



## **Friends of Chorleywood Common**

### **Newsletter Spring 2014**

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#### **1. Ballot of members: Nature Trail and Play Area**



The AGM discussed the following two resolutions:

**A. The Friends of Chorleywood Common support the Parish Council's proposal for a "Nature Trail" on the Common.**

**B. The Friends of Chorleywood Common oppose the proposal for a "Play Area" with climbing and other play equipment at a single location on the Common.**

Both were carried; the first unanimously, the second by 19 votes in favour, none against and 6 abstentions. The meeting also decided that these issues ought to be put to a ballot of the whole membership of the Friends; this has now been arranged.

(1) Members who receive this Newsletter electronically will be emailed with a link to complete the survey through a free service called "Survey Monkey". This will accept one vote from an address where our records show there is a single member, and two votes from an address for joint members. It allows one submission (of one or two votes) per email address. The site is up and running; we will use the count of replies received before 12 noon on Monday 9 June.

(2) Members who receive this Newsletter by post will also receive a ballot paper (two for joint members) and a stamped addressed envelope; please complete and return. This

should be posted to arrive by Wednesday 11 June (we are using second-class stamps), but please do not leave it that long: vote as soon as you can!

We have tried to make the vote reasonably secure and secret: the hard copy ballot papers are numbered, and only originals will be counted, but there is no record of who has been sent which papers. Survey Monkey collects electronic submissions anonymously, and we will not see the email addresses used.

## **2. Chairman's Annual Report to the AGM**

*(The full text of the report is on the Friends of Chorleywood Common website at <http://chorleywoodcommon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Chair-Report-AGM-2014.pdf>.)*

The Chairman reported on the concluding events of the 2012-13 winter programme: Tim Venner's talk (after the 2013 AGM) on the work of the Friends of the Chorleywood House Estate; "Bats without Belfries" by James Shipman and "British Reptiles and Amphibians" by Nick Bessant. The 2013 summer programme included a Dawn Chorus Walk led by Anna Marett (the event was not strongly supported – more next time?); the Parish Council's Beating of the Bounds of the Common on Rogation Sunday; Pond Dipping led by Andrew Goddard at Christ Church pond; a Herb Walk led by Victoria Stainsby; Village Day, when Mike Warburg and Michael Hyde were able to show newts to the children who visited the Friends' stand, and we were also able to display the first results of Simon Varnals's fixed point photography; the Flower Walk led by Martin Hicks; and a Fungus Foray led by Paul Adams. The 2013-14 winter programme began with an "open discussion" meeting on the stage the "Play Area" proposal had reached (that proposal raises ongoing issues); and a talk by Liz Goodyear on "Butterflies of Hertfordshire".

The Friends' other regular activities had continued: the Butterfly Survey group had found many more butterflies in 2013 than the previous season, and were planning to continue their work in 2014; the volunteers had continued to work on the Common in collaboration with the Parish Rangers; and Simon Varnals had completed a year's worth of fixed point photography.

The Chairman also reported the position on the Play Area and Nature Trail proposals, car parking and grazing, and the proposed Community Plan. (There have been further developments since the AGM on all those issues, and other items in this Newsletter contain updates.) Finally he asked the members for feedback on what the Friends are doing, and any suggestions as to what else we might do; and thanked the Committee for all their hard work.

## **3. Birds on the Common**

Last year the Parish Council asked the RSPB to conduct a survey of the birds on the Common – this was a year-long study and recorded their relative numbers and also those species that were breeding.

Compared with the records of 30 years ago, many interesting differences can be seen, some reflecting national trends and others the changing habitats on the Common itself.

One of the most significant changes is that thirty years ago, there were Skylarks on the Common, but there are none now - and Yellowhammers were breeding in good, though declining, numbers, whereas they too are no longer present – as many who know the Common well can attest. Both of these species can still be found locally and it is to be hoped that with the reintroduction of grazing and the encouragement of gorse regeneration, the habitats for these two birds will improve significantly over time. Some of the woodland birds are doing better now than 30 years ago - the Nuthatch is now breeding, when it was not here before, and the Greater Spotted Woodpecker and the Tree Creeper have both improved their status - perhaps as the trees have matured. Whether the Tawny Owl was here 30 years ago is not entirely clear, as the earlier surveys only seem to have been carried out in the morning! The report also confirms that the Willow Warbler has declined dramatically, from many breeding pairs then to just "probably breeding" now and scarce at that, but the Chiffchaff is now confirmed as breeding. And there are other variations too – the birds of prey – sparrowhawk and kestrel - are both more common and the red kite and buzzard are now on our list. Perhaps the bird to look out for this year is the House Martin – surprisingly perhaps not even recorded as being present last year.

Greater Spotted Woodpecker



and Nuthatch



#### **4. Community Plan**

The Parish Council has suggested that Chorleywood would benefit from the creation and implementation of a Community Plan. The Friends of Chorleywood Common is one of the local community associations that were asked to take part in this project. A Steering committee was formed in December 2013 and has been meeting monthly since with the aim of producing the Plan for our parish.

The Community Plan will be based upon the views and opinions of the whole community, identifying areas of want or improvement for the Parish, as well as the things that the community wishes to protect or enhance. The group is led by Parish Councillors and has members from other interested parties in the community, including the Friends of Chorleywood Common, Chorleywood Business Association, Chorleywood Care, Chorleywood Mums, Royal Voluntary Service, Chorleywood Residents Association and Loudwater Residents Association. Other groups may be asked to contribute.

A questionnaire is being formulated and this will be sent to all homes in Chorleywood later in the year, taking into account group members and residents' concerns. It has yet to be decided how this will be formatted. A stand will be available at Village day on the 12<sup>th</sup> July.

This will give residents an opportunity to discuss the plan and put forward any suggestions for inclusion. Also a website will be set up linked to the Parish council's website with information. Two Friends of the Commons members Bob Sutherland and Gareth Hunt are involved with the meetings. Bob is taking responsibility for Environment/Open Spaces and Transport while Gareth will be looking at Development.

At some stage in the future the Community plan may become a Neighbourhood Plan, which concentrates on Planning and is a legal planning document. So please make your views known, visit the stand at Village Day. Details of the launch event in September will follow as soon as they are known.

## 5. Recent Events

An interesting talk on Moths was given by Andrew King in March and here are two of the moths that were mentioned.



Small Elephant Hawk-moth



Black Arches



## Heather Seeding

You may have noticed areas of the common around the low heather bushes, near to Darvells Pond, looking like this.

Well, the patches in this area have been scraped back by a digger driven by the ranger Andrew Goddard from the Parish Council.

The purpose was to prepare the ground for FoCC volunteers to spread the seed harvested from the established heather at the back end of last year into these patches, once raked over, in order to expand the heather area in line with the Parish Plan.

## 6. Parking control at the Memorial Hall and Shepherd's Bridge.

The only area on the Common which is strictly and legally a “car park” is at Christ Church; the Cricket Club, the “Lorry”, the Memorial Hall and the Shepherds Bridge areas are “permissive parking”, where the Parish Council as landowner allows users of the Common to leave their cars whilst they are playing cricket or golf, walking dogs, flying kites or whatever. Unfortunately the Memorial Hall area in particular has been an attractive place for commuters to leave their cars without having to pay, and imposing a penalty for parking between 8 and 8.30 in the morning has not been a deterrent: the area tended to fill up immediately after 8.30, to the considerable inconvenience of the Golf Club and other legitimate users.

The Parish Council planned to introduce a new system of control from 22 April 2014, but teething trouble with the ticket machines – now replaced, as pictured – meant that the start was postponed to 1 May. The new procedure (suggested by the Golf Club, which is also contributing to the cost,) at the Memorial Hall, and at Shepherd's Bridge, to stop the problem simply migrating there, is that anyone parking between 1 pm and 3 pm Monday to Friday must obtain a ticket from the ticket machine and display it on the vehicle. The ticket is issued free of charge, but the machine only operates from 11 am, which is intended to be too late for commuters to obtain tickets before heading for London to do a day's work; and enforcement from 1 pm is intended to be too early for



commuters to get back, even if they go in on one of the very early trains. The ticket machines are solar-powered; the one at the Memorial Hall is by the pedestrian exit to Common Road, and the one at Shepherds' Bridge is at the back left, next to the horse track.

The Parish Council pays the enforcement company a flat rate, and the company issues penalty notices and if necessary enforces them, and keeps the whole of the proceeds. If the system works as hoped, there will be very few penalties paid; but if the Parish Council is asked to cancel a penalty, it will not be entitled to make the enforcement company remit the amount due, and will therefore (in effect) have to pay the penalty itself; so it is unlikely that the Council will be particularly sympathetic to "hard luck" stories.

There is information about the scheme on the Parish Council's website, and on notices at the two parking areas. At present the restrictions are not being enforced on Saturday or Sunday, but it will be possible to extend the arrangements to the weekends if that should prove to be necessary.

## 7. Grazing Update



At the time of writing, the Parish Council and the grazier are making the final arrangements for the first session of grazing cattle on the Common controlled by means of "virtual fences" (pictured left), cables buried in the ground which transmit signals to collars worn by the cattle and give them a mild electric shock if they get too close to the boundary: apparently they learn to stay where they are meant to be. The contractor has installed most of the system, and very soon there will be an initial grazing period of about four weeks, with four cattle; that may even be happening by the time Members of the Friends read this Newsletter. Some of the "slotties" (still in place from previous grazing periods with temporary fencing) will be used for posts with notices explaining what is happening. The initial Spring grazing trial will be followed in the autumn by a longer period with perhaps ten or a dozen cattle. The area grazed will be similar to that used for previous trials: Larks Meadow, the May Bushes and the rest of the area from the Cattle Creep to the top of Larks Meadow, and the Railway Field and the area adjoining. There has been some "fine tuning" of the compartment boundaries: (i) Larks Meadow

will be divided, so that if necessary the cattle can be kept out of the area containing the pyramid orchids and other important wildflowers; and (ii) the boundary of the other Larks Meadow compartment will run from the top of Artichoke Dell to the top corner of the allotments, (rather than next to Dog Kennel Lane,) i.e. along the brow of the hill - this is practicable because the Parish Council now has the equipment to "cut and lift" the grass on the slope, and with the virtual fence at the top being underground, it will be possible to

mow safely, up and down the slope (turning on the flatter ground at top and bottom), rather than across the slope with the risk of the machine falling over.

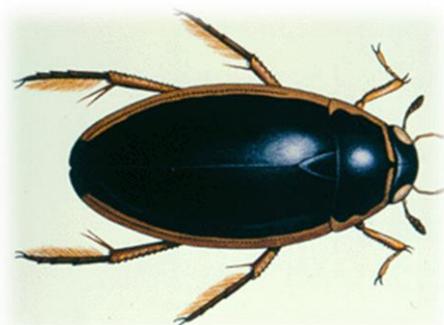
The cattle will be Longhorns: although their appearance (above right) justifies their name, they are docile, and have been bred to graze safely in areas where the public have access. There are more details on the grazier's website at



<http://www.maydencroft.co.uk/view-details/2373/1/Farming-Our-conservation-grazing-service/Our-conservation-grazing-service.htm> .

The Colney Heath and Harpenden Councils are considering the introduction of grazing in their own areas, and are interested in the “virtual fencing” system; representatives of both those Councils are expected to come to Chorleywood to look at that system in operation.

## 8. Dates for your Diary



**Friday 16 May: "Pond Dipping"**, led by the Common Ranger, Andrew Goddard; meet at 6.00 p.m. in Christ Church car park. Bring your children or grandchildren, and your wellies; everyone welcome. All sorts of creatures can be found when pond dipping (see above).

**Saturday 21 June: "Edible and Medicinal Plants"**, led by Victoria Stainsby; meet at Shepherds Bridge parking area at 3 p.m.

**Saturday 12 July: Village Day** – FoCC will have a stall.

**Sunday 27 July: "Wildflowers and Butterflies"**, led by Martin Hicks of Hertfordshire Ecology; meet at Christ Church car park (by the churchyard lych-gate), at 2.30 p.m.

## 9. Treasurer of the Friends.

After a long stint in the job, Nick Simons gave up the post of Treasurer at the 2014 AGM – many thanks for all he has done for the Friends – and Michael Hyde took over on an “Act-

ing” basis: he does not wish to hold the position indefinitely. A volunteer is therefore needed! The job involves, mostly, fairly routine bookkeeping: keeping track of expenditure and, with the Membership Secretary, subscription and other income, and preparing simple accounts for the AGM. The only slightly subtle part, (or at least it seems subtle to your Chairman, who has no accountancy training,) is the need to treat the appropriate proportions of three-year subscriptions as “income in advance”, but it is said that this need not be difficult. Anyone who is willing to become Treasurer, please get in touch with any member of the Committee.

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