

Chairman's review of the year – April 2016 to March 2017

It has been an eventful year!

The proposed Wildlife Site was officially designated Dothill Local Nature Reserve on 9 February 2016. It comprises lakes, pools, streams, woodland and open scrub land. A group of keen volunteers, who hardly knew each other at the time, set about forming a committee, writing a constitution and putting in place all the mechanisms that would allow us to work officially as a Friends Group under the guidance of Telford and Wrekin Council (the landowners) and supported by Wellington Town Council and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. We have links with Wellington Walkers are Welcome, the East Shropshire Ramblers, Friends of Apley Wood and The Severn Tree Trust. A Management Plan is in place and it provides the main reference point for work to be done on the Reserve.

Our first main effort on site was to remove as much of the non-native and highly invasive Himalayan Balsam as we could. This went on for much of the spring and summer! We also did a survey of small mammals, put up bird and bat boxes and made great efforts to protect the swans and their cygnets. We had very successful promotional stands at the Wellington Midsummer Fayre and Dothill Primary School Summer Fete.

Following the resignations of the Chairman and Treasurer on 1 October it was decided by the Committee that Andy Harnell (Vice-Chairman) should become Acting Chairman and Keith Jones (Secretary) would take on the role of Treasurer.

A regular Tuesday morning work party was established. This has proved to be highly successful in building a core of reliable and committed team members, which continues to achieve a considerable amount of practical work around the Reserve. Activities to date include: coppicing, hedge planting and maintenance, opening up neglected fishing pegs, path tidying and restoring, litter picking, repairing fencing, planting native trees and flower bulbs, restoring access around Dothill Pool, reed mace removal, maintaining pool margins, the creation of the 'Henge', the building of 'Dothill Pier' and the installation of a picnic bench at the north end of Tee Lake. We are now engaged in removing Himalayan Balsam again! The water quality in the pools and streams is monitored regularly.

We have recently provided the opportunity for a Saturday morning work group for those who would like to volunteer, but aren't free during week days.

The Friends were winners of a Telford and Wrekin 'Active Lifestyles' Award in October. We have received grants from Wellington Town Council and gained sponsorship from Breedon and Veolia. We have led a walkabout for Year 6 pupils from Dothill Primary School exploring the history of the site to link in with their work on the Victorians. We have hosted a hedge laying course. Guided walks are another significant feature of our public engagement programme.

The group has a professionally produced publicity leaflet. Welcome signs have been put up at the entrances to the site. Our notice board by Tee Lake is refreshed frequently. Our website provides a range of information and the Facebook page gives regular updates of what is happening around the Reserve.

I would like to thank the Friends Committee and the work party volunteers for their enthusiasm, commitment and support during a hugely successful first year.

Andy Harnell (Acting Chairman)