

## **Inaugural meeting of the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group**

Minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011, 8 pm – 10 pm,  
Whitegates Hotel Public House, Clipstone Road East, Forest Town, Mansfield

Present: Alyson Ciborski (Acting Membership Secretary), David John Oliver (Acting Vice-Chair), Lorraine Downen (Acting Chair), Josh Downen (Acting Treasurer), Shlomo Downen (Acting Secretary (Minutes)), Andrew Lowe (West Notts Conservation Officer, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT)), Ann Ward (Birklands Ringing Group)

### **1. Meeting context / Background**

For several months the NWT Conservation Officer for West Nottinghamshire, Andrew Lowe (Andy), has been in contact with residents of Forest Town and Mansfield Woodhouse who had expressed an interest in forming a local Friends Group to protect and enhance Spa Ponds and other local sites with nature conservation value. Some of these residents have crossed paths at NWT events in Mansfield, and some electronic correspondence was subsequently exchanged. On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2011 Andy circulated a constitution template that could be used for the formation of a Friends Group that would be recognised by Mansfield District Council (MDC). Shlomo Downen (Shlomo) used this template to generate a draft constitution for a Forest Town-based Friends Group, and the meeting was organised to constitute the group, with Andy's support.

### **2. Agreeing the name of the group**

Those present discussed potential names for the group and unanimously agreed that the name: "Forest Town Nature Conservation Group" would be the most inclusive, accurate and sensible name. There was recognition that such a group would welcome members who live in Mansfield Woodhouse and other areas neighbouring Forest Town (including parts of Oak Tree, Ravensdale and Clipstone), and that the "Forest Town" Group could provide an organisational structure that could accommodate numerous projects, e.g. some people keen to focus on Spa Ponds, others focussing on Maun Valley, and yet others with an interest in the conical tip (currently in the process of being restored).

### **3. Agreeing the aim of the group**

In light of these discussions, it was further unanimously agreed that the formal aim of the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group would be: "To enhance the nature conservation sites within and around Forest Town, including but not limited to Spa Ponds and Maun Valley, for the benefit of local people and wildlife".

### **4. Setting a date when membership subscriptions will be due**

Several dates were considered, and the feeling was that it was best to avoid 1<sup>st</sup> January, as the Christmas / New Year period is a hectic one for all concerned. Josh Downen (Josh) suggested that a date nearer the Spring would tap into members' rising energy for engaging with the natural world, and it was agreed, again unanimously, that the 1<sup>st</sup> April would be the date when membership subscriptions (currently set at £2 per person per year) would be due. Should this date or amount prove to be problematic or inconvenient, this matter could be revisited.

### **5. Setting the minimum number of meetings attended that entitles a member to a vote**

The MDC template constitution includes an expectation that groups would require members to attend a specified number of meetings before that member would be entitled to vote. There was agreement that we wished the Forest Town Group to be as welcoming and democratic as possible, and that therefore we would set this number to one. Again, if this decision could be revisited in the future, should the need arise.

## **6. Agreeing who will assume each of the Officer roles**

An Acting Executive Committee was formed, with roles assumed by those present as outlined above. For the avoidance of doubt: Alyson Ciborski agreed to become the Acting Membership Secretary; David John Oliver Acting Vice-Chair; Lorraine Downen Acting Chair; Josh Downen Acting Treasurer; and Shlomo Downen Acting Secretary. The duties associated with these Officer roles are included in the constitution, although the language of these descriptions are prescribed by MDC, and are open to a degree of flexibility, e.g. the Chair may choose to delegate the role of spokesperson as appropriate. All agreed to support each other to fulfil their respective roles. Andy Lowe agreed to act as liaison between the Group and NWT and MDC. Ann Ward agreed in principle to offer independent scrutiny (financial audit) of the Group's accounts.

## **7. Deciding upon the number of members required to trigger an EGM**

In addition to the requirement to hold an Annual General meeting (AGM), the MDC template constitution includes provision for the triggering of an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM). Following consideration it was decided that an EGM should be able to be triggered by a simple majority of members, i.e. 50% + 1. It was also seen as useful to add a provision to enable the Executive to trigger an EGM if deemed necessary without the need to secure specific support for this from members, e.g. should there arise a need to alter the constitution. Therefore it was decided that the constitution should allow for an EGM to be triggered by either a simple majority of members or by agreement of any four Officers (including the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Membership Secretary, and Treasurer).

## **8. Opening a bank account in the name of the group**

All present agreed that the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group should move quickly to set up a "Community Direct plus" bank account with the Co-operative Bank, due to the Co-op's ethically policy. Further details of the terms and conditions, etc. of this type of account can be found at:

<http://www.co-operativebank.co.uk/servlet/Satellite/1196151412581,CFSweb/Page/Business-CommunityBanking>

It was unanimously agreed that the account should require three signatories, any two of whom would be required to sign a cheque, and any one of whom would be empowered to undertake transactions via the Co-operative Bank's telephone or on-line banking facilities. The following were authorised to be the first three signatories of the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group bank account: Lorraine Downen (Acting Chair), Josh (Joshua) Downen (Acting Treasurer), and Alyson Ciborski (Acting Membership Secretary).

## **9. Taking out public liability insurance to a value of at least £2,000,000**

In order to comply with the MDC requirement to take out suitable public liability insurance, the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group will approach the BTCV. Andy has previous experience of negotiating public liability insurance in conjunction with the BTCV, and he offered to make initial contact with them on behalf of the Forest Town Group (see actions below).

## **10. Addressing all Health & Safety issues (e.g. trained first aider) and securing electronic copies of all relevant MDC policies (e.g. Health & Safety, Equal Opportunities, Child Protection, Data Protection)**

Once again, due to his previous experience, Andy kindly offered to support the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group to consider and address all relevant Health & Safety issues in order to ensure both good practice and full compliance with MDC requirements, including all relevant MDC policies.

## 11. Signing the adopted constitution

Having reached agreement on all of the above matters, the Acting Executive Committee – comprising Lorraine, David, Shlomo, Josh and Alyson, signed the constitution. Thus, the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group was formally constituted on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011.

## 12. Actions arising from this meeting

- a) Andy to send a membership form template to Alyson (as the Acting Membership Secretary)
- b) Alyson to use the template to design and circulate a (draft) membership form, ensuring the form includes a reference to the Data Protection Act, along the lines of: "I accept my data being used as per the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group's data protection policy". For a sample data protection policy see: [http://www.ukwin.org.uk/files/pdf/ukwin\\_data\\_policy.pdf](http://www.ukwin.org.uk/files/pdf/ukwin_data_policy.pdf)
- c) All to feedback to Alyson regarding the draft membership form and data protection policy, and when we are happy with the form and policy, we can begin to formally recruit members! In the mean time we can draw in additional members on an informal basis, i.e. without collecting membership dues until our systems for keeping track of members is in place.
- d) Alyson to design a poster to promote awareness of the Group, and to advertise our next meeting. Alyson to circulate draft for comment and agreement prior to display. Once agreed, posters could be displayed in community venues and notice boards, as part of an effort to raise awareness of the Group and attract members.
- e) Alongside the designing of the promotional poster, the Group should arrange for an e-mail address, FaceBook entry and Wordpress website. Josh to support Shlomo and Lorraine with this, and Shlomo and Lorraine to report progress back to Andy, Alyson and David.
- f) Andy to supply content for the website, e.g. information and photographs relating to Spa Ponds, Maun Valley, Conical Tip, the wolf catcher, etc.
- g) Andy to supply electronic copies of "Annex 2" and all of the necessary MDC policies for appending to the Group's constitution.
- h) Andy to supply Josh with relevant financial templates, including spreadsheets for recording financial accounts and for recording in-kind contributions.
- i) Lorraine, Shlomo and/or Josh to start the ball rolling with regard to opening a Co-operative Bank account as agreed (with Alyson, Lorraine and Josh as signators).
- j) Shlomo to explore no cost / low cost options for a venue for future meetings, e.g. Forest Town Miners Welfare, and report back to fellow Executive Committee members.

## 13. Dates of future meetings

Future meeting could take various forms, e.g. virtual meetings via skype; meetings of the Executive Committee, public meetings. Andy suggested we work towards building the Group's capacity to host an outdoor nature conservation event at Spa Ponds in June, to be supported by NWT. Planning meetings (of the Executive Committee) may be required to help organise public meetings and events. It was agreed that the Group's first meeting that would be open to the public should be held at the end of March, preferably on a Wednesday evening (7 – 9 pm). Communications between meetings would be expected to entail exchanges of e-mail messages and telephone conversations.