



Friends of Crofton and Sparrow Woods (FOC&SW)

Minutes of Zoom Committee meeting at 6:30pm on 8 March 2022

Present

Jane Andrews
Kirsty Blackman
John Bray
Karen King
Claire Osborn

1. Introductions and welcome

Idverde were not asked to be represented at the meeting, as agreed at the previous Committee meeting in December 2021. Kirsty Blackman was welcomed back to the Committee – she wishes to remain on the Committee, but to no longer wishes to have the responsibility of being the Group's secretary. John Bray kindly volunteered to take on that role.

2. Minutes from last meeting

The previous minutes and action points were reviewed and agreed. Jane apologised for not seeking the Bromley Friends Forum Zoom tool for the current meeting due to other work pressures. It was agreed that these minutes, and future minutes, should be published on the website, with any privacy redactions to be agreed by the Committee.

Action Point 1: Jane to add Committee Meeting minutes to the website

2. Update on developments

2.1 Noticeboards

Jane had followed up with the suggestions for fabricators of noticeboards. The Norwood firm was very expensive, and likely to be upward of £600. Men in Sheds had initially expressed interest, but had not provided a quote despite chasing. Jane had therefore tracked down Caroll Long – ex *idverde* – via Facebook to be reminded the details of her suggested supplier. He was quoting approximately £310 for a board along the lines of the boards that we have, fitted by him. Jane suggested that the Committee buy at least two boards. In discussion it was agreed to buy one board to check the quality – this should be installed in the recreation ground between the high chain link fence and the park bench.

Action point 2: Jane to gain Angela Wood's written approval (already given orally).

Action point 3: Jane to commission one noticeboard, and seek a refund from the Group against an invoice.

2.2 Dog bag dispensers

Karen King had spotted a new bag dispenser fallen down at the Broadcroft Road entrance, had propped it up, and Jane was filling with bags. This seemed to be on top of the sewer and on private land. Jane had checked with Ian Wright (*idverde*). He confirmed that the board was in the wrong place – it should have been at the Sparrow Drive entrance, and that the installer was responsible for checking that there was nothing unsuitable under the soil. Since the post was unstable he would ask the supplier to refit – even if it stayed in the same location. Another dispenser was due to be fitted at the main Coppice Estate entrance, and a replacement at the Ormonde Avenue entrance. It was noted that the vandalised dispenser had been returned, but needed to be replaced.

2.3 Waste bins

Jane had chased up the lack of bins on the Coppice Estate side of the woods as agreed at the previous meeting and had been told that the Council were now looking for suitable sites.

Action point 4: Jane to chase the Council again

A member had expressed concern that there were no bins at the Broadcroft Road or Sparrow Drive entrances, which Karen supported. This was something that could be raised via Fix My Street.

Projects

Jane noted that although the Committee had prioritised its three projects at the request of the Council Funding Team, views varied among the membership. In any event, all three remained on the 'books'. Jane was still seeking a volunteer engineer to sketch a design of a replacement bridge from Gumping Common, as without that we could neither get permission from Natural England, nor a quote for the cost of the work.

3. Evening event on 22 March with AGM

All the Committee would attend. Kirsty and Karen would handle refreshments – which would be self service – and the sale of cakes and biscuits. It was agreed that disposable cups should be used. Jane is trying to borrow a water boiler.

Action point 5: Karen, Claire and Jane to cook for the event

Action point 6: Jane to buy disposable cups, tea, coffee, milk & biscuits and source the loan of a water boiler.

The Committee agreed to arrive at 7.00pm on the 22nd to set up. Claire would man a recruitment table. Jane would bring her business's Sum-up card reader, and transfer any income received across from her business account, supported by bank statements. If Sum-up proved a success the Committee would then consider buying their own for future events.

Action point 7: Jane to bring a card reader for the 22nd

Jane is borrowing a projector and screen from the local scouts. The talks would start at 7.30pm with Steven Lofting, who would speak for 35 – 40 minutes on the wildlife of Bromley. FOC&SW would then talk for 20 – 30 minutes on the wildlife and history of Crofton Woods. It was agreed that Jane would prepare and give the presentation. Then there would be a 10 minute refreshment break for non-members to leave before the AGM starting at 8.45pm at the latest, finishing at 9.15pm at the latest, as we needed to be cleared up and out by the end of the booking at 9.30pm.

The Committee agreed that idverde could not attend the AGM element, as they were not members of the Group, and that the Group should not try to debate matters which were the responsibility of the landowners. It was important to maintain a positive atmosphere at the event to encourage membership support for the woodlands.

Jane is arranging for the event to be promoted by the Petts Wood and District Residents Association and the Crofton Residents Association. The Committee discussed other people who should be invited to the event, and agreed on Local Councillors.

Action point 8: John to provide Jane with details of the relevant local Councillors

Action point 9: Jane to invite those local Councillors

4. Membership

Claire said that the Group now had approximately 70 members on its mailing list, of which 37 had completed the DPA compliant forms. It would be important to encourage the remaining members to complete the new forms, and current members to renew their membership and be asked to consider making a further donation.

5. Treasurer's Report

Karen had circulated the financial projection to the end of the financial year. There would be further expenditure for the open event (including £52.50 for the hall). Jane mentioned that she had also bought two charity collection boxes. The excellent news was that Karen had been able to transfer into the Group's account the remains of the 'Go Fund Me' contributions. The site had taken down the details so she could not identify the original contributors, although she had approached those that she could recall, and they have been content that their contribution was being transferred to benefit the Group's work.

Metro bank was discussed, and it was noted that cheques could not be paid in via an app, and needed to be paid in at the bank. Cheques should therefore be avoided where that was possible.

Kirstie recalled that there was a £5000 limit on the amount that could be retained in the account.

Action point 10: Karen to check whether there is an account maximum on the Group's account

6. Future opportunities to widen awareness of FoC&SW & fundraise

Opportunities to fundraise and raise awareness were discussed, including events at Crofton School, the Petts Wood May Fayre, and the Methodist Church in Petts Wood.

Action point 11 : Claire to establish whether Crofton Infant is having a summer fayre, and if so whether we might have a stall to raise awareness

Action point 12 : Karen to establish whether there will be a 2022 May Fayre, and if so whether we might have a stall to raise awareness

Action point 13 : Jane to contact Liz Sewell of Petts Wood Methodist Church and accept the offer of running a coffee morning to raise awareness, seek members, and sell allotment produce, suggesting Saturday 9 July 2022.

7. AOB

Concerns expressed by users of the woods

Kirsty Blackman and Karen King shared the concerns that they had heard expressed by a number of members of the public about the works being carried out within the woodland. Their concern was that they liked to woods unmanaged and tousled, rather than over-managed as some other places are. The coppicing in the last couple of years, surrounded by dead hedging, made the paths seemed hemmed in and less natural looking. People found it easier to understand clearing for extra light to increase biodiversity, but did not understand the dead-hedging which detracted from the aesthetics of the woods. It was therefore important that the Group prioritised to park users that the woodland is the subject of a 10-15 year coppicing cycle, and that dead hedging was a means of protecting the woodland floor and was the only means of disposing of cuttings now that bonfires were less used because of their carbon footprint. Chipping the by- products of coppicing was an option when ground conditions allowed, but that meant trucks and chippers being taken deep into the woods, which was something that the Group was keen to avoid happening again.

Mud in the woods

The level of mud on all the paths thanks to yet another winter of heavy rain was dire. Natural England objected to the use of roadstone to reinforce the paths, and wood chippings were of limited value when the ground was water logged (even if we had access to a source).

Vehicles in the woods

In the past idverde and its contractors were bringing vehicles, sometimes numerous vehicles, into the woods so that equipment for woodland management – including that funded under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme – could be used. This had caused deep ruts in the paths and ground compaction as the site is a wet woodland consisting of London clay soil. Once the soil is compacted, it is extremely difficult to make right again.

Successive wet winters has made mud a significant issue, even where vehicles have not passed. However, in 2021/22 idverde had successfully been encouraged to drive less far along the tracks, and had accepted the damage to the circular path in Sparrow Wood was in part attributable to vehicles. Kirstie's continuing concerns about the use of vehicles in the woods were discussed (she had also raised this through 'Fix my Street'). After discussion the Committee concluded that the position should continue to be monitored to ensure that vehicles were not accessing deep into the woods, and that the Group had to accept idverde's right of some access to the woodlands that they managed under contract

Woodland management

The woodland management was opening up overgrown areas to the light, and restoring some of what was previously open space. This was designed to encourage diversity. It was less popular with some local walkers who felt that the dense woodland was changing as they had enjoyed seeing only the woodland rather than a mix including some dead hedging and coppiced areas beyond. The wet winter meant that paths have become extremely muddy. As stated above people preferred the unmanaged look of the woods and were not aware of coppicing rotations. Jane had secured notices from idverde at Kirsty's suggestion, and had put them up. The Committee asked that similar information be added to the information board on the Coppice Estate side of the wood.

Action point 14: Jane to add a notice re coppicing to the information board.

London loop

Kirsty informed the Group that she is regularly told by other walkers that the part of the London loop within the woodland is the worst part that they have walked, it has numerous potholes and very muddy. (Although actually other paths are far less passable.) Kirsty has previously reported this via Fixmystreet in June 2021

and was disappointed by the Council's response stating that they had no records of the footpath being a footpath. Also it was not easy to get vehicle access to that part of the site and type 1 is not suitable for the ground.

Report on fortnightly Work Group

As agreed at the last meeting Jane had run two additional sessions on the private land to retackle the bramble near to the Broadcroft road entrance. They had not been well attended, but here had been enough people for succeed in removing many bramble roots despite bad weather. The fortnightly working group was continuing with 8 – 10 attendees, numbers were down now people have returned to work. Jane and John had decided that a weekend session was not wise while the woods are so muddy, and Jane suggested that September might be better timing. John suggested that this was tested at the face to face meeting on the 22nd.

Safety netting

Kirsty noted that the safety netting on the recreation ground has still not been fixed, and represented a continued hazard to users. This continued to be raise via 'fix my street', which was the best avenue to attract the Council's attention.

Park benches

Two of the park benches in the recreation ground have been vandalised and reported, and have since been removed.

Action point 15: Jane to see whether Angela Wood can help ensure replacement.

Newsletter

The March newsletter will be out after the event on the 22nd, and would include reference to the pair of red kites that had been sighted over the woods on a number of occasions in the last two weeks.

8. Agree timing and date of next meeting

The next meeting will be at 6.30pm on Tuesday 26 April by Zoom. Ian and Angela should be invited.

Action point 16 : Jane to invite Ian and Angela

Action point 17 : Jane to see if we can use Bromley Friends Forum's Zoom licence

Jane Andrews