

Chairman's review of the year – April 2019 to March 2020

As we approach the end of another twelve months, I can confirm that the Friends Committee has continued to fulfil all the commitments of the group's Constitution. There are no gaps or major areas of concern and we continue to plan a wide range of activities.

The aims of the Friends of Dothill LNR have not changed: to promote public awareness, to assist with the development and maintenance of the area, to seek grants and funding, to develop the Reserve's potential as an educational resource, to research the history of the site and liaise with the relevant authorities.

Our main achievements

Public awareness

- We now have 112 members who receive a weekly email advising them of work the volunteer groups are doing.
- Over 600 people 'like' our Facebook page and regular bulletins keep them up to date with events. Much positive feedback and followers are keen to send in their photos.
- Our website has received 66,000 views. It is regularly refreshed with photos of volunteering activity and the Reserve's flora and fauna, and now has News, Events, and History tabs and a species list. The 50 Tree Trail, Three Bridge Way, main information leaflet and Reserve map can be downloaded. Field study guides are available FOC to our members.
- Two large interpretation boards have been installed and the notice board updated.
- The outlets for our leaflets are still requiring frequent topping-up. The 50 Tree Trail leaflet continues to be particularly popular; this has been updated to include new paths.
- Telford and Wrekin Council's website lists the Reserve in its A-Z of Services (Nature Reserves); this online information includes downloadable leaflets and links to our website.
- We have organised and led various guided walks.
- The Reserve is still popular with walkers (dog-owners and otherwise) and cyclists. Prior to UK lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic, however, anecdotal evidence suggested that many residents were only vaguely aware of its existence, so we made the following efforts to increase awareness:
 - Wellington Midsummer Fayre - washed out, limited display area in church hall
 - July Open Day
- Promotional stand at idverde's mini-beast safari in August – good weather, 80+ visitors.
- Our displays at Sainsbury's attracted a lot of positive attention.
- The Reserve has featured in both national and local press as well as county publications.

It is pleasant to note that this year we have also received various awards in recognition of the work we have done and the relationships we have built up.

Development and maintenance

Numbers in the Tuesday volunteer work groups have grown; Saturday sessions are on hold due to poor attendance. There has been additional physical help from Sainsbury's, who sent teams as part of their 150th anniversary celebrations, and Ricoh, who turned out in awful weather to clean up the streams. We have also attracted help through support from companies and Council schemes, enabling us to take on some ambitious projects in addition to many smaller tasks. Some examples of work undertaken/ongoing include:

- Path restoration & resurfacing, addressing drainage issues and new path laying – various.
- Oak sapling management – Donnerville Spinney.
- Poplar runner removal (with Sainsbury's) – Tee Lake.
- Himalayan Balsam removal (with Ricoh) – various.
- Cutting back brambles & bracken and removing cleavers – various.
- Clearing overgrowth at entrances, along paths and around signs – various.
- Oak pollarding – The Paddock.
- Dead-hedging – various.
- Litter/debris clearance – Charlton Pool.
- Reed mace removal – Charlton Pool.
- Remove plastic tree supports – various.
- Removing old ironwork/barbed wire – various (some with Sainsbury's).
- Clearing plastic and other litter from the two streams (with Ricoh – LYM7).
- Engaging a contractor to dig out the area in front of the 'snake field' to facilitate laying hard-surfaced path.
- Meadow sampling (with Sainsbury's) – The Paddock and Canal meadow.
- Collection of Yellow Rattle seeds – The Paddock.
- Seeding of Yellow Rattle & Birds Foot Trefoil (with Sainsbury's) – The Paddock.
- Scalping - Severn Drive and park pathways.
- Building several bug hotels, 2 with Sainsbury's – The Paddock.
- Creating woodpiles for wildlife – Paddock Copse.
- Planting 150 hedgerow trees (with Small Woods) – path by Millennium Wood.
- Junior Friends planted 50 holly whips (with Small Woods) – path alongside play area.
- Swan nest protection, island creation and removal of fallen trees – Dothill Pool.
- Fallen tree clearance – from path south of Dothill Pool.
- Monitoring water quality, undertaking surveys and keeping the species list updated.
- Working in co-ordination with contractors to restore the wetland area next to 'Shawbirch' bridge.
- Resuming our programme of coppicing previously neglected hazel.
- Continuing a laid hedge restoration project to enhance tree work done by the Council.
- Liaising with Pearce Environment on restoration works on two pools to improve habitat with a view to encouraging Great Crested Newts to our water bodies.

Grants and other funding

- Further financial assistance from Wellington Town Council, helped by our positive and successful involvement on the Reserve.
- A grant from idverde for a hard-surfaced path construction.
- Receiving the Councillors' Pride Fund, nominated by Karen Tomlinson.
- Financial support from Sainsbury's Telford via collection box.
- Promotional stands in Sainsbury's raised money to help fund work on the Reserve.
- Continued support from the local Co-op via collection box.
- Donation from Wellington Townswomen's Guild in thanks for our presentation.
- Taking part in a joint event with the Dothill School PTA – donation received.
- Leading a Bat Walk with the Wellington Walkers – donation received.
- Sponsorship for a bug hotel from Blair Plumbing.
- The removal of ironwork fencing and barbed wire yielded funds from a scrap metal merchant.

Educational resource

We continue to have a good working relationship with local schools. Highlights include:

- A week-long Outdoor Education programme with Dothill Primary School pupils, with a big increase in attendance on the previous year.
- Hosting a woodcraft event by Small Woods – demonstrating to DPS children and the Ecology students from Charlton School.
- The Junior Friends are still keen to learn and get hands-on, and this year they have planted holly, laid dead-hedges and built bug hotels.
- Individual visits for specific topics.

Some of the volunteers have undertaken training (on equipment – sawmill) and in woodland condition assessment, hedge laying and hedge planting. This works very well, as these skills are then passed on to new volunteers where appropriate.

The '50 Tree Trail' is a learning resource available to everyone at all times.

History

We have completed an outline history of the houses, land use and ownership of the site, together with a piece on the Forester family and Dothill Park. These are published on our website. Research is ongoing.

Liaison

We have liaised with local schools and conducted a programme of events involving, amongst others; ARC, Environment Agency, Small Woods, Wolverhampton University and Wellington Town Council.

Guided walks around the Reserve have been organised for our local group partners, and we have given several talks and presentations about the Reserve, its history and flora & fauna.

We continue to have good relationships via ongoing liaison and regular meetings with SWT, Small Woods, TGSP, Wellington Festival Committee, idverde, Wrekin Forest Partnership; Canal & River Trust and other local Friends groups.

The regular site 'walkabouts' and follow-up meetings remain vital to maintaining the positive support the Friends receive from Telford and Wrekin Council, Wellington Town Council and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

The Friends group continues to flourish because of an enthusiastic, committed team who share the same goals. New Committee members were elected at the 2019 AGM, with some new roles being created, reflecting the need for a wider pool of resources at Committee level. Each member of the group plays an invaluable part in ensuring that the Reserve continues to thrive and I thank them all for what has been achieved.

Jerry Williams