

MINUTES OF FORH COMMITTEE MEETING

Held on Tuesday 24th April 2018 at 1 Dundas Avenue, Dudley, DY2 7TJ at 7:30pm

Present: Andrew Cook (AC), Bob Duncan (BD), Lynn Poulton (LP), Mike Poulton (MP)
Wildlife Trust representative - Tom Hartland-Smith (THS), invited guest - Josie Cook (JC)

Apologies: Jane Tavener, Simon Atkinson

Minutes of Previous Meeting: were accepted as a true record, proposed by Andrew Cook, seconded by Bob Duncan

Matters Arising: none

Treasurer's Report:

BD informed the committee that the subscription for the FORH website has been paid for the next 12 months.

Current Account: £129.63 and £54.75 cash carried forward

Conservation:

The hedge planted in the winter of 2016 along the boundary of Portway Farm as part of the 'Awards for All' events is establishing well, and where there were gaps in the original planting, these have now been filled with hawthorn whips donated by the Wildlife Trust.

A staggered, double-row of native shrubs have been planted at the entrance onto the hillside from Kennford Close to deter unauthorised vehicles from accessing the site – a local dog walker has donated £40 to FORH towards the cost of materials for this.

Steady progress is being made at eradicating ivy, honeysuckle and garden rubbish from land to the rear of gardens along Kennford Close/Waddham Close. This work is ongoing and will resume once more next winter. We are grateful to Andy Beaton, a local resident, for his assistance with this task.

Our gratitude also goes to Richard Southwell, caretaker of the Edith Harper Legacy, who has purchased for FORH, two litter-pickers and 5lt. of Roundup Pro Active from the legacy.

THS informed the committee that 25 Alder Buckthorn and Buckthorn have been planted in various places across Portway Hill in the hope of attracting Brimstone Butterflies.

Regular litter-picks have taken place on the Portway Hill site – BD and MP have delivered letters to five local businesses along Wolverhampton Road, KFC, Cookhouse and Pub, BP Service Station, Travelodge and Premier Inn, appealing for a donation to FORH towards the purchase of litter-pickers, black bags, hoops etc., and requesting permission to use their refuse bins to dispose of any litter collected. Kerry Powell, the Street Cleaning Supervisor at Serco Ltd. Shidas Lane depot has donated a box of litter bags to FORH and stated that any full bags will be collected, providing they are given prior notice, clear instructions where they can be found, and as long as they are stacked on the roadside.

BD has made a 'tree popper' for the removal of small hawthorn and other invasive trees and shrubs. In trials this has proved to be very effective resulting in virtually all of the hawthorn and bramble scrub being removed from the WT owned land.

Several events have been arranged for the coming months. Information can be found on the FORH website. We are grateful to Tom Hartland-Smith from the Wildlife Trust for setting them up, and to Nick Horton, who has once again agreed to lead a Dawn Chorus event in early May.

Local Access Forum

MP reported that two waymarker posts on the Portway Hill site are missing and two of the other posts have been uprooted.

Adam James (AJ) Sandwell MBC - said that the Country Parks team may have posts, but if not the contractors may have to undertake the work as an 'add on' to another scheme. MP said that the Friends of Rowley Hills Group were willing to install the posts if the necessary materials can be provided.

AJ advised that he does not have any more waymarker discs, however Wayne Moore ordered them last time and so may be able to assist. Digging deeper holes and using concrete lintels in a 'T' or '+' formation will make the posts securer in future. Transportation Dept.to progress.

MP informed the Local Access Forum meeting held in January at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury, that fly-tipped conifer stumps and branches were partially blocking the Public Right of Way access onto the hillside from the top of Portway Hill. BD has since moved them off the path and piled it to the side for burning in the autumn.

At the LAF meeting mentioned above MP enquired about the rumour that Dudley Golf Club may be selling off some of their land. The response from council was that DGC have made an approach to Sandwell MBC but no further information was forthcoming at this stage.

The waymarker posts on Dudley Golf Course are still not clearly marked – the golf club are aware that walkers are straying from PROW because of lack of clarity as to where the right of way is.

MP enquired about the possibility of installing bollards or a concrete block across the entrance onto the hillside from Kennford Close to prevent vehicle access to the site from this point. In early April a 4-wheeled vehicle has been onto Portway Hill and churned up sections of the PROW, leaving deep, water-filled ruts making it difficult for walkers using the paths. This vehicle attempted to drive up the recently opened-up track through the old quarries but had to turn back before it reached the top.

Council response- Whilst there may be landowner complexities, Transportation are to investigate.

It has since been pointed out by AC that there are also tracks made by a 4-wheeled vehicle accessing the land from the top of St Brades Close.

MP enquired about the removal of barbed-wire along the top of the broken-down fence near the bus stop at the top of Portway Hill. There were mixed feelings about its removal unless something is put there to replace it.

AGM

The date for the AGM has been set for Saturday June 2nd. MP said that he would approach Oakham Library to see if the meeting can be held there.

JC suggested posters could be put up to advertise the AGM at Oakham Library, Blackheath Library, Regent Road Co-op and the newsagent at the bottom of Tower Road.

AOB:

In January of this year the whole of the Portway Hill site was designated as a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) by Sandwell MBC. This designation provides a certain amount of protection from development. SINC sites form an important part of the Borough's environmental infrastructure along with green space and Local Nature Reserves. They contribute to the health, environmental wellbeing and overall attractiveness of the borough.

In February a meeting took place to discuss the future of the Portway Hill site at the Wildlife Trust for B&BC headquarters at Centre of the Earth, in Winson Green. Present at the meeting were Georgia Stokes (Chief Executive of WT), Simon Atkinson (Conservation Manager WT), and Tom Hartland-Smith (Senior Conservation Officer WT), Peter Seal, (Chairman of Butterfly Conservation West Midland branch), Richard Southwell, (holder of the Edith Harper Legacy), and MP, representing FORH. The outcome of this meeting was that

the Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation have agreed to jointly fund the Land Registry costs to determine the ownership of land on Portway Hill. Simon Atkinson stated that he would approach someone he knew at South Staffs Water Works to attempt to find out who owns the old quarry land above the WT site.

MP reported that leaflets are now available from Dudley Museum relating to the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project - Geosite 39 relates to Rowley Hills and Geosite 23 relates to Blue Rock Quarry on the Portway Hill site.

Thanks were given to BD for hosting this meeting.

Date of Next Meeting:

The next meeting is the AGM. This has been arranged for Saturday 2nd June. _