are responsible for now.

Another cheat-sheet required.

RG asked Ian if he had insurance.

Ian said yes he is covered by the Wildlife Trust when out looking at newts with groups.

FD said an email list of people in the group would be very useful.

GW said not everyone had email so contact details should include phone and addresses.

Everyone present agreed they were happy for CL to pass on their contact details to Ray.

It is important that anyone without email is still kept informed e.g. delivery by hand.

There was a short break for refreshments and SS left the meeting.

Many thanks to Elaine Humphreys for the delicious cakes.

Additional point made from Phil Clark: He is able to provide the group some support, attend some meetings and is willing to help in any way he can and will enlist the help from Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) who provides support for voluntary groups.

4. Elm Tree Planting/launch of Friends of Worts Meadow/WM as an LNR

Charlotte gave some background to this....

The date is Saturday 26 February 2011, 2-4pm.

The aims are to:

- Launch the Friends Group
- Establish WM is now an LNR
- Plant elm trees
- have some kids' activities
- Sharon Hearle, Butterfly Conservation, to give a talk

(on the White Spotted Pinion Moth and Hairstreak Butterfly)

plus a tea in the VH (RH kindly volunteered some cakes)

CL to book Village Hall and arrange publicity.

Neville now has the 3 Elm trees (supplied by Butterfly Conservation) and Alan volunteered to provide transport from Neville's to the site.

Sharon is organising a contractor to come and cut out some ash trees in the SW corner of the site so that existing elm saplings get more light.

GW commented that these saplings are in fact suckers from an old tree that died of Dutch Elm disease. Are the new trees Dutch Elm resistant? Yes.

Ian said that there was some value in even the old saplings/suckers from old tree as they would encourage the hairstreak butterfly which lives on elm trees.

RS asked how big the elm trees will grow?

GW said 50-60' in 100 years time.

ND said we'll need a watering rota in the summer.

GW wondered about other locations for elm trees.

It was agreed that we would stick with the planned location for these 3 trees but that other trees could be planted at a later date.

GW would also like to see a flower meadow (cow free).

Extra Agenda Item: Ian Webb talking about Great Crested Newts

The UK and particularly Cambridgeshire is of global importance for Great Crested Newts and WM is a prime location.

Ian said he'd been coming to Landbeach since mid-1990s, first to the Spaldings Lane pond (now virtually dried out) and then to the Moat in Worts Meadow. He has been monitoring the newts every year from 2001 and says the best way to see them is at night March/April with a torch. He once counted 72 and regularly sees 50+, sometimes even in the process of laying their eggs on vegetation.

In order to preserve and encourage expansion of the population of newts at WM, two new ponds were dug and some ditched were cleared out. To continue this process (no newts found there yet) it will be necessary to introduce some suitable plants to the ponds and prevent the ponds being damaged by dogs. Newts migrate over an area of up to approx 1km and like ponds of about 50 square metres. They can survive a pond drying out for a year or two and live about 12 years.

Ian handed out an information leaflet to everyone.

Ian now plans a ***newt walk*** in the spring – the date for this was agreed as ***Wednesday 23 March 2011 at 7pm, meet in the Village Hall car park.***

6. Hedge Work

The Stewardship Scheme has some funds for hedge work – to be spent before the end of February.

The hedge behind the bus shelter towards Worts Farm is a mess and has been highlighted by the Parish Council as a priority. This was discussed at the site visit.

CL to liaise with CFE.

7. Access from SW corner onto Akeman street

Do we want to make an entrance there? Probably.

8. Notice Board/Sign

To discuss at next meeting

9. Additional Dog bins

Dog bins are emptied by the council(SCDC).

Would they empty one on the other side of WM? If not, maybe there could be a second bin near the second gate (up Cockfen Lane)?

10. Recording Wildlife

FD has asked Lynn Farrell if she would be prepared to do a plant survey.

Maybe we could set up a scheme for people to record any wildlife seen.

11. 2011 Meeting Dates

These were proposed as Mondays 11 April, 25 July, 17 October.

Meetings (room hire etc) to be funded by? Probably CL's group until 2012.

12. AOB

Work party leader course – Saturday 19 March 2011 in Isleham. Free of charge.

Ray requested that in future could someone from CCC could come to these meetings?

Ian Webb commented that he is very happy to continue to support the group.

Conclusion: the main issue arising from this meeting is the setting up of a proper constitution for the Friends of Worts Meadow. This should be a main agenda item at the next meeting. Ray has agreed to draft this.

The meeting closed at 9.45pm

MH, 2 Feb 2011