

**NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE FRIENDS OF HADDON WOOD
AT THE MANOR HOUSE INN, DITCHEAT, ON 1 MAY 2013**

Present:

Jon Burgess (Woodland Trust)
Jo Curtis
Mark Curtis
Charles Evans
Fiona de Fonblanque
Tony Hall
Hilary Harrison
Rose Hubbard
Nell Hunter
Michael Leach
Daphne Osmond
Terry Osmond
Gert Schley
John Severne
David Shepperd
Linda Stalley
Nick Truman
Stephen Wessel

Hilary was asked to take the Chair and accepted. Tony wrote the notes. Hilary gave apologies from Gill and Alf Burrell, Lydie Gardner and Tony Worner for their absence.

Before starting the meeting proper Jon gave a quick rundown of the current position with fundraising. The target was £20,000 and we were already half way there. He said donation envelopes had been mailed to all Woodland Trust (WT) members in Somerset, but several people related instances where members hadn't received one. Jon undertook to investigate. Hilary asked what would happen if we received more than the target. Jon said, in that case, he would discuss the situation with donors.

Do we need a committee?

Hilary introduced this item saying there had been some discussion between a few members and there was some uncertainty about what kind of relationship the WT wanted. Jon explained that he was looking for community engagement. It could be done on an ad hoc basis but this would involve too much individual communication from Jon. A local group to represent the community would make communication much easier. Also, a formal group with a constitution would be a much more powerful voice with the WT, and insurance companies, for instance, would require it before issuing insurance cover for activities.

Stephen wanted to know whether there was any precedent for a committee and asked Jon for a specific example. Jon gave the Beacon Hill Wood group who organised many activities such as archaeological outings, horse riding, forest schools, etc., but there were various others providing different models for different purposes. Hilary added that she had spoken to Ian Hounsell, the chairman of Duncliffe Wood Committee, who said it was very difficult to maintain support without a formal group.

Jo wanted to know whether the current 'Friends' group would be maintained, and it was agreed that it should be and would be consulted and take part in wider decisions.

Stephen said it was vitally important to appoint a treasurer and Hilary confirmed the local council would require a bank account in the event of any grant applications. Hilary asked for a show of hands on whether or not a committee should be formed, and the result was 17 for and 1 against. She then asked for volunteers. Rose, Nell, Hilary, Nick, Gert, Jo and Mark raised their hands. Hilary was elected chairman, Nell secretary, and Jo treasurer. Rose, Mark, Nick and Gert were unopposed as members. All votes were unanimous with the exception of treasurer where there was one abstention. It was agreed that the committee would decide the constitution at their first meeting.

Prioritising work to be done

Jon recommended to the group the draft Haddon Wood Management Plan which he had copied to everyone. The plan hinged on three key aspects, namely: new natural woodland, informal public access, and the archaeological feature (two strips of ridge and furrow). Eventually the Plan will be published on the WT website, but at the moment it was a fluid document. He gave a very brief rundown of the Plan and said he would like to finalise it, in particular work for the period 2013 to 2018. The group was asked to send him any comments by 31 May, and Jon has put up notices at Haddon Wood inviting public comments.

Ongoing maintenance of orchard, wildflower meadow, etc.

There weren't enough funds yet for the orchard or the wildflower meadow and, in any event, it was too late this year to plant the orchard. The meadow was likely to be expensive and Jon might commission a report from experts on which seeds to buy and where to plant them. Gert confirmed that they need poor soil, and Michael said he had a brother who was a botanist and offered to approach him for advice. Jon gratefully accepted.

If and when these two features come into existence they will require maintenance, and Jon said that the more work the community can do the further the money will go. Community involvement was crucial,

particularly for the meadow which, if ignored, would be replanted with trees. Lots of local volunteers would be needed, for example on pruning, although it was noted that scything the meadow would take special skills. One advantage of scything was that the work was very therapeutic.

There was a general discussion about other potential activities such as coppicing. On this issue Jon said it was for the group to decide and organise, otherwise it will remain an unworked woodland. Similarly, any use of wood for fuel would need to be managed by the group. The trust was asked what their attitude was to declining wood crafts, such as charcoal burning. Jon said these were not directly supported by the WT but they would be happy to allow them if the activities didn't interfere with WT work.

The pond will be in the furthest field which will be planted by 15 December. Hilary said that a local resident had pointed out that there used to be a natural pond there but the field was drained. The drainage will be removed. The WT will remove the barbed wire in hedgerows, and Mark volunteered to remove the old iron field gate in the hedgerow between fields 2 and 3.

Potential for leasing woodland

It was agreed that it was much too early to consider this yet and that it was really a long term issue for, perhaps, 5-10 years hence. Charles suggested that we wait a few years in any event to see to what extent interest is maintained. Nevertheless, the WT wanted this to be a sustainable site and it would remain an option for the future. He also confirmed that the Management Plan would not be applicable to any leased land. Hilary confirmed that this had been put on the agenda because some members saw this as a potential way to safeguard the wood in the future.

Tribute to Mary Schley

The group was asked what form this tribute should take and Gert said he had discussed it with his sons. They would like a bench with a plaque. Also, perhaps a donation of ½ or ¼ acre of woodland. Jon will research the cost of a bench and the woodland and let Gert know. Gert will inform the committee. It was suggested that a tribute should also be made to Anne Haddon who donated the land. However, it was felt that as she preferred to have no publicity this might not meet with her approval. It was acknowledged that she was interested in everything concerning the wood and it was agreed that she would be kept fully informed.

Any other business

Jon asked the group to think about registering as official volunteers with the WT. The advantage is that registered volunteers get regular information about and invitations to activities and events and are able to claim expenses for things like gloves.

A potential issue was dog fouling of footpaths and Jon asked whether the group thought poo bins should be provided. There was general agreement that this was a bad idea: local councils won't empty them, and it was felt that they just exacerbate the problem. It was more practical for, and easier to encourage, dog owners who had no poo bag to flick the mess off the path with a stick. Also, it was suggested that anyone walking there should pick up any litter they find and take it home for disposal. WT will pin a polite notice on gates asking for this. In a similar vein The WT have printed a poster, a copy of which Jon produced, asking people not to park in front of the access gate by the tin tabernacle.

Jon said the WT wanted to install a kissing gate beside the main gate at the Alhampton entrance next to the tin tabernacle but they had discovered what looked like an old stone wall which was in the way. He asked whether anyone knew of the wall's provenance, i.e. whether it was of any archaeological interest. General opinion was that it had none and was now, in any case, just a pile of rubble. One local senior citizen who had lived in the village most of his life had been asked and said that in his childhood its only purpose was to support a stone style. Nevertheless, Jon decided to apply for planning permission before attempting to remove it so that the WT would be covered. Also, following an incident where travellers had parked in the Jacob's Lane car park and in front of the No Through Road (NTR) gate, he said that all gates had now been padlocked and the one in NTR is also chained. It was agreed that Rose would be a key holder for the NTR gate.

Jon gave an update on trees planted this spring. 80% have so far budded but he was nervous about the larger oaks. He didn't think some would make it, but if they didn't they would be replaced. The grass around the trees would be sprayed with Round-up in the next week or two to help them establish. Cattle grazing would also start very soon in the far field.

Jon said that each wood had its own micro site on the trust's main website which can be used for comments, photographs, etc. He encouraged the group to make use of it, for instance by publicising any events they organise.

It was decided that future 'Friends' meetings will be arranged as and when required.

ACTION POINTS

Do we need a committee?

The Haddon Wood committee to arrange a meeting as soon as practicable to decide on their constitution and future action

Prioritising work to be done

Friends members to send any comments they might have about the proposed Management Plan to Jon by 31 May

Ongoing maintenance

Michael to approach his brother (a botanist) to ask for his advice on the wildflower meadow and to arrange with Jon

The WT to remove barbed wire from hedgerows

Mark to remove the old metal gate between fields 2 and 3

Tribute to Mary Schley

Jon will research the cost of a bench and a ½ or ¼ acre of woodland and notify Gert

Gert will inform the Haddon Wood committee

Any other business

The WT to pin notices at access points to the wood requesting people to pick up any litter they see and take it home for disposal

Jon to apply for planning permission to install a kissing gate at the No Through Road (NTR) entrance

Rose to collect a key for the padlock to the NTR gate