

**2017 Annual Report**

**Friends of Bradgers Hill (FoBH)**

**Version 3.0 Final**

1. **Overview**

Our second full year of activity has been very successful as we have maintained a regular cycle of monthly meetings and sustained ourcore membership of individuals who have again shown themselves to be more-than-willing to take responsibility. We have continued the core work built up including regular litter picks, the season-long butterfly survey, an extensive website and valuable work completed on maintaining access to and rebuilding steps on the Hill. We have also cemented the foundations in our infrastructure, i.e. a bank account,successful funding bids, an agreed Constitution, nominated officer roles taking responsibility, and a programme of wide ranging events.

1. **Officers and Membership**

We have 10 individuals who took on Officer responsibilities and who regularly attend meetings. When we have guest speakers at Meetings the number of attendees can be up to 25.

In April 2017 we launched the concept of “membership” – offering two types of membership – “basic friend” and “full friend”. The difference between the two levels of membership is set out in Annex A. As of October 2017 we have 11 “full friends” (being confirmed with Finance Officer).To date we have only advertised membership on our website, it has not been “pushed” extensively and all bar one of our “full friends” are our Officers. We have also struggled to attract regular“new blood” to meetings and this is an area to pick up on next year.

1. **Activities**

Over the year we have undertaken the following:

* **Conservation and clearance work:**

Having joined The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) organisation earlier in 2016, the FoBH were able to access TCV’s start up (Chestnut) Fund. This enabled the group to acquire a varied set of hand tools (loppers, saws, spades, litter pickers etc.) so we could start conservation work on the hill.

Our first project in November 2016 was to cut back grass and scrub obscuring a number of sets of steps of the Public Right of Way (ROW) on the northern part of Bradgers Hill which is under private ownership. Inspection of the steps showed that on the middle set most of the wood was rotten therefore making them unsafe. In consultation with Trevor Tween (LBC) a new project was established to replace the steps referred to above and also build a new set of steps at the intersection of the ROW and the top nature trail. Permission was gained from the owners and also Heritage England because of the hill's status as a Scheduled Monument. Funds were made available from LBC Highways Department since they are responsible for the upkeep of structures on a listed Right of Way. A number of work parties with the assistance of TCV (Bedford) cut back either side of the ROW and installed the new steps during November 2016 through to April 2017. During that period, FOBH members also worked alongside the Wildlife Trust and TCV teams doing work on behalf of LBC on the southern portion of Bradgers Hill and also Stopsley Common.

In May 2017 in consultation with LBC the ROW on Bradgers Hill was resurveyed to see if further work to improve access and safety would be beneficial. A number of improvement areas were identified including the addition of steps on two of the existing flights and also the addition of a new flight of steps. These new steps are to be located on the rather steep slope below the new intersection steps installed in April 2017. A programme of work was agreed and the necessary consents and funding obtained. This project is currently underway, again with help of TCV and is due for completion by the end of September 2017.

Looking to the future, we have a proposal to clear back the bottom section of the nature trail on the northern portion of the hill. We have been successful in obtaining funding through the LBC Your Say, Your Way programme for this, so we are now preparing a work plan for the period October 2017 to March 2018 to restore access to this portion of the Nature Trail.

It also proposed to have additional / ad hoc work groups throughout the coming year to ensure accessibility of existing trails and tracks across the whole of Bradgers Hill. These are to be scheduled in the coming weeks.

* **Sustained a season-long butterfly survey** – the results will be presented at the AGM.
* **Organised quarterly litter-picks**- This year our 4 large litter picks were arranged for the Sunday mornings of :
* 20 November 2016 - this was cancelled due to a severe weather forecast of strong winds.
* 12 February, 12 March and 11 June 2017 – Where we collected many bags full of cans, plastic, paper etc.. The bags were collected by Luton Council from outside Bushmead Community Centre/Hub.

In between these dates additional small group litter picks took place to target specific issues. For example: the dangerous debris left by the rope swing, the discarded television pieces on Bradgers Hill Road, the large quantity of whole and broken glass bottles revealed after the Fire Brigade tackled the hillside fire. All the larger items we took ourselves to the Council Refuse Tip.

Over time it became apparent that Luton Council could not always supply the metal pickers on the dates required (due to other requests) so it was decided to purchase 5 identical pickers from The Helping Hand Company (Ledbury) Ltd.. These have been marked for the FoBH and they can be repaired if necessary.

It has been interesting meeting some new volunteers who have joined our litter picks. Also people stop to talk to us as we work and now several walkers carry a plastic bag and collect a few items to take home. Some people have reported problem areas and we have passed the information on to Luton Council. We do not deal with large scale fly tipping as the Council deals with that.

The Environmental Officer would like to thank everyone who has helped with the litter picks. With the kind support of the local shops and schools our advertising of the picks reaches many people. The area does seem tidier and by being visible in the community helps others to have the courage to tackle the issue of litter too.

* **Maintained a cycle of monthly meetings**, with a number of guest speakers, which covered the following:
* April - Esther Clark from the Wildlife Trust delivered a talk about the habitats and wildlife of the North Chilterns Chalk Living Landscape, including wildlife sites and nature reserves in and around Luton.  Well attended by local residents.
* May – Andy Grimsey delivered a talk on the birds in our area along with many reference books he recommended.  This is a popular talk, and the following Sunday Andy led a dawn chorus walk for us to see the various of habitats for different bird types, as well as listening to birdsong and to the way birds communicate. Both well attended.
* **Ran our third Wildlife Weekend in July 2017** over 3 days, which involved support from external organisations;
* Free of Charge (FOC) – Luton Astronomy Society setting up large telescopes for all to view distant planets and constellations.  Much interest subject to good weather;
* FOC - Bats society who led a very informative evening walk where the bats came out and performed on cue.  A donation was given using funds given from contributions made by the many attendees;
* Paid - Chris’s Animal Encounters came along with many reptiles for a hands on experience.  Very popular event, constant flow of residents and a great photo opportunity.
* FOC – Wildlife Trust (WT) provided materials for us to run a mini-beast session.  Suitable for younger folk, and could be held anytime of the year if we had our own props’.  The WT also had a drop in session on Bradgers Hill to show the sort of work they carry out.  The meeting location for the drop in sessions was a little vague possibly affecting interest.
* We also ran our own geo-caching treasure hunt which could also be repeated at any time of year at no cost.
* We have agreed to spread out events next summer, rather than concentrate them over a weekend, this will give flexibility to attend a number of events and reduce the risk of all events having to be abandoned due to poor weather.

1. **Finance**

The Financial Statement is included at Annex B, which shows a moderate, but healthy balance of £475.29 as of 31 August 2017.

We have been successful in applications to the following:

1. Your Say, Your Way LBC Grants

In Autumn 2016 we were successful in our bid for £1250. These funds were used for:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***First Invoice*** | ***Second Invoice*** |
| Training (First Aid + Kit) |  | £153.00 |
| Speakers | £50.00 | £110.00 |
| Meeting Room Hire |  | £190.00 |
| Website |  | £58.00 |
| Public Liability Insurance | £190.00 |  |
| Public & Education Resource | £368.00 | £114.00 |
| Total | **£626.00** | **£625.00** |

In Autumn 2017 we were again successful in our bid for £980. These funds will be used as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | ***Amount*** |
| Equipment | £200 |
| Resources/speaker support | £190 |
| Reopening of the nature trails and associated marketing | £550 |
| TCV Membership | £40 |
| Total | **£980** |

1. Interpretation Signage

In 2016 we were successful in obtaining £3,271.20from Luton Borough Council for two interpretative signs at the base of Bradgers’ Hill. Due to the Election Purdah period this work was put on hold but the signs have finally been delivered, we hoped to have these installed in September 2017 but this was not possible. A new date and funding for TCV to carry out the work is under consideration.

1. **2017 Officers**

* Organiser – to convene meetings and co-ordinate committee activities – currently **Dave Coupe & Charulata Patel**
* Secretary – to carry out administrative tasks that sustain activities of the Friends – **Abi Coupe**
* Treasurer – to maintain accounts, banking arrangements and membership details –**Alan Mason**
* Fundraising Officer – to seek opportunities for funding, prepare bids and evaluation returns –**Paul Hammond**
* Survey Officer – to organise volunteers for surveys, collate data and liaise with relevant outside bodies –**David Coupe**
* 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 Hetherington**
* 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 Patel**
* Website Officer – to maintain and develop our online presence – website, Facebook and Twitter –**Scott Mason**
* Environment Officer – to organise quarterly litter picks –**Margaret Hetherington**
* Conservation Officer **–** to assist with the organisation of maintenance opportunities and liaise with relevant bodies**– Alan Mason**

1. **Suggested Plans for the Year Ahead – To be discussed and agreed at AGM**

* To sustain the current strong features of the Group – an imaginative monthly programme of speakers with walks and activities
* Repeat successful events such as the Dawn Chorus Walk and the Astronomy Evening
* Maintain the interpretation sign boards with up to date information
* The butterfly survey and quarterly litter picks should also be sustained
* Carry out the programme of works covered under the Your Say Your Way funding - to clear back the bottom section of the nature trail on the northern portion of the hill.
* Consider imaginative ways of using the revamped Community Hubprovision to promote our work and build community links– in the spirit of John Dony
* Consider ideas to increase membership and regular attendees.

**Abigail Coupe**

Secretary

October 2017

**Annex A**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Friends of Bradgers Hill Membership Options** | | |
|  | **Basic Friend** | **Full Friend** |
| **Annual Fee (Apr  01 to Mar 31 - or part thereof)** | **Free** | **£5.00** |
| **Discounted Access to Group Public Events** | **Yes** | **Yes** |
| **Access to Group Member Only Events** | **Yes** | **Yes** |
| **Discounted Access to Member Only Events** | **No** | **Yes** |
| **Voting Rights** | **No** | **Yes** |
| **Right to stand for Committee Selection** | **No** | **Yes** |
| **Access to our online Members Area** | **No** | **Yes** |
| **Access to Group resources** | **No** | **Yes** |

**Annex B**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | |  |  |
| **INCOME AND EXPENDITURE A/C FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31.08.2017** | | | |  |
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|  |  | **INCOME** | **2017** |  |
|  |  | Memberships | £70.19 |  |
|  |  | Collection for Beds Bat Society | £38.85 |  |
|  |  | Donation | £4.00 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **GRANTS** |  |  |
|  |  | Interpretive Signs - Luton Borough Council | £3,271.20 |  |
|  |  | YSYW - Luton Borough Council | £1,250.00 |  |
|  |  | TCV - set up grant | £150.00 |  |
|  |  | TCV - Support grant | £350.00 |  |
|  |  | SURPLUS / (DEFICIT ) | £5,134.24 | £5,134.24 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **LESS EXPENDITURE** |  |  |
|  |  | YSYW | £1,006.46 |  |
|  |  | Interpretive Signs | £3,271.20 |  |
|  |  | TCV - set up grant | £38.00 |  |
|  |  | TCV- Support grant | £343.29 |  |
|  |  |  | £4,658.95 | £4,658.95 |
|  |  | EXCESS OF INCOME / |  | £475.29 |
|  |  | (EXPENDITURE) |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |