

Northfield Constituency Environmental Forum



Woodgate Valley Country Park, Tuesday 30th September, 2pm.

Present: Graham Andrews (Chair), Penny Moore (Secretary), Jill Harvey (Lickey Hills Society), Roland Kedge (Rea Valley Conservation Group), Daniel Bryson-Pearl (Friends of Manor Farm Park), Denise Meredith (Friends of Cofton Park), Stefan Lewandowski (TCV), Alex McDonald (Environment Agency), Mike Adams (Environment Agency), Clive Wright (BCC), James Gibb (BCC), Gaynor Roberts (BCC), Lee Copplestone (Waterside Care), Maggie Sweet (BOSF Chair and The Fields Millennium Green), Clive Sweet (The Fields Millennium Green)

Apologies: Amanda Cadman (Treasurer/Vice- Chair), Norma Boyd (FLAG), Sue Amey (District Parks Manager), Lickey Hills Rangers, Lynn Horsnett (Friends of Kings Norton Park), Sarah Royal (BOSF)

Welcome:

Graham welcomed everyone to the meeting

Minutes:

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

Environment Agency Presentation

A presentation then followed by Alex McDonald, Biodiversity Technical Officer with the Environment Agency.

Alex gave a great overview of the importance of rivers and brooks to our local biodiversity, highlighting some local improvement projects.

Local projects included work on the Bourn Brook, through Woodgate Valley, to help the top of the river. The idea is to alter or remove some of the ten weirs along the river to aid the movement of wildlife. Roland asked why there were so many weirs and Clive said they were there to reduce the speed/energy of the river.

Graham asked about knotweed on river banks and was informed this was the responsibility of the riparian landowner. Alex also explained that our river catchment was unusually urbanised at the top. Unfortunately this meant the problems of litter and invasive species were magnified by the confined space.

Denise wondered if it would be possible to do something with the reappearing water course in Cofton Park and Alex offered to go on a site visit.

Graham thanked Alex for coming and giving such an informative presentation.

River Rea Partnership:

Mike and Clive informed the meeting that a new River Rea Partnership had been formed in the hope that Birmingham City Council, Severn Trent and the Environment Agency working together could attract funding and skills to new projects and much needed works.

Clive explained there was a change to how funding was allocated. Funding was now granted on cost benefit whereby each project got something, but how much was dependent on a scoring system.

Mike and Clive said they were having to learn new skills to bring projects together from a mix of local authority funding, grants, working with developers etc; They were creating bespoke tools for this and engaging the public through roadshows.

Graham asked were they working with the developers of the North Worcestershire Golf Course, as he was concerned about the Tessall Brook (Hanging Brook). Clive said the developers would be expected to improve the brook as part of any development.

Denise asked if anymore of the River Rea was to be opened up. Clive said yes further up stream and there was also a commitment to improve water quality.

Maggie asked if there were plans to remove any weirs further down the Rea at Cannon Hill or Holders Lane; possibly at Holders Lane.

Mike and Clive were thanked for their time

Matters Arising

Green Fly-Tipping:

Roland commented on the rise in fly-tipping on their Coley's Lane site. This was mainly green waste. Maggie said they were experiencing the same problem on the Fields Millennium Green.

Pocket Handkerchief Spaces

Roland said there had been a commemorative poppy planting on some of these small open spaces around Northfield, while they were a little late some had bloomed this summer.

Northfield EcoCentre

The centre is going through changes at present. They are looking for a new manager, but their activities were continuing including an up and coming walk.

Financial Report

Amanda has sent her apologies; however there was no change in our financial situation.

Walks

Everyone felt it would be nice to do a Christmas Local Explorer Walk. Roland offered to lead a 'Mystery Boulder Walk' and a date is to be set.

Waterside Care

Lee informed the meeting that Keep Britain Tidy are holding Diamond Jubilee Awards and there was to be a special Waterside Care Award.

Waterside Care and Keep Britain Tidy are holding a 'Big Tidy Up' at Kings Norton Park on 10th October the wombles are coming to help!

Lee was pleased to announce the Waterside Care Handbook would be launched soon, hopefully in November.

New Friends Groups

At present no new groups are forming

Ranger Service

No update at this meeting as the rangers sent their apologies.

Future Plans for the NCEF

No new plans were discussed at this meeting. However Roland raised the issue of Turves Green Dingle and what could be done to improve the area. There is loads of fly-tipping and he felt there could be some kind of project to address this especially in winter when things are easier to see.

Walking Officer

Gaynor informed the meeting she had been working closely with Active Parks and is organising lots of different walks across Birmingham. Her remit is to get inactive people out and active. She is also looking for volunteers to train as walk leaders. Gaynor had been working with Denise to provide Nordic walking in Cofton Park.

Roland commented that he had been to an Active Parks event and was concerned that children were wearing Coca-Cola tabards.

Friends Groups and BOSF Updates:

BOSF:

BOSF chair Maggie gave everyone the latest news from the open spaces forum. Phil Evans is standing down after years of loyal service as BOSF treasurer; he is moving to Malvern and everyone wishes Phil and Gwen much happiness. On 5th November BOSF is ten years old! To celebrate a small event is being held at the Library of Birmingham.

Friends of Cofton Park:

Denise was happy to announce that the group had a new committee member. She said that the friends group would be teaming up with the Friends of Balaam's Wood LNR for the Longbridge Festive of Light. They will be taking part in the community competition to decorate windows in the town centre.

Denise said sadly the application to fund a new building in the park (changing rooms, toilets and community room) had been unsuccessful, but the council would be making a new application.

The Fusion festival had been successful and the group were planning to put in new benches and a new notice board.

Leyhill Park:

Graham said the friends group had been busy with regular litter picks and their Active Parks activities; pilates and a 'Well Fit Moms and Babies' session. A new cycle hub is also going to be constructed on the corner of the park.

Manor Farm Park:

Daniel informed the meeting that the friends group were looking forward to their 30th birthday next year. He said there had been an open day at the Cadbury Barn; which went really well and gained the group new members. They had mapped out two walks for the park and were discussing the possibilities as the lake needs dredging.

TVC:

Stefan said they had been working on the site at Leyhill Park and were looking at creating food growing spaces at Woodgate Valley and Kings Norton. The proposed site at the QEHB was progressing slowly at there were tensions between the setting up of the site and the preservation of the fort remains. There was also a plan to use the food growing site at Manor Farm Park as a feeder site.

Maggie asked if it was correct that allotment holders were no longer allowed to plant fruit trees. This was to be looked into.

Rea Valley Conservation Group:

Roland said the group continued to work on the site at Coley's Lane. The site had two trees down, one across the river. He asked Alex if she could get an inspector to visit.

Balaam's Wood LNR

Penny was happy to announce a Nature Improvement Area grant had been secured to improve the River Rea through Frankley. This would include clearing banks, improving the riverbed and creating a nature corner near Reaside School.

Kings Norton Park:

Lynn had asked that we mention the canal festival being organised for summer 2015 and hoped NCEF members would get involved in some way. Lynn was particularly keen to get volunteers to help clear the canal banks to make it easier for boaters. The festival would include sports and all kinds of activities including a mini triathlon.

Lickey Hills Society:

Jill informed the meeting that the Lickeys had hosted a pop up park in August. Their other Active Parks activities continued including Nordic walking and some gentle walks to get new people involved. There is to be an autumn litter pick and in November the Lickey Hills Society will be holding its AGM and celebrating its thirtieth anniversary.

The Fields Millennium Green

Maggie said they had held a very successful event on August Bank Holiday, in conjunction with The National Trust. They were also planning some bulb planting at half-term.

There was no other business so Graham thanked everyone for attending and invited them to join him on a guided tour of the trekking centre adjoining the country park.

Next Meeting:

Our AGM will be held on

Friday, 12th December, noon, Ecocentre Northfield