

FRIENDS OF PUTNOE WOOD and MOWSBURY HILLFORT

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 16 February 2016 in the Committee Room at Mowsbury Club House

Members present: Lynn Caudrey, Martin Fannon, Sue Fannon, Helen Miller, Dave Parratt, Diana Readhead, John Wallace, Marion Wallace, Helen Wilkie, John Wilkie, Andy Wilkins (Chair), Alison Wilkins.

1 Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Jon Bishop, Margaret Ibbett, Jane Warner and Chris Wedge

2 Minutes of last meeting held on 8 December 2015

These were agreed as an accurate record.

3 Update from Green Space Officers

Andy reported on behalf of Jon and Danny.

3.1 Mowsbury Hillfort Conservation Management Plan. Deferred following departure of Jane Moore.

3.2 Community Green Flag status application. Deferred following Jane's departure.

3.3 BNHS recorders findings. No report received to date.

3.4 Putnoe Wood. Danny is very pleased with the work carried out to date. Future work plans reported under item 5.

3.5 Borough funding and support for volunteer groups. Andy had received assurances from the Council that budget and staffing cuts would not impact on our work as a volunteer Friends group. Members present agreed that we will need to adapt to accommodate the new staffing structures including by taking on more of the management work to assist the Country Park Guardians, and we will need to discuss with them how best to achieve this.

4 Mowsbury Hillfort Friends Vision. Lynn and John Wallace reported on a meeting at Mowsbury Hillfort on Tuesday 9 February with David Kenny from Historic England, Sarah Clarkson and Frances Prince from Natural England, Geoff Saunders Archaeology Officer from Bedford Borough Council, Jon Bishop from Bedford Borough Council, with Lynn and John Wallace representing the Friends Group. The notes Lynn and John took at this meeting are attached to these minutes. In the light of their report and in accordance with a suggestion from History England, members present agreed to set up a small working group to draft a document setting out the Friends' vision for the Hillfort, which will also include identification of key issues and proposed actions to realise the vision. Membership will comprise Lynn Caudrey, Helen Miller, Dave Parratt, and John Wilkie. Members thanked Lynn and John for their work.

5 Future tasks and events. John Wallace reported.

5.1 Putnoe Wood – requests from Danny:

- Continuation of work on paths and provide a 1 meter clearance at the edges to facilitate brush cutter management, including by cutting down small saplings to ground level.
- Clearance following tree felling
- Bramble management

5.2 Mowsbury Hillfort – requests from Jon following meeting at Hillfort on 9 February:

- Clearance of 10m stretch of brambles on north side to enable easier interpretation of the ditch.

- Old Orchard south-west corner – clearance of triangular patch beyond that already cleared.

All clearance tasks must cease at the end of February because of birds nesting.

- 6 Update on Graze Hill, Freemans Common, Renhold Green Corridor and Petition.** Andy circulated maps showing the sites for possible development under the Local Plan 2032 in the Parish of Ravensden. Members discussed the impact of these on the Renhold Brook Green Corridor which includes Graze Hill, Freemans Common, Mowsbury Hill Meadow and Mowsbury Golf Club. At its September 2016 meeting, the Borough Council Executive Committee is due to decide which if any of these areas, and others proposed elsewhere in the Borough, will go forward to the Planning stage. Andy gave details of an e-Petition to reject the sale and inclusion of Freemans Common into the Local Plan.

Andy drew members’ attention to the Mowsbury Hillfort Scoping Study produced in 2009 by Albion Archaeology for Bedford Borough Council and available via the Borough Council and the Friends websites. This includes Mowsbury Hill Meadow within the Hillfort site defined by the scoping study, and shows part of the meadow as within the Scheduled Ancient Monument. The possibility of registering the Meadow as a Community Green Asset within the Borough was discussed. If an application was accepted, it would place the Meadow on the Register of Assets for 5 years during which time it would be subject to a 6 month notice period of intention to change its usage. An application by the Friends Group to register Mowsbury Hill Meadow as a Community Green Asset was proposed by Martin Fannon, Seconded by John Wallace and agreed by all members present.

- 7 Friends’ 5th Birthday Celebrations**

John Wallace said that the Four Seasons Café, Mowsbury Park would be pleased to host this as for the 2015 celebrations. Members present agreed, with the event held as our next meeting.

- 8 Financial Matters**

John Wilkie presented the latest figures:

Cash in Bank	£795.36
Petty Cash	£0.00
TOTAL	£795.36

Transactions since last report:

Income

Sale of notelets	£114.00
Donations as Wassail	£209.00

Outgoings

Wassail expenses	£76.36
TOTAL	£76.38

Liabilities

Unused Ward Funding	£63.24
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The total profit from the Wassail was £132.62. It was agreed that 50% of this will be offered to Hemlock Morris to donate to their preferred charity and Andy will contact Jon Bishop to ask for details. If no charity is identified, 50% will be given to a charity chosen by the Friends.

John drew members’ attention to the new facility for counting coinage prior for deposit at NatWest bank. If the machine rejects any coins, it will result in the sum recorded on the deposit slip being less than the total counted by the depositor prior to banking.

9 Any Other Business.

None

10 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 12 April, Four Seasons Café, Mowsbury Park..

Annex A

Meeting at Mowsbury Hillfort, Tuesday 9 February 2016 @ 10.30

Attending were: David Kenny from Historic England, Sarah Clarkson and Frances Prince from Natural England, Geoff Saunders Archaeology Officer from Bedford Borough Council, Jon Bishop from Bedford Borough Council, Lynn Caudrey and John Wallace from the Friends Group.

1. Everyone was pleased with the Friend's work in clearing and opening up the site.
2. It was noted that the tree belt west of Mowsbury Hill Meadow provided good screening for the site and was worth retaining.
3. Some of the ash debris from the Wassail braziers had been deposited on the edge of Meadow and it was suggested this should be deposited further away from the monument.
4. Natural England suggested we look at ways of removing grass clippings from site rather than spreading them at the edges of the meadow, especially at the top near the ponds. Money should be available from the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) to pay for baling and dumping the grass.
5. Historic England are relaxed about mature trees on the site that are upright and stable. Only leaning trees and those liable to wind-throw need be felled.
6. The Inner Island would be easier to interpret without the dead hedges around it. The removal of visual barriers would restore the openness of the site. Geoff Saunders and Natural England said habitat piles of cut brush would be preferable to dead hedges generally. Perhaps some of the cut material should be removed and burnt out on the meadow. Portable fire platforms have been used on other sites. This allows burning to proceed without damaging the ground archaeology.
7. Natural England and Historic England appreciated the opening up of a view point north from fishpond 2 including the ditch beyond the dead hedge. They suggested we clear a 10 metre length of the bramble which lies on the north side of the ditch. It will allow for easier interpretation of the ditch, which was thought to be within the scheduled area. This will provide a better view of the nearby small trees at the edge of the golf course and the landscape beyond.
8. There was discussion about the fish ponds. There is money in the HLS to pay for deepening the ponds to provide better habitat. Any work would need to be preceded by an archaeological survey to ascertain whether any medieval or earlier material remains in the pond. Natural England and Historic England said the archaeology should take preference and any work done should be because of an archaeological benefit. It was agreed it would be of benefit to survey the ponds by core samples to find out if there are any medieval or earlier archaeological evidence remaining. It would also be useful to core the moat at the same time to establish whether archaeological deposits remain. Up to 100 core samples was suggested. A hydrology survey could be done at the same time to assess where the water on the site was coming from and if it is practical or advisable to try to raise the water levels in the pond. There was some doubt as to whether the leat supplies a great deal of water to the ponds and moat these days. Further action would depend on the outcome of the surveys. Preparation of the management plan for the site, the core sampling, the hydrology sampling and providing interpretation information could be funded through the £32,000 provided for the HLS agreement. Natural England will draft proposals for the

hydrology survey. All agreed that careful financial management was needed to ensure the maximum amount of use was made of the HLS funding.

9. It was suggested there was an opportunity to open a viewpoint to the east of the monument to give a more open impression of the site.
10. Scrub is not good for archaeology, but it was generally agreed to retain the cherry plums and hawthorn around the southern and south western perimeter as they provide shelter from the prevailing south westerly wind and create a micro climate within the hillfort. Natural England suggested some mature trees could be selectively coppiced to produce lower and bushy growth and prevent wind-throw. More light would then be let in to encourage ground cover such as grass and ground ivy to grow, which would stabilise the ground and thus aid the archaeology. All the elder can be cleared.
11. In the Old Orchard (south) Natural England suggested some large cherry plums or hawthorn could be coppiced back to new growth so that they would regenerate to fill gaps as the old trees gradually die and fall. This is more or less in line with what we had started to do there.
12. In the eastern end of the Old Orchard (south) some glades could be made in the scrub area to let in more light. Areas of 5-6 metre diameter could be coppiced. Natural England agreed that coppicing some large trees between the two orchards to let more light into the eastern orchard would be OK. Coppicing of blackthorn to be limited to not larger than 90mm dia.
13. On the south west corner of the site, clearance of a triangular patch beyond where we have already cleared can be tackled. This would mean clearing all elder and blackthorn up to 90mm diameter.
14. A viewing point from the raised walkway looking south would be good. Viewpoints could feature in a management plan.
15. Now the site is more open, more mapping of the site is possible. This could be done by the Young Archaeologists. Historic England might then also look to see if the scheduling boundary needs to be changed.
16. Rabbits are a big problem for the archaeology and thought will need to be given about how to discourage them. If they are cleared, the burrows would need to be back filled to prevent re-infestation. Geoff suggested some inert material such as sharp sand could be used. There is no funding for this as landowners already have a duty to control rabbit populations on their land.
17. The interpretation board at the bottom of Mowsbury Hill Meadow was welcomed and all agreed further interpretation boards would be helpful for the monument and site generally. David considered this might be done within the scheduled site if it aided interpretation for the public. Scheduled monument consent would be required, but would not be a problem. An additional panoramic interpretation board linking other Hillfort monuments and relevant information would be helpful. This could be located at the top of the meadow near the monument sign and bench, adjacent to the main entrance to the site.
18. Jeremy Oetgen has sent a two page statement to Historic England outlining how a management plan/vision statement might be taken forward. Historic England thinks that Jane Moore had other surveys done that could be included in the plan. Natural England will be responsible for commissioning the management plan. Natural England can also include a scrub management plan. Frances Prince of NE gave Jon Bishop a copy of the HLS agreement and he will let us have a copy of it. The cost of the plans is to come out of the £32,000 of HLS funding.
19. Historic England suggested the Friends should prepare their own vision document for the site.