



MINUTES – Friends of Lye Valley Annual General Meeting
Bullington Community Centre, Thursday 25th July 2024

1. Judy Webb, chair of FoLV extended a welcome to all for the 11th FoLV AGM.
2. 17 members attended. Apologies were received from Jennie Hopkins, Lucy Radford,
3. Minutes of 2023 AGM were displayed. There were no questions or matters arising. They were accepted by the meeting.
4. Treasurer's report. The accounts for the year 1 Apr 2023 – 31 Mar 2024 were displayed. The treasurer clarified that donations in this period (£452) included an exceptional £210 from sales of the 2024 calendar. It was also noted that insurance for volunteers is held by Oxford City Council as FoLV is a recognised "Friends" group. The accounts were accepted by the meeting.
5. Election of officers. As the current officers expressed their willingness to stand and as there were no other candidates, a vote was not taken. All committee members will therefore continue in office.
6. Membership contribution proposal. Attendees were asked to vote between:
Current: £10 individual, £15 family, zero for student/unwaged.
Proposed: £15 individual, £20 family, £5 student, zero unwaged.
A clear majority voted for the (new) proposed fees. There were no votes against so the proposal was carried *nem con*.

7. Chair's report for August 2023 – July 2024

Volunteer Work in the Valley

Regular Wednesday morning work parties have carried on all year (21 people on my list, average 8 per week). We had the help of Oxford City Council in autumn with some machine cutting of the fen and necessary tree felling work and help from the Oxford Conservation Volunteers for two Sunday sessions of the inevitable raking that follows scything or cutting. In addition there were 3 sessions with corporate volunteers (17) from Amey Infrastructure Company. We estimate more than 1000 hours of volunteer work over the last year. Jobs include scything, raking, chopping scrub, digging out problem plants, dam building and repair, making signs, seed collecting and seed spreading. Some of this goes on in the private South fen section as well as the North fen. Big thanks are due to all volunteers who turn out regularly in cold, rain and sun and are kind enough to do whatever I ask of them. Very wet days have much increased (Climate Change). Above all, a big thanks is due to Rod for coordinating and doing major amounts of the stream work you will hear about in his talk. Keeping our peat reserve wet and carbon store safe is a very important part of volunteer work.

It's volunteer work that keeps the valley biodiverse and looking beautiful...it is astounding how much regular time it takes to simulate the **natural light grazing** by stock of cows or horses the fen habitat needs but which is now impossible.

Flower numbers and insects depend on the cutting work. The last count of the Marsh Helleborine orchids in the north fen area was **1,274 flower spikes** which I think is pretty stunning. Grass of Parnassus is in flower already, a full month early (Climate Change). Insect numbers are down (as everywhere).

Volunteer Tools and storage. There has been much committee time spent this year discussing this, planning and accumulating money to pay for a **locked tool storage container** to be located in the Peat Moors Recreation area to save Rod and I having to bring tools weekly in vehicles. We wear out tools at a good rate, so replacements are always needed.

Educational use of the Valley

Jamie Walker (who started as volunteer when a student) has run two sessions for **Wood Farm Primary school** children in the valley featuring experiencing wetland plants like water mint and butterworts and talking about peat. Recently he and the school children did rush and reed weaving in the valley. He plans a 'Peat-Fest' on **Sat 9th Nov** this year at the Lye Valley/ Bullingdon Community Centre with talks and walks. '**RE-PEAT**' is the organisation coordinating such Peat-fests in other wetlands.

2 University students have had projects in the valley. Sarah (Brookes Uni) studied reptiles - Slow-worms for her undergrad project and discovered we had lots along with grass snakes. We are grateful for her records of these protected species. Student Daniel has carried on some recording since then. Alessandro has been studying our native and urban snails.

Prof Adrian Parker of Brookes Uni again brought his undergraduate students to the valley last autumn to teach them peat-coring techniques. They took away a peat core for lab analysis. Previously he has radio-carbon dated the bottom of a peat core and shown that the fen started forming 14,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age.

In future **Brookes Architecture students** will be looking at the Lye Valley as a case study of the relationship between development and this important Nature area nearby.

We do not yet have the capacity to engage with educational activities for secondary level students, but two did come with parents to do litter picking for Duke of Edinburgh awards. The committee is looking for help to expand this. Anyone interested should contact me at friendsoflyevalley@yahoo.com.

Developments

The biggest workload for the committee this year has been the application by the **Churchill Hospital** for a rebuild to produce a new **Clinical Bio-manufacturing Facility (CBF)** on a site only 82m distant from west valley fen high level spring line. We are into our **third round of objections**. A huge amount of work has been involved but I must acknowledge with thanks all the help from Mark who publishes the Headington Heritage blog. He is very skilled at analysis of complex planning documents and explanatory graphics. The application designs for dealing with the site run-off water have been inaccurate and inadequate to protect the fen's water supply. Also, we now fear that the SUDS design could easily make the current flooding along Footpath 80 at the site edge worse. It has already been over grown and impassible for nearly a year. Council and volunteers will try to clear vegetation on **8th August**. I have requested a site meeting with the Churchill planners to look at this off-site impact. This rebuilding is only the first phase of big re-developments on the east side of the hospital site, so we expect further re-building applications to come.

The **Warren Crescent** Development (10 houses adjacent to the North Fen) is built and occupied. The SUDS infiltration 50m long soakaway swale is not yet being maintained by the council and the inadequate fence needs replacing. The promised water testing should be happening in boreholes and the valley springs to monitor the effects of this development. Despite asking, they have failed to produce any results.

The agreed development of two houses at **2 Dynham Place off Girdlestone Road** should be starting soon.

The firm of **hydrogeologists** paid to study and report to the City Council on the North fen's water levels and an attempt to map more accurate water catchment limits should be reporting soon. The aim is to see how much more housing development is possible in the rain catchment.

We still await a decision from the planners at the City Council on the two-house proposal up the slope from the South Fen SSSI unit (Land West of 75 Town Furze)

We remain opposed to any further loss of green spaces within the fen water catchment. **The committee could very much do with more help from anyone skilled in planning issues and planning legislation as we are dealing with a big workload.**

Sponge Headington

This is a new project we have started up with representatives of 6 Headington Churches. I gave a talk to the representatives at the Bullingdon Centre, followed by a site walk to appreciate the valley. The aim is to encourage house owners within the natural rain catchment and the road drain catchment to interrupt roof downpipes to install water butts, rain gardens and soakaways from roof downpipes to get rainwater into the ground and not running off to the road drain that emits in the valley and causes massive erosion. The coordinator is Anna Brooke. They will be leafleting every house and are planning a water walk pilgrimage from Headington all the way down Lye Brook and Boundary Brook to the Donnington area where it meets the Thames. Let me know by email if you want further information.

Flood Alleviation Award entry

We submitted all the work done on log dams and bank defence in the Lye Brook north fen area to a competition for such schemes, in our case the reduction of flooding from Boundary brook in the Florence park area. A video is on our website. Competition results should be available soon!.

Public Appreciation of the Valley Nature Reserve

I recently gave a guided tour to a group looking at **public access to SSSIs without causing damage** to the nature interest of the site. They were interested in all the issues we have to deal with!

We receive many appreciative comments on a Wednesday from passers by as we volunteers work in the valley; *'a little piece of heaven'* is one of my favourites.

But the most moving one was received recently. A local poet (and psychotherapist) who lives on the edge of Cowley Marsh playing field has walked from there up on the footpath through to the head of the valley daily since Covid lock down in 2020/2021. He will be publishing a small volume of 12 line poems entitled 'Promise' next year. The poems are not specifically about the valley but during lockdown he says that this walk was *'the main thing that kept me in any way sane'*. Also, he comments of his daily walk *'I'd be profoundly lost without it'*.

Publicity

I'm still writing the **wildlife newsletters** three times a year. Printed versions are very useful as hand-outs at events. We are planning a **small general information leaflet** on the Valley Wildlife. As ever, a big thanks is due to Tony Gillie for taking wonderful photos of valley wildlife and for running our Social Media Twitter (X) and Facebook accounts, accessible from the website. Latest figures from Tony are that the Lye Valley **FaceBook has 858 followers and Twitter (X) has 1868 followers**. Sadly, it will not be possible to produce the Lye Valley Wildlife Calendars this autumn.

To conclude - Thanks for the support of all committee members in their various roles and to **Stephanie Jenkins** for running our website, which is now full of useful information. We also thank our local City Councillors for support and are grateful for the Parks department of the City Council for help in site management. Finally, I deeply appreciate being able to hold meetings right next to the valley in this lovely new community centre.

8. AOB. There was no other business.
9. Rod D'Ayala then presented an illustrated talk *Flood Alleviation and Stopping Erosion in the Lye Valley*. This initiative by Friends of Lye Valley is a scheme using natural materials of logs and woven willow branches to slow the flow in the Lye Brook in Oxford in order to combat flash-flooding from urban storm drains. Volunteers work on this scheme weekly in the valley. After heavy rainstorms erosive high flows in the Lye Brook have previously damaged the soft peat banks as the brook runs through the very rare habitat of Lye Valley fen SSSI, damaging both biodiversity and carbon storage in peat. Beyond where Lye Brook joins the Boundary Brook, high flows have caused damage to bridges as storm water rushes through a golf course and flooding of homes and gardens, before delivering water to the Thames. Grant-funded log-damming work to slow the flow started in 2018 in the SSSI section. Since then, and specifically in 2023, Climate Change-induced increases in storm intensity have meant that the local volunteers working as willing 'human beavers' have had to add and re-design stronger, more resilient log dams and increase the fen peat bank protection woven willow barriers. Residents of previously flooded Campbell Road OX4 say since 2018 the brook no longer floods their properties.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm