

# MINUTES OF FORH COMMITTEE MEETING

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022 at 11:00am

The Cairn, Wildlife Trust land, Portway Hill

## **Present:**

Andrew Beaton (AB), Andrew Cook (AC), Josie Cook (JC), Bob Duncan (BD), Lynn Poulton (LP), Mike Poulton (MP), Jane Tavener (JT), Julia Morris (JM)

## **1) Apologies:**

None.

## **2) Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

As this was the first FORH committee meeting held since December 2019, the minutes of the previous meeting were considered irrelevant. Instead, minutes of the AGM held in September 2021 were referred to.

## **3) Matters Arising:**

Publications: MP passed around a first draft of the Geology Trail Guide. The updated version is currently with the design and print company, (The Worx t/a Need Flyers), and it will be in print by the end of this month. 1000 copies of A2-folded have been ordered at a cost of £250. This has been paid out of the £5000 grant, received in February 2020 by the FORH from GM2LF.

MP reported that in a recent meeting with Helen Trueman of GM2LF, it was discussed how the grant could be spent. He informed her about the upcoming Geology Trail Guide, the Netherton Tunnel and Pepperpots Walk guide to follow, with more trail guides/booklets, leaflets etc. under consideration. She said that providing the money is used to benefit the local community in the GM2LF catchment area, and records and receipts are kept of how it is spent, the grant can be used as we think fit.

JC commented that although the Portway Hill site contains UNESCO Global Geosite 23-Blue Rock Quarry and it is in the Sandwell area, there is no mention of it on the Sandwell Council website. While recently speaking to her local MP, she had said that she would provide the MP with a copy of the upcoming Geological Trail Guide along with other relevant information about the area.

JM informed the committee about an App. called Geotourist.com which is free to download to your mobile phone. With this App, voice recordings, bird recordings, photographs etc. from the area, could be made available to others who also have the App. This will be further investigated.

## **4) Treasurer's Report:**

Community Account at 13-04-2022 contains £4,777.77; Petty Cash - £0

Outstanding payments to be deducted from the above are a cheque for £15 made payable to Jane Tavener for the FORH website, and £250 payable to Need Flyers for 1000 copies of The Geology Trail Guide.

BD informed the committee that he intends to relinquish the Treasurer's post at the next AGM. Committee members were invited to consider taking over this post.

## **5) Conservation Work Update:**

MP informed the committee that the hawthorn clearance work in the top meadow continued during the winter/spring of 2021/22. Another considerable area of grassland has been exposed, whilst ensuring that 'islands of hawthorn' are retained for the benefit of nesting birds and as cover for small mammals. The cuttings were burned or mounded up into piles to create habitats for invertebrates, spiders and foraging birds. A path was cut through the woodland, linking the bottom corner of this meadow with Portway Hill. Work on this project is still ongoing.

During the early part of this year, the overgrown 80m-long stretch of the old double-hedgerow known locally as 'Church Walk', has been reopened by FORH volunteers. JT reported that favourable comments have been received on Facebook about this.

The old plastic mesh fencing along the pavement on Portway Hill has now been removed in its entirety, and grateful thanks go to Sandwell MBC Recycling Centre for collecting and disposing of the waste for us. A 2m-wide strip of irregularly cut vegetation is now being maintained by FORH along the fence line near the summit of Portway Hill, to prevent bramble and other vegetation from creeping out onto the pavement.

## **6) A.O.B.**

MP reported that the Grade 2 Listed Building, Portway Farm, including 1 acre of land, is currently up for sale.

MP informed the committee that, on behalf of the FORH, BD has secured the rental of the old brick built MEB sub-station building on Portway Hill, for an annual peppercorn rent of £50 through Western Power. The building will now be restored and made secure and used to store tools etc.

LP commented that the owners of the riding stables along Oakham Road are in the security business and it might be worth approaching them about the security of the building.

AC and JC informed the committee that a parcel of land to the rear of Blue Rock Place is/was up for sale. They also informed the committee that the original path to the rear of St Brades Close is now lost due to the felling of the belt of trees in May/June 2021. Because of this, a new desire line path has occurred through the wet area around the tree felling. As far as they are aware, no survey for nesting birds was made prior to the felling, and no attempt has been made to clear the felled trees by the landowner. Sandwell MBC has been made aware of the tree felling and the potential fire hazard, but they are powerless to do anything about it because the land is in private ownership.

MP informed the committee that the application by Dudley Golf Club to build houses on two separate areas on the golf course side of Oakham Road has been turned down. It is not known whether the golf club have objected to this decision.

With nothing further to discuss, the meeting was formally closed at 11.40am.