

FRIENDS OF BARNFIELD SANDBEDS

Meeting at South Staffordshire Council Offices, Codsall
20th February 2009 @ 2.00pm

MINUTES

PRESENT:

H. Medicott, Landscape Manager (HM)
H. Baugh-Jones, Landscape Planning Manager (HBJ)

J. Bradley	D. Kent
B. Caffrey	G. Martin
R. Cook	C. McShane
C. Danbury	S. Moore
E. Davis	P. Mullard
J. Davis	S. Palmer
M. Goodrich	C. Redshaw
P. Goodrich	J. Redshaw
D. Griffiths	A. Richards
L. Griffiths	E. Squire
R. Hancox	I. Squire
B. Kewley	G. Tanner

HBJ outlined the aims and objectives of the site and the present situation. South Staffordshire Council acquired the site in 2008 through a section 106 agreement associated with the nearby development. The site is not a SSSI but it is a County Grade 1 Site of Biological Interest and will be declared as a Local Nature Reserve in the future.

A land contamination survey has been carried out and it has been found that work can be done as long as the ground is not disturbed too much. However, there are some 'hot spots' throughout the site.

A great deal of fly tipping and surface material has been removed. The existing building and the asbestos is to be removed shortly by a contractor appointed by the Council.

The character of the site will remain the same with improvements being made such as a decking area to the pond to enable school pond dipping visits and open areas are to be planted with wildflowers. Footpaths may be formalised in the future.

There will be a small on street public car parking area. The planning application for this has been submitted). The other parking area will be for use by schools and maintenance vehicles.

A member of the group asked whether toilet facilities would be provided if school visits are going to take place. HBJ said buildings cannot be erected on the site as it is green belt land.

Footpaths are not going to be shaled at present but it is something that will be looked into to ascertain whether there is a need for this. There was some concern that people will be reluctant to use the site if the paths are very muddy. HBJ said once the initial work has been completed and maintenance vehicles have stopped going onto the site the issue of wheel ruts/muddy paths can be sorted out.

Brash and arisings from work being carried out on the site will be left in piles to create wildlife habitats. Trees with obvious defects will be removed and standing deadwood will be left. The stump of the Sycamore that has been removed has been smoothed out/rounded off for health and safety reasons.

A member of the group expressed a concern about the Bee Orchids that are growing in the area close to the shed as tractors and other vehicles are driving very close to them. HBJ said that he would ensure that the contractors working in this area are made aware of the presence of Bee Orchids. HBJ said he is keen for the group to report such things to the Council and is appreciative of the fact that the group has specialist knowledge of the site.

The Council is awaiting a report from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust which details all species found on the site.

The Forest of Mercia will be going on to the site to carry out vegetation clearance works.

HBJ said there will be no work carried out during the bird nesting season.

RM to e-mail or post a copy of the site layout plan to all members of the group along with the relevant contact details that are to be used when reporting things that have been seen or when requesting that work is carried out.

HBJ and HM have met on site with the Staffordshire Badger Group who have informed them that work can be done near to Badger setts at the end of the breeding season which is the end of June.

The group pointed out that there is an area of carbon black contamination on the site which gives off an extremely unpleasant smell and asked whether it can be removed. HBJ said the contamination did flag this up but not as a major problem. It will not be removed as what is underneath could be worse than the carbon black itself.

HBJ said the access at the bottom of Orams Lane will be gated to prevent vehicular access.

A member of the group asked whether the pond will be dredged as it dries out during the summer months, HBJ said this may be something that is looked at in the future.

The funding from the ongoing maintenance of the site will come from the Forestry Commission for annual works and the rest of the work will be paid for from the existing Grounds Maintenance Contract budget.

It is intended that the Friends Group will be the Council's 'eyes and ears' for the site and will inform the Council of work that is required, problems, ideas for improvements, sightings of wildlife species etc. HBJ is the contact for the initial development and clearance of the site and HM is the contact for the aftercare/ongoing maintenance and for community groups enquiries.

HM spoke to the group about the principles of Friends Groups and the four groups that already exist throughout the District. The groups all carry out a variety of projects such as litter collections and fundraising, which are in keeping with the management plan. A management plan will be developed in the near future for Barnfield Sandbeds.

The existing groups are:

Friends of Wom Brook Walk, Wombourne
Friends of Wyrley Essington Branch Canal
Wild About Perton
Friends of Riverside Walk, Kinver

The groups are structured and have a chairperson, treasurer and secretary and have an adopted constitution.

Friends Groups are partners in managing the sites. Each site has a management plan which outlines the aims and objectives, sets out the scheduled maintenance operations and identifies the more specific work needed for the enhancement and protection of the habitats within the site. Management plans enable Friends Groups to see the progress being made against the aims and objectives.

Some ideas from the group can be incorporated into the management plan but not all will be practical. It is important to realise that there needs to be a holistic approach.

It is up to each individual to decide whether they want to be an active member of the group and it is up to the group to decide how often to meet. HM is happy to attend the early meetings whilst the group is establishing but he won't attend all meetings.

Friends Groups are not just about a specific site, they are about building communities. There can be community involvement through social events etc. There can be a sense of pride and ownership created by being part of a Friends Group.

A member of the group asked when the management plan would be available. HM said it will be compiled once the initial site clearance and development work has been completed. A basic management plan needs to be supplied to the group as soon as possible so that they have something to work with.

It was suggested that some members of the group go to other Friends Groups' meetings to see what goes on.

HM informed the group that bat boxes are available from the Forest of Mercia free of charge but advice needs to be taken as to how many are needed for the site. They may not be available until the autumn period. Advice is also needed with regard to the number of bird and owl boxes that are needed. Colin McShane can advise on this. It was suggested that local schools and the scout group could get involved in making the boxes. Two residents of Orams Lane have purchased a Barn Owl box from The Wolseley Centre which will be installed in early March by The Barn Owl Action Group. A variety of nesting boxes are available from The Wolseley Centre.

With regards to the policing of the area it is anticipated that increasing the use of the site will deter people from abusing it.

Eileen Davis and Marion Goodrich volunteered to be the initial points of contact for the group. RM to e-mail the list of attendees and their contact details to ED and MG along with contact details for the existing Friends Groups.