

Friends of Pelaw Wood Annual General Meeting

12:30pm, Sunday 7th January 2018
The Queen's Head, Sherburn Road.

Present: Jenny and Ian Zass-Ogilvie, Richard Lilly, Carole and Peter Lattin, Tony Ewin, Sarah Wheeler, Barrie Evans, Milja Spruit, Roger McAdam, David Crutcher.

Apologies: Mike Flood, Jenny Lee, Anne Quigley

Chairman's Welcome

Tony welcomed everyone and thanked them for their work in the woods and in honorary positions during the last year. He mentioned the impressive turnout for the New Year walk as a particularly good start to the year, and also that the success of the tree planting in the hockey field meant that some trees were now large enough to require management.

Bottle-mining update

Ian Zass-Ogilvie gave us an update on his progress with the bottle-mining problems. The background to this is that a soft drinks factory once stood on St Giles Close, and many glass bottles were dumped in the area. Some old glass bottles are collectible, so people dig into the banks near the Silverlink Bridge in search of them. This is dangerous, but also risks undermining the bank and some of the trees on it. We have informed the police, but they are unable to take action because the ownership of the land is unclear. Therefore Ian has been trying to find out who (if anyone) owns it. Local councillor, Richard Ormerod, obtained a small grant for us to cover the costs of the search fees required by the land registry. This is Ian's update:

IZO reported this was proceeding, enabled by a grant of £180 from DCC (via local councillor); which sum should be regarded as restricted funding within the FOPW accounts, since any unused balance is due to be paid back to the Council. On behalf of FOPW, detail has now been sought from the Land Registry of the following ownerships – Miller Homes, Durham County Council, Hild & Bede (DU) and both of St Giles Church Graveyards. The latter are not registered with Land Registry, due to ownership ante-dating mandatory registration. Durham Diocesan Office has provided access and copies of some title deeds, but no defined map of the Church's ownership has yet been found. This will require further research (on behalf of St Giles PCC) so as to identify the S and SE boundaries of the original graveyard, on ground sloping very steeply down to the beck. This intention was included as part of FOPW's bid for funding. So not only are we as yet without record of the precise boundaries of the Church's land, but it would appear likely that the parcel of land (steeply banked and subject to bottle-mining) between the Church and DCC land to NW side of the bridge abutment is both unregistered and unclaimed. If boundaries can be confirmed, our objective will be to encourage the

Council to adopt ownership of the said land by means of Statutory Declaration. This should facilitate both woodland management and exclusion of mining, which currently threatens stability of large trees and their potential to damage the DCC-owned bridge.

Secretary's Report

Sarah gave out copies of the report summarising the activities of the group during the year.

Treasurer's Report

Sarah presented Mike's report in his absence. There was some confusion over whether the Parish Paths Partnership grant had been received, so Sarah will look into this.

Members approved the purchase of some nails and wood, to be used for ongoing maintenance tasks, plus one new wheelbarrow and two new leaf rakes.

Election to Honorary Positions

All existing post holders were warmly thanked for their work and unanimously re-elected. It was agreed that David Crutcher's role description be altered to incorporate both the website and publicity.

Chairman - Tony Ewin

Treasurer - Mike Flood

Secretary - Sarah Wheater

Auditor - Richard Lilly

Publicity and Website Coordinator - David Crutcher

David asked that anyone with suggestions of how to attract more members let him know. The current channels we use for publicity are our website, Facebook, Twitter and the Durham Times. We also have some small business cards to give out to people we see in the wood.

Work Programme for 2017

Wide-ranging discussions were had about different parts of the wood. Milja expressed concerns about paths in the wood that are not official Rights of Way. This was discussed at length and it was agreed that some large pieces of wood could be moved up toward the sports field to create a block to hinder quad bikes etc without blocking access for pedestrians. The state of the beck (litter including large objects, plus possible sewage pollution) was discussed. It was agreed that approaching the council about the beck was the best initial step, because the job is large and may need machinery, and there were some concerns about safety of access. Sewage pollution needs to be reported immediately to the Environment Agency for investigation.

Summary of suggested work for 2018:

- Pieces of wood to be used as a barrier to quad bikes near Sports Field
- Contact Durham Bird Club to see how we might work together
- Make nest boxes for birds
- Ongoing path maintenance
- Himalayan Balsam Pulling. It was agreed that we would make this the focus of our June work session. Those present felt that last year's extra sessions organised by Jenny and Anne were very worthwhile, therefore if Jenny or Anne (or anyone else) would be happy to organise some this year that would be very welcome.
- Host a moth evening
- Host a bat walk
- Host a botany/fungi walk
- Organise a mammal survey
- Contact Durham Wildlife Trust to see if we could work together
- Litter picking and removal of fly tipping where possible
- Lead a New Year Walk

Any other business

Carole asked whether Pelaw Wood falls within a civil parish, or will do when the new Durham parish is created. Nobody was able to answer this question - Sarah to check.

ACTIONS

Sarah to investigate whether the PPP grant was received from DCC, as the accounts indicate that it was not. Once this is established we will re-issue the accounts.

Tony to purchase a new wheelbarrow for the group

Roger to purchase two leaf rakes for the group

Barry to donate one metal leaf rake to the group

Everyone to let David Crutcher know of any publicity suggestions they have

Sarah to check whether Pelaw Wood does/will fall within a civil Parish.

Barry to see if it is possible to get his small tractor into the hockey field in dry weather

Richard to lead on the task of moving large pieces of wood up to reduce quad bike access, possibly at the February work session

Milja to contact Durham Bird Group

Tony to contact Dave Wainwright re a moth evening

Sarah to contact the bat group about another bat walk (possibly late summer)

Anne and Jenny (if they are happy to do so) to organise some evening balsam pulling sessions

Sarah to ask a friend if she would lead a botany walk in the wood

Sarah to arrange collection of the large items of rubbish on St Giles Close by the council

Sarah to contact the university to ask if they would like to do a mammal survey in the wood

Richard to approach Durham Wildlife Trust to see if they would be able to offer us any advice/support in managing the wood

Sarah to contact the council about cleaning up the large quantities of fly-tipped rubbish in the beck

Everyone to report any sewage (or other) pollution they witness to the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60. Time, date, location, nature of the pollution and photographs are all helpful.