

MINUTES of the Nineteenth Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Hagg Wood held at the Reading Room, Dunnington, on Wednesday 24th May 2017.

PRESENT Maria Gill from St Nick's, speaker, David Mayston, Chairman, Alan Worsley, Treasurer, Linda Maggs, Secretary, Tony & Elaine Hudson, Olwyn Fonseca, John Eastwood, Brian Poulter, Wendy Worsley, Linda Sturgeon, Sandra Laws, Tony & Diane Conway, Helen McPherson, Nigel Emery, Pauline Poulter, Margy Vernon, Jane Granville, Pat & George Staniland, Rowena Bedlington and Tony Marsh .

APOLOGIES from Michael & Diana Dunn, Michael & Janet Clarke, Wendy & Peter Crosby, Peter Dean, Mr & Mrs East, John Maggs, Margaret Eastwood, Jennie Stopford, Ian & Lita Black, Neil Sturgeon, Liz Turnbull and John Vernon.

MINUTES The minutes of the eighteenth AGM, 25th May 2016, were accepted as a true record.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

David gave everyone a warm welcome, especially our speaker, Maria Gill, the volunteer coordinator at St Nick's, who had stepped in to replace Jonathon Dent, who was busy working on new projects.

The FHW had enjoyed a productive and active year, celebrating our 20th anniversary in the beautiful surroundings of the wood, with the Community Choir and Woodsmoke providing entertainment, joined by 2 former MP's, Frank Dobson and John Grogan, who had both been instrumental in helping FHW in achieving its aims of becoming a Community Woodland. In the autumn we had an interesting lecture on 'Alien Species' by Mike Sutton-Croft and in January we had enjoyed our traditional New Year Lunch at the Sports Club. Earlier this year we had adopted an international perspective with Guy Mandziuk's lecture on 'Volunteering after Disasters', and Terry Weston's talk on Namibia, on behalf of the DCG. In April we had enjoyed an excursion to Drax Power Station, firstly with a guided tour around their nature reserve, the Skylark Centre, followed by a very informative tour inside the power station.

The Working Parties had been well-attended with brambles taken out of the Bluebell Area and rhododendrons removed from the area south of the Stone Road. The magnificent carpet of bluebells, and wood anemones continued to expand and the Little Vikings, reported that they were stunning.

Some members had taken additional training on Strimmer Courses and the TCV had been commissioned to undertake 4 days intensive work. This was made possible by the generous bequest of founder member, Barbara Pyrah. Attractive glades had been created on the advice of ecological expert, Martin Hammond, Andrew Cutts of Urban Buzz and Dr Rachel Pateman, of Butterfily Conservation. Pollinator species of flowers and shrubs such as crab apple, guelder rose, and alder buckthorn had been planted in the glades which would attract butterflies and other invertebrates. Another notice-board to highlight the natural flora and fauna was to be placed at the end of the Stone Road.

Due to the boggy state of many of the rides, the FC had raised the centre level of some of the paths, to allow them to drain more quickly; the process created scrapes, which would be excellent for pond-life. The FC had started on Crater Way and hoped to complete the work in the summer months, if their limited budget permitted. The FC had also prepared the ground for the installation of Ron Bielby's new seat, donated by Mrs Pam Frankland. The original seat had been vandalised. The new seat would be placed in a more exposed area, at the end of the Stone Road, in full view of passers-by.

Ron, helped by Linda and other FHW members, had assisted Barry Wright in undertaking a hedgerow survey of the whole parish of Dunnington. Barry had now been awarded his PhD. His summarised report, with a full copy of his work provided on a DVD on the inside cover, had been produced and was available in the Library. Copies of the report 'Historic Hedgerow Heritage of Dunnington' were available to interested members, a small donation to FHW funds would be appreciated.

David said that the achievements of the group would not be possible without the hard work of the members and he thanked them for their support. He gave special thanks to Olwyn, a founder member, who had decided to step down from the Committee after 20 years. She had made a very valuable contribution to the group and would be much missed.

Linda thanked David for his continued dedication as Chairman and the audience clapped in appreciation of David's efforts.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Alan presented the FHW Accounts and said they were in a very healthy position with money in the bank, thanks to Barbara's generous bequest. Money had also been received from the Vale of York Environmental Group which had folded; they had left their residual funds to the FHW. Barbara's bequest meant that the group will have an increasing capacity to carry out projects, managing the wood for wildlife. It was satisfying to commission the TCV, although the organisation cost a significant amount of money; we still hoped to see a good number of volunteers at the work parties. It will be very rewarding to see the biodiversity flourish and we now have the funds to plan ahead.

ELECTION OF THE COMMITTEE

Members nominated for election: Alan Briers, Michael Dunn, John Eastwood, Tony & Elaine Hudson, Linda Maggs, David Mayston, Brian Poulter and Alan Worsley. They were duly elected. One place remained on the committee and members were asked to consider whether they would like to join.

ELECTION OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Dr David Worsley had agreed to continue to act as the independent examiner and he was thanked.

MARIA GILL, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR OF ST NICHOLAS FIELDS NATURE RESERVE

Maria said that the vision of St Nick's is for 'York to be a City where people value wildlife, the environment and each other equally, to sustain a rich and healthy life for all'. The Reserve had a rich history from 'Meadows and Monks to Bricks and now a Reserve'. It used to be the site of a hospital caring for lepers in the twelfth century, part of St Nicholas Church which was destroyed in the Civil War in 1644 and never rebuilt. After becoming a brickworks (note the beautiful doorway of St Margaret's, now the EMC) it later became a scrapyards for bricks and stones. In the 1950s it was full of pits filled with rubbish but in the early 1970s the waste site closed down and it became colonised by wildlife. The Council reviewed it for building purposes but local people campaigned for a community space and in the early 1990s a Green Space agreement was drawn up. The land was capped with clay. Initially the area looked very bleak but it has since developed and in 2004 it was recognised as a Local Nature Reserve. It is now a jewel in the heart of York and has held a National Community Green Flag Award since 2010. It was a pioneer of community buildings with a sustainable design, with sedum roofs, compost toilets, solar panels and wind turbines. Some items have not lived up to expectations, for instance they needed to work on the wind turbines, but it was a great experimental project. A low carbon-emission recycling business for 2500 households and businesses in the city centre, using electric vehicles and trikes to keep the scheme as green as possible, provided an income for the Centre.

St Nick's organised as many events as possible, such as bat walks, ceilidhs, apple-bobbing, enacting Macbeth, with the aim of connecting with people, raising awareness, and to spread knowledge about the environment. A few years ago the Centre did a lot of environmental education but cuts in school budgets had made it difficult. It was hoped to resume this work as soon as money allowed.

Another aspiration was to become a Heritage Skill Base; it would like to offer training in scything, hedge-laying, stone-walling and other important heritage skills that would allow wildlife to prosper.

Eco-Therapy was a new venture, aimed at providing an opportunity for mental well-being for people with mental health issues. It was a brilliant scheme, getting people involved in gardens/allotments and helping them to connect with nature. It was at present being evaluated to get 'continuation funding'.

Last year 270 volunteers contributed over 8000 hours of labour. The Centre which possesses wetlands, grassland, meadowland and scrubland, was a hub for the local community and was a haven for wildlife.

A new initiative 'Grassland Management Project', funded by Heritage Lottery Funding, was to be launched on 16th June, with the intention of managing local green corridors, providing help and support to local community groups and to provide scythe training for groups across Yorkshire, stressing the importance of wildlife habitats.

'York Urban Becks' was another important project with 3 aims: to help reduce the risk of flooding, to improve the wildlife value of attached green spaces, and to enhance wildlife corridors. Tang Hall Beck, Osbaldwick Beck and Heworth Holme all provided homes for water voles, who were making a comeback after being decimated by American minks. 1700 plants had been planted along the becks and 2 comprehensive surveys were being undertaken by St Nick's and Derwenthorpe Wildwatch.

David thanked Maria for her inspiring talk and thanked members for attending.