

Forest Town Nature Conservation Group

Notes from the meeting of Wednesday 29th June 2011, 7 - 9:15 pm,
at the Forest Town Miners Welfare

Present (18)

Shlomo (Acting Secretary); Josh (Acting Treasurer); Lorraine (Acting Chair); Betty; Alan; Malcolm; Helen; Ron; Lee; Jeff; Rose; Margaret; Arnold; Colin; Jackie; Rose; Jez; Andy NWT)

Apologies (10)

Apologies were received from: Alyson (Acting Membership Secretary); Dave (Acting Vice Chair); Megan; Val; Geoff; Pauline; Christine; Barry; Richard; Dianna

Membership Update

As of 25th June the FTNCG had 27 members.

Please continue to encourage friends and relatives to join the Group.

Financial Update

As of 29th June the FTNCG had £270.24 in our bank account, and a further £54 in cash, awaiting deposit. Once this has been deposited, we will have £324.24 in our bank account (plus anything donated this evening). Since our meeting in May we have spent £33 for Group Membership of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, and we have received £6 in membership from our 3 new members, and £298 in other donations, including a cheque for £250 from Councillor Martin Wright, from his Nottinghamshire County Council constituency budget. A friendly reminder has been sent to the other three local Mansfield District Councillors.

Note: subsequent to the meeting we were contacted by Councillor Denise Moody – who intends to make a donation to the FTNCG from her MDC constituency fund.

Action: FTNCG to send thank you note to Martin for his contribution.

Nottingham Post Coupons Update

A total of 123 coupons were sent to the Nottingham Post on behalf of the FTNCG. We expect to find out how much money we will receive sometime around the 11th July. Our thanks go out to everyone who supported us by collecting coupons.

Publicity Update

The FTNCG made our debut appearance in The Chad on Wednesday 15th June (page 12), with a short piece about our Spa Ponds walk. We also expect our Group to be featured in the next edition of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's Magazine. We would like to thank the Forest Town Community Council, and Val Moss and Phyllis Gregson in particular, for helping us publicise our meetings with posters in Forest Town's various notice boards. New posters are available for shop windows and other prime spots. And we've not forgotten the idea of promoting our Forward Programme in the local One Stop magazine (once we have finalised our Programme!).

Internet Update

The FTNCG's corner of the ForestTown.net website (www.foresttown.net/index.php/nature/) continues to grow, with the addition of a photo gallery. We remain keen to upload additional content, so please continue to send us photographs and articles of interest. We will continue to upload the minutes of our meetings, and to do our best to keep the site current. And for those who use Facebook, we now have a Group page with 9 members that you are welcome to join. Please visit: http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_201161073258358

National Consultation Submission

On 13th June an outline response was submitted on behalf of the FTNCG as part of the Government's consultation on their Making Space for Nature – Defra's Natural Environment White Paper. Our submission focussed on the importance of ensuring that development does not threaten any potential Special Protection Areas, especially the one proposed for Sherwood Forest. We also called for greater powers to be given to planning authorities to enforce restoration conditions, including enhanced powers to levy financial penalties. We noted that this would be in keeping with the notion that: "We must repair the damage done to our natural environment by restoring natural connections that have been broken" [Para 2.5]. And we asked how we could engage as partners in the proposed Green Infrastructure Partnership. Copies of the submission are available upon request, and from:

http://www.foresttown.net/nature/FTNCG_Environmental_Whitepaper_Submission.pdf

Sherwood Habitats Steering Group Update

About the closest we get to a Green Infrastructure Partnership or a Local Nature Partnership is the Sherwood Habitats Forum. Although the Forum only meets once a year, there is also a Steering Group that meets four times a year. I attended these Steering Group meetings in March and again on 14th June. Other Steering Group members include representatives of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, the Sherwood Forest Trust, the Forestry Commission, Nottinghamshire County Council, the National Farmers Union, the RSPB, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the Environment Agency and Natural England. There is little by way of community representation. The meeting included an update on stalled plans for a Sherwood Forest Regional Park. Various partners are working on various bids for funding that could help move this project forward. I will be attending the next Steering Group meeting in September, and I understand that an open meeting of the Forum is planned for 11th October. Please let me know if you would like to attend the October meeting, which will take place at Rufford Country Park.

Water Vole Update

One of the benefits of attending these meetings is the opportunity to cross paths with Chris Jackson, Nottinghamshire County Council's Biodiversity Officer. Chris was very excited to hear that we had spotted a water vole during our walk around Spa Ponds. This sighting has now been officially logged. Wayne Ball, of the Sherwood Forest Trust, has offered water vole training to members of the FTNCG. Wayne has been invited to attend a future FTNCG meeting to tell us more about how our Group could work together with the Sherwood Forest Trust.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust Update

The FTNCG is now a Group Member of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. Shlomo and Josh travelled to their offices and were shown the mapping system that is used to help inform planning consultation responses. As a result of this training, Josh downloaded and has begun to use the GoogleEarth software. David and Alyson have also been receiving training from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. They've been dry stone walling and sheep sheering. At a future meeting David will share something of his experience.

FTNCG members are welcome to join NWT volunteers on Sunday 3rd July, from 10 AM – for a balsam pull at Spa Ponds.

Andy Lowe said a bit more about the mutual benefits of NWT membership for the FTNCG. Wildlife and habitat training and expertise can be provided. NWT benefits from members, as we have a stronger voice, e.g. negotiating with Government. Members are NWT's eyes and ears on the ground – members can alert NWT and NWT can take effective action, e.g. FTNCG members can record wildlife sightings in and around Forest Town that can then be officially logged to help protect species and habitats.

Andy was asked to help us understand what counts as “special” enough to note having seen it. For example, Helen reported spotting a hawkmoth near her home in Forest Town. Andy explained that each recorded sighting adds to the official “proof” (evidence base) that wildlife exists in Forest Town. Species may be “common” in Forest Town, but rare elsewhere, and even in danger (“on the ‘amber list’, or even the ‘red list’”).

Action: Amber and red lists to be made available via the FTNCG website.

Sherwood Forest Trust Update

As mentioned above, Shlomo reported speaking with Wayne Ball of the Sherwood Forest Trust. Wayne, who lives locally, told Shlomo about various potential ways that the Sherwood Forest Trust could work with the FTNCG. For example, if there is sufficient interest, Wayne (and NCC’s Chris Jackson) could arrange for Water Vole training (possibly as soon as mid-August). There are also plans for a balsam pulling along the River Maun that FTNCG members could attend, as well as activities at Vicar’s Pond (Vicar Water) and Intake Wood. Wayne is involved in a “Special trees of Sherwood” project that could support FTNCG members to identify and research local “special trees”. We hope that Wayne will be able to attend our 21st September meeting and tell us more about the work of the Sherwood Forest Trust.

Ecologist Report Update and Discussion

Shlomo and Lorraine submitted a pre-application request for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help pay for an ecologist’s report on Forest Town’s habitats, but the fund turned out not to be suitable for that purpose, so other potential sources are being investigated. The full report would cost around £10,000, but might be able to be carried out (and paid for) in stages. NWT is considering where we might go next to ask for funding. We can explore the possibility of working with MDC and/or NWT for Biffaward, for example.

Action: Thank Sean, and ask for estimates for 3 smaller projects – and continue to explore funding options.

Rushpool Update and Discussion

Only 10% of the existing gorse is to be removed, as gorse helps provide wildlife habitat (including for insects, birds, bats, etc.) as well as protection from vandalism. New site management plan needs to be drafted and agreed between local resident (represented by the FTNCG), NWT and MDC. This draft site management plan would need to be circulated to local residents to help them appreciate the nature conservation value of the site, and to comment on the plans for the site. Cllr Martin Wright has shown an interest in helping support a local group. This could be channelled through the FTNCG. This initiative could be linked with the FTNCG volunteer clusters to feed in to the larger group – see below. Dialogue with MDC is very important. We could offer an alternative site management plan. Indeed the FTNCG could take remedial action, with guidance from NWT. It is obviously important to get local MDCllrs on board. We can prepare for a work day in November, to deliver the improved plan, including planting roses, and a mini meadow.

Action: Andy to initiate a site visit to inform a draft work plan, and then FTNCG will give local residents an opportunity to comment on the proposed work plan. Andy will also help work out any associated costs (plants, tools, etc.) of enacting the plan, and then we can approach Cllr Wright for project-specific funding.

Volunteer cluster idea

The FTNCG is intended to cover all green spaces of nature conservation value in and around Forest Town. Members may have an interest in the whole area, or in specific spots. The FTNCG could therefore support any number of site-specific clusters of interested people, as well as one cross-cutting research cluster. Local historian and FTNCG member Pauline has already shared some of her Spa Ponds research findings with us (see below)!

Forward Programme Update and discussion

Water vole training is to be arranged. Next FTNCG meeting will be on Wednesday evening 10th August. Wayne Ball, of the Sherwood Forest Trust, will deliver presentation at our 21st September meeting. Andy will organise a November clearing at the Rushpool site (with support from NWT).

Fundraising Update and Discussion

Andy has applied for Water Framework Directive funding, and will let us know the result.

Next meetings

Wednesday 10th August meeting from 7pm at the Forest Town Miners Welfare

Wednesday 21st September meeting from 7pm at the Forest Town Miners Welfare

Bonus Track

SPA PONDS RESEARCH – by Pauline Marples

Pele/Pele Tower is a small fortress, generally found in northern England, built as a defence against border raids [pg 211 The Local Historians Encyclopaedia - John Richardson]

Spa - mineral spring [Collins Dictionary]

Information found in 'A Celebration of Kings Clipstone':

Chapter 'Early Agriculture Park and Pele' by Joy Shawe Browne

pg 43 Drawing of author's impression of the pele adjoining Clipstone Park 1317 - 1328

pg 46 The Spa ponds below the pele were spring fed and retained an even temperature summer and winter. They were well stocked with fish, and probably acted as a stew or holding pond.

pg 46 The location of the pele can be seen on a fourteenth century map at Belvoir Castle.....William Senior's map of 1630 show more detail of the village and the site of the pele.

pg 50 The Countess of Oxford writing to lady Mary Wortley Montague 1747 refers to visiting a country retreat in Clipstone Park.....in 1749 she writes again and says 'there is a mineral spring no further away than Clipstone Park which restores some people to health but does not agree with me'.

The Spa Ponds comes from a clear spring, a fairly rare thing in bunter sandstone, although there are others within Clipstone Park. It is believed that the water fed an area of swamp and pools before the ponds were formed at the time of building the pele. Remains of old stone culverts and sluices have been found during excavations and there was evidently a dam at the lower end to stop the water over flowing onto pasturelands.