

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of
The Friends of Train Wood and Marriott's Way
Wednesday 17 September 2014
at the Norman Centre, Bignold Road, Norwich**

In Attendance:

Alan Cabbage, Adrian Holmes, Wyn Hurst, Lucy Galvin, Nick Stone, Jan Middleton, John Batley, Stuart McPherson, Dan Knights, James Davis, Alan Jackman, Christine O'Hanlon, Susan Cabbage, John Elliott, Shirley Batley, Sarah Hamill, Jane Munro, Angela Reynolds, Gordon Reynolds, Anne Harris, Tony Gibbons, Anne Pears

Paul Holley, Natural Areas Officer for Norwich City Council, who was to give a talk entitled 'The Nature of a Small Woodland in the Heart of a City and its Value to City and County Residents', was unable to come to the meeting due to illness.

John Batley of Friends of Norwich City Station gave a talk about the history of the station, which once covered an area of 60 acres. He explained how he was inspired to get a group together to try and find remains of the station. Initially there was nothing visible but the group, digging by hand, have so far cleared 95 ft of platform and other archaeological remains of the station.

FONCS would like to carry on with their excavations but are not allowed to at present by County Council. JB does a weekly litter pick, but the wood is becoming overgrown and neglected, is attracting unsavoury elements, and people are less keen on visiting it. JB would like to see the wood tidied again, turn the platform area into a wild garden and have interpretation signs around the site to explain FONCS' findings. Their group have been given a vintage M&GM railway bench which they would like to site in the area. He pointed out that while they were clearing the wood with the approval of Norwich City Council there was less vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, and there were more visitors.

Jan Middleton facilitated the raffle and was thanked by the committee.

AGM

Apologies:

Theresa Belton, Rachel Watson, Tom Foxe, Arthur Thompson, Richard Bearman, Chris Low, Caroline Jessett, Richard Edwards

Minutes of the previous meeting

The meeting approved the minutes from the previous year's AGM on 18/9/13.

Questions: John Elliott asked what difference a designation of Asset of Community Value makes – the Chairman explained that for five years the owners would not be able to dispose of the property without notifying FOTW; in the eventuality of a sale FOTW would be invited to bid for it; an ACV signals to developers a strong interest and involvement among the local community and would make it less attractive to them. FOTW could re-apply for a further designation of ACV at the end of the 5 years.

Chairs Report

See report attached.

In response to the chairs report Professor John Elliott felt that the lack of response from some elected representatives at county and city level had been unsatisfactory. He felt that FOTW would have been justified in exposing this via the media. LG and AC had felt it better to try and work with members rather than antagonise them. The chair reminded members that FOTW had no political affiliations and that our members are from all parties or in some cases none.

Treasurer's report

The treasurer presented his report to the meeting. After expenses the balance in the Train Wood account is £647 – AH pointed out that much of this may be needed to pay solicitors' search fees.

The Treasurer's report and the group's accounts were approved by the meeting.

A grant from City Council of £490 has finally been agreed for this year following deferment last year – this should be paid soon.

Election of Management Committee

The chair moved to elect a committee but JE sought to make a comment prior to the formal nomination.

JE suggested that a member of the committee should take responsibility solely for keeping members up to date on a much more regular basis with what the group were doing, even if just to explain delays and frustrations. This should be a separate function from that of Publicity Officer. Sue Cabbage nominated JE for this post, NS seconded and JE was elected by the meeting.

NS pointed out that Facebook and the FOTW website have been updated regularly; but not everyone looks at them. He was thanked by the chair for his very professional website and his contribution over the past year, along with his offer of future help.

AH proposed that the committee be opened up to people who were prepared to come and help for example with a specific event – this was agreed by the members.

SC proposed holding regular social events for members.

The chair pointed out that three members of the committee, Wyn Hurst secretary, Nick Stone Publicity officer and Tish Kirkham had stood down consequently the remaining committee members were able to stand again and all had shown their willingness to do so. The chair thanked all three committee members who had stood down for their valued contributions in the past year.

Christine O'Hanlon proposed that the remainder of the existing committee should be voted en bloc; Angela Reynolds seconded this and it was agreed by the members. The committee members elected are Alan Cabbage, Adrian Holmes, Lucy Galvin, Jan Middleton, John Batley, Stuart McPherson and Richard Edwards. There had been no proposal for Hon Secretary or Publicity officer for the group. The members were requested to ask among their friends or if anyone at the meeting was interested to have a chat with the Chairman after the meeting.

Where to Next a discussion led by Lucy Galvin of the Management Committee:

Lucy posed the question what are FOTW core aims and what type of organisation did we wish to become?

Tony Gibbons, chairman of Norwich & District Anglers' Association:

Pointed out that he had seen a great deterioration in Train Wood over the past three years. It appeared not to have been maintained; it is an eyesore and needs development by owner before the Anglers' Trust will give support and before its members will be happy to use it again. The NDAA has a large membership with links to the Broads Angling Strategy Group (BASG), FOTW could get 20,000 member support from NDAA – have suggested to the council that Train Wood is an excellent site for developing as a leisure area – shops, restaurant, loos etc – suggested that an investment of £250,000 could bring in £5 million a year. Would send letter to support the aims of FOTW - can possibly help with insurance.

It was suggested FOTW put a link to the Anglers' Trust on the website and add it to the list of sponsors and

supporters.

JE – while walking in the area he had been speaking to employees of Norse Norwich, who have good ideas about how to manage river banks to make more accessible for fishing and are keen to do it but are apparently not allowed to by City Council.

Although the path through the wood is now wider than before, showing it has been in regular use, management of the path has lapsed and work needs doing on it. The concern was that more the wood is neglected the more people will stay away from the area. JE agreed to write to City Council about the group's concerns over the management of the path and the river bank.

The meeting was in favour of the core aims as described in our constitution i.e. keeping the wood in public ownership and available as an asset for all its various user's cyclists, walkers, fishermen etc. LG reiterated that the group need to build up a management plan and estimate costs before negotiating a lease. A draft proposal is being worked on for submission to Norfolk County Council in December.

LG then spoke about Group entity, i.e. the type of organization we wish to see FOTW become:

Kate Swade from Shared Assets, a consultancy advising the management group, sent the following spectrum of options for FOTW to consider:

1) Remain as a campaign group

The wood has been saved for now. The Friends can keep a watching brief and if the council tries to sell the wood again, mobilise another campaign.

Pros

- Easier to mobilise against something than take management responsibility for something
- Track record in campaigning
- Low admin costs

Cons

- Wood remains on the disposal list
- Council has clearly asked for a positive solution

2) Facilitate a third party taking on ownership / lease of the wood

Support a third party, eg Norwich Fringe or the Land Trust to take a lease on the wood from the council. Continue to act as a friends group, scrutinising their activities and organising volunteers

Pros

- No need to constitute; no formal responsibilities

Cons

- May be hard to attract third party to play this role
- Less control if that organisation changes priorities, gets into difficulty
- Less control over direction of the site
- Harder to raise money if the Friends have no formal role or security

3) Friends take on lease; coordinate management

Friends act as the governing and accountable body for the site; take responsibility for raising money, coordinating management activities etc

Pros

- Control; ability to set direction of the site and develop it as the community wants
- Easier to raise money with formal role and "ownership" through the lease

Cons

- More responsibility means more work and administration
- Business plan and fundraising strategy needed

- What happens at the end of the lease?

4) Form community owned body to buy freehold of land

Constitute formally, and raise the capital (£25,000?) needed to buy the wood outright from the council. Hold a community share issue (see <http://communityshares.org.uk>) and also raise other funds from grants and if necessary, loans.

Pros

- Brings site into community ownership in perpetuity
- Build on existing community momentum
- Community shares would create genuinely community owned site
- May be easier to raise remainder of funding if community has committed to purchase
- Control over what happens and future direction of site

Cons

- Business plan and ongoing revenue generation will still be needed
- Community shares create administration burden, which comes with costs

Christine O'H pointed out that in the TW area the community voice is marginalised and local amenities have been diminishing as they are closed and not replaced; an example being the former St Augustine's swimming pool. It's important therefore that this amenity isn't lost and that the powers that be are made aware of local feeling about the wood.

LG suggested that a 5th option ie to start another petition for City Council to take ownership of the wood from County Council; FOTW would be the agent for its management. Members were asked to vote on the 5 proposals and the majority voted for the 5th option, with option no 4 (FOTW buying the land) as the preferred second option.

NS suggested finding other organisations who would support option 5 - Tony Gibbons of NDAA was in favour of no 5 and was sure that FOTW would gain support from the Broads Authority, the Norwich Tourism Board and the Environment Agency.

AC: said the committee would:

Circulate to members a list of options for the future role for FOTW and suggestions from the floor of tonight's meeting in the draft minutes.

He suggested putting email addresses of committee members on material we send out – WH to email committee members to make sure they're happy with this.

Formulate a management proposal and circulate it to members.

Need comments from members at the meeting, asked them to pass on minutes to friends for ideas and stir up interest to bring in more members and support.

Date of next AGM:

Wed 16th Sept 2015

AOB:

On behalf of the members Angela Reynolds thanked the committee for all they had done in the past year.

