

Northfield Constituency Environmental Forum



Minutes

Meeting Held:

New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council Office, Friday 12th August 2016, 2pm

Present: Penny Moore (Chair), Cllr Ian Cruise (Longbridge Ward), Cllr Randal Brew (Northfield Ward), Cllr Brett O'Reilly (Northfield Ward), Roland Kedge (Rea Valley Conservation Group), David Beardsmore (Lickey Hills Ranger Hub), Linda Coates (Frankley Street Champions/ New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council), Geoff Skidmore (Rea Valley Conservation Group), Natasha Murray (Environment Agency), Sarah Royal (BOSF)

Apologies: Graham Andrews (Secretary), Amanda Cadman (Treasurer/ Vice Chair) Sue Amey (Constituency Parks Manager), Maggie Sweet (The Fields Millennium Green), Clive Sweet (The Fields Millennium Green), Daniel Bryson-Pearl (The Friends of Manor Farm Park), Chris Blythe (BCV), Jill Harvey (Lickey Hills Society), Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Carol Griffiths, Bruce Pitt (Frankley Street Champions/ New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council), Cllr Debbie Clancy, Cllr Julie Johnson, Amy Watson (ExtraCare retirement village), Carol Cooper (Severn Trent), Matt Andrews (LPAP)

Meeting started 2.10pm

Welcome

Penny welcomed everyone to the meeting and accepted apologies.

Minutes:

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted by all as a true record.

Matters Arising:

None

Financial Report

There was no change to finances; however Roland had now ordered the plaque for the Great Stone and is due to collect it from Derbyshire. The group will be supporting the plaque with a donation towards the £350 cost.

Natasha Murray (Environment Agency)

Natasha kindly came along from the EA to give the forum an update on the River Rea.

Natasha said at present the River Rea was classified as moderate and the aim was to raise it one level to good. The vegetation and micro biology of the river are considered poor due to phosphates from road run off, missed connections and other factors. Longbridge is a cluster area for missed connections and it is hoped this can be addressed.

Due to the incident a while back when oil got into the river, severely damaging the water life, Western Power has given money by way of redress to be used on the river. It is planned that some will be used to remove a weir at Longbridge. Roland said at Coleys Lane he'd not seen any fish since the pollution incident mentioned above. Natasha pointed out the oil spill was only found because of monitoring by volunteers; which shows the importance of such testing.

Natasha also spoke about habitat connectivity and how we should think big when it comes to improving habitat.

Geoff commented that there is a lack of visibility along the river and in many places you can't see it at all. Natasha suggested we could do some fixed point photography to record the river throughout the year. Cllr Brew felt we should encourage schools to adopt their local section of river.

Roland questioned whether a fallen tree should be removed from the river? Natasha felt it was good habitat unless the area was prone to flooding. Linda said some irises were blocking the Rea near Arden Road and the parish council team were planning to remove them. All three councillors believed flooding was best addressed with joined up thinking and Cllr Brew highlighted the work of FLAG.

Natasha was thanked for her time and presentation.

Roland Kedge (RVCG)

Roland gave a very interesting presentation about the Rea Valley Conservation Group its history and aims. The group started 28 years ago and was the first of its kind along the river. Early aims had been a Rea Valley Country Park and the preservation of the river. They had also been supporters of the 'Raise the Rea' campaign.

There are many conservation groups along the river now and Penny commented that the RVCG deserved much credit for being the pioneers.

Roland went on to suggest we are at a stage where we need to reflect and perhaps rebuild the volunteer and local authority working relationship. He felt on too many occasions (his example was Turves Green Dingle) the local authority would not support volunteers in activities because of health and safety concerns. Roland felt there were inherent risks in all activities and the present culture misused the health and safety rules.

Penny commented while more freedom to undertake activities was something we all wanted keeping volunteers safe would always need to be a priority, Cllr Brew agreed. Cllr Cruise said similar issues had arisen regarding Frankley Street Champions and their tipper truck. He felt that policy could be made more flexible and volunteers should be encouraged and supported. Sarah felt there had been a marked change in attitude towards volunteers in the last 10 years and it was something BOSF continued to encourage and champion. Cllr O'Reilly suggested council officers come out and join volunteers to find where barriers existed and how they could be tackled.

Roland was thanked

Update Ranger Service

Ranger Dave updated the meeting about recent activities at the Lickey Hills. He said due to further restructuring there was a possibility we would lose one ranger hub and there were also voluntary redundancies taking place in higher management.

The rangers continued to work closely with friends groups and there was a possibility there would be a parks community worker for the city in the future.

Lots of activities had taken place at the country park including a Bilberry Wake and a National Play Day event that attracted 1,500 people.

The Britain in Bloom judging had gone well, but sadly Kings Norton Park had not been awarded a green flag. Northfield had won the Britain in Bloom garden competition working with Victoria School.

Penny thanked Dave for his report

Member Groups Update

Roland reported a preliminary meeting had taken place and hopefully a friends group would be forming for the Turves Green Dingle. The councillors present were happy to support this and agreed they would be willing to help with printing leaflets to be used to promote a group. Sarah also offered the open spaces forum's help.

BOSF

Sarah said they had helped with this years Britain in Bloom. They were planning to start coffee mornings again and four evening socials. The bioblitz had been a great success and they were going to hold a bat walk later in the year at Holders Lane. Following last year's good feedback they were going to hold another Christmas lecture.

Penny asked about an email she had received regarding a change to insurances. Sarah said Emma was looking into this.

Frankley Street Champions

Linda reported as one of our local Waterside Care groups they had received a visit from the chief executive of Keep Britain Tidy. Cllr Cruise and Penny had also been involved in the visit and all said it had been a great success.

Friends of Balaam's Wood LNR

Woodland Workout and Nordic Walking continue to be very successful Active Parks activities. There is a new bench in the orchard donated by parish councillor Eric Carter. New steps and bridges are planned for the woodland and an upgrade to the cycleway.

Rea Valley Conservation Group

Work at Coley's Lane continues and the licence is up for renewal.

Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Amanda sent a report by email saying they were both balsam bashing and undertaking annual conservation cuts to the meadow. Working with Buglife more local wildflowers will be added to the meadow. Baby newts have been seen near the new scrape, which is now full of reeds. Popes Lane is still to be designated an extension to the LNR. It is hoped the Tracmaster Powerscythe can be used in more places around the reserve in future with BCC supervision.

Any Other Business

Geoff raised a concern that he had not seen many bats on the site of the old North Worcestershire Golf Course recently. Dave said Simon Needle (BCC ecologist) had done some surveying and he would speak to him and ask about his findings.

Penny informed the meeting there was a new funding avenue available called South Birmingham Mobilising Communities.

Penny thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Next Meeting:

Friday 7th October 'Policing Our Parks', LPAP Space at Longbridge Town Centre, 2pm