**Annual Report for Friends of Bradgers Hill**

**Overview**

After our initial “Wildlife Weekend” in summer 2015, we decided to establish a group that met on a regular basis. Our inaugural year of activity has been very successful as we have maintained a regular cycle of well-attended meetings and sustained a core membership of individuals who have shown themselves to be more-than-willing to take responsibility. People have been quick to offer their expertise and follow their interests and as such we have had regular litter picks, a season-long butterfly survey, an extensive website and valuable work completed on maintaining access to the Hill. If we are to maintain this momentum, then we need to establish firm foundations in our infrastructure, ie. a bank account, a wider range of volunteers taking responsibility and a more co-ordinated approach to publicity. There is no shortage of creativity at the heart of our team, but developments with the Community Centre will draw away time and attention so it is important that we delegate key functions to a separate group of individuals. The Community Centre, however, does present great opportunities to re-establish some of the functions of the John Dony Centre through a revived sense of entrepreneurship and return to the estate’s core values.

**Membership**

We have a group of about a dozen individuals who take responsibilities within the Friends, with a valued number – of about ten – who attend our monthly meetings. On occasions that number can be swelled to twenty. We have discussed the concept of “membership” – more focused on the idea of affiliation than the generation of revenue. It is an issue that we can return to as we might well need new blood to increase the size of that inner-core of officers from ten to twenty.

**Activities**

Over the year we have:

* Paid for the rejuvenation of the allotment area through cutting and collection of flayed material
* Sustained a season-long butterfly survey
* Organised quarterly litter-picks
* Maintained a cycle of monthly meetings in which we have:
* Birds of Bradgers’ Hill
* Butterflies of Bedfordshire
* Bradgers’ Hill – Ancient Monument
* Mounted additional activities outside of the meeting cycle:
* A “Creatures of the Night” moth and bat evening
* Lunchtime walk to Lilley
* July astronomy evening
* Dawn chorus bird walk
* Summer orchid walk

**Finances**

It’s quite something to consider that we have carried out all of that activity with nothing in the bank account! in fact it is only recently that we have put in an application for an account. The good news is that we hope that we will soon receive funds that will set us up for the year in terms of administration and development in the field of conservation.

1. The Conservation Volunteers – we have been successful in applications to both of these ….

Start-up grants

These are for groups who have no money when they are first set up and are available to groups in their first year of existence. The grant will enable them to begin practical work and will cover administrative expenses, e.g. postage, publicity, hire of meeting rooms, telephone bills and/or the first year of The Conservation Volunteers Community Network Membership plus Insurance fees. The maximum grant will be £150.

Support grants

These are for groups who have no money for tools, equipment and training. Preference will be given to resources selected from The Conservation Volunteers sources. This grant is available to all groups, regardless of how long they have been constituted. (Groups within their first year can apply for both the start-up grant and the support grant). The maximum grant will be £350.

1. Your Say, Your Way LBC Grants

We were successful in our bid for funds in summer 2015 and have put in a bid once more for this autumn, when £1250 is on offer. Voting takes place on Saturday 1st October.

1. Interpretation Signage

We have been successful in obtaining £2,000 for two interpretative signs at the base of Bradgers’ Hill.

1. Ecological Garden – Community Centre

Sean from the Community Centre has put in a successful application to transform the Ecological Garden around the back of the building. The minimum we can receive is £8,000 and the maximum is £12,000 – voting in local Tescos begins later this month.

**Officers**

* Organiser – to convene meetings and co-ordinate committee activities – currently **Paul**
* Secretary – to carry out administrative tasks that sustain activities of the Friends – **Abi**
* Treasurer – to maintain accounts, banking arrangements and membership details - **VACANT**
* Fundraising Officer – to seek opportunities for funding, prepare bids and evaluation returns - **VACANT**
* Survey Officer – to organise volunteers for surveys, collate data and liaise with relevant outside bodies - **David**
* Access Officer – to begin the task of mapping the major and minor routes on the Hill; organising volunteers to keep these in good repair and seek opportunities to improve signposting - **James**
* Education Officer – to liaise with local nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools and the Sixth Form College with view to the provision of educational activities - **VACANT**
* Liaison Officer – establishing and maintaining relationships with Luton and county-wide groups with similar aims - **VACANT**
* Events Officers (meetings) and (walks) – to organise and publicise speakers for monthly meetings and the quarterly walk programme - **Charulata**
* Website Officer – to maintain and develop our online presence – website, Facebook and Twitter - **Scott**
* Environment Officer – to organise quarterly litter picks - **Margaret**

**Suggested Plans for the Year Ahead**

* In many respects we need to sustain the current strong features of the Group – an imaginative monthly programme of speakers (autumn / winter) with evening walks and activities (late spring / summer.)
* Some events can be repeated such as the Orchid Walk, Dawn Chorus and the Astronomy Evening
* These activities will be enhanced by funding from the above sources – for the first time. I would suggest that the Website officer post could be expanded to include responsibility for social media and publicity.
* I would suggest that the butterfly survey should be sustained but adding another dimension along the same route – wild flowers perhaps?Similarly, we should maintain quarterly litter picks.
* However, we need to build capacity for simultaneous running of community centre and the Friends of Bradgers Hill group as there is some cross-over of personnel. This needs to be reflected in some amendments to the officer roles.
* Given that we have new equipment, there are opportunities for a local conservation programme to start in collaboration with Trevor’s existing groups.
* I suggest the interpretative signs need to be accompanied by improved waymarkers so we have a consistency between the existing leaflet, the signs and the markers.
* I suggest that we look at imaginative ways of enhancing Community Centre provision with strong ecological elements such as the Garden, information on the exterior, leaflets, work of The Friends – in the spirit of John Dony.