

Friends of Park Wood Newsletter Autumn 2024

Friends of Park Wood Silver Anniversary in 2025



Next year marks 25 years since the Friends were formed. We will be having some events to celebrate. First thing to announce is a Woodland Festival on Saturday 7th June 2025.

This being organised in partnership with the Havant Climate Alliance as part of Big Green Week which will be running from the 7th to Sunday 15th of June. Other activities will be announced in due course. If you would like to help with the Woodland Festival Pete would be pleased to hear from you.

Please contact him on 07565 058965 or by e-mail to petehodges191@gmail.com

Ash Dieback

On a recent site visit Phil the Woodland Trust Officer noted that there were several trees at the London road frontage showing signs of Ash dieback.

As these are within dropping distance of the main road and other easily accessible areas they will be scheduled for felling as they pose an unacceptable risk.

The disease kills off the foliage and the tree trunks eventually become dry and brittle and prone to collapse.



Ash in any case is known for splitting easily when felling is taking place (the easy to split timber is one of the reasons Ash is such an easy wood to work for items like handles) and had a reputation as a widow-maker in the forestry industry of old.

There is no date as yet for when felling might take place. First Phil has to make a TPO application to the Borough Council and we expect that as part of the planning consent some replanting of species yet to be decided will be required. We will keep people informed when we know more.

New Management Plan

Phil Truluck is now reviewing the existing management plan for Park Wood. This expires next year when a new 5 year plan will take over the existing management plan that we currently work to. In terms of the management on the ground people shouldn't notice any difference and hopefully there will be a smooth transition to the next one.

Once Phil has a first draft we will as a group get the chance to put our views forward via Pete our chair. If you wish to be kept informed please speak to Pete.

The value of grasses, meadows and glades in woodland



All too often when we are looking at woods we only think about the conservation of the trees. However, an important part of the ecological value of a wood are the more open areas found within the wood or at its edges. Grassy glades, paths, rides and the woodland edge all have tremendous value and potential for wildlife. Where plants flourish, so do insects, birds and mammals.

Ironically due to habitat loss, the remnants of grassland areas found in and around our woods are often of equal if not more importance than the woodland itself. In Hampshire many small woods survive and indeed where the opportunity arises new ones are being planted in areas like school grounds or on recreation grounds. Compared to grassland habitats, woods are more readily publicly recognised as in need of protection due to their landscape impact.

The last eighty years has seen a very large proportion of natural grassland habitat being lost. This was due to a number of reasons. Historically, unmanaged grassland was seen as unproductive waste land. During the war, when increasing home food production was a national priority, areas of neglected land previously thought to be uneconomic to grow crops on, were ploughed and turned into productive farmland. Post war mechanisation of food production in the UK continued this process, affecting not just grassland but hedgerows and woodland acreage as well. Increased use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides meant that many of our wildflowers steeply declined on farmland and with them the insects and birds that relied on these traditional meadows also went into decline.



Post war, there was an upsurge in house building to provide housing for the bombed out residents of our cities. New estates went up on what had been farmland. A local example being Leigh Park where the woods survive but the fields were built over. What green spaces were left were either now the private gardens of the new householders or green spaces in the care of the grounds maintenance staff of the local council. Either way what were once wildflower meadows were now mown frequently to provide managed tidy open spaces for sport and other leisure pursuits. Locally, the urbanization of farmland continues with the recent building of an estate on fields between West Leigh and Emsworth as well as the developments at Wellington Meadows and Newlands, all previously greenfield sites.

However today conservationists have made planners more aware of the need to maximise biodiversity in terms of habitats. Where there are new housing developments the developers are now encourage to ensure there is some biodiversity net gain such as funding new natural planting and after an environmental impact assessment, ensuring that areas of importance for wildlife are kept as intact as possible. If you walk around the development at Newlands you will see that a large part of the land allocated as open space is grassland with native plants. With the right approach, there are now opportunities for grassland dependent species like the skylark to recover.



In Park Wood we have open habitats. We have two remnants of former grazing land on the edge of the wood. If left alone they would become secondary woodland and too shady for the meadow species that still survive in situ. This had happened to a large

degree in the London Road meadow which has shrunk over the years as trees colonised about half the original area after grazing stopped. Likewise the other remnant of meadow was until 10 years ago shrinking in size having been colonised by bramble and Oak trees. Both areas have grassland and wildflower species that suggest they had been unimproved grassland for a considerable time. We now actively manage them to encourage more diversity in our wood.

We now cut most of the meadows every year, leaving some small areas for overwintering insects. We are not just cutting the meadows to make them look nice. We are replicating the effects of grazing, we don't leave the cuttings lying on the site, rather we rake the area after strimming and mowing to remove the hay so as to keep the area as nutrient poor as possible. If we didn't, the vegetation would become dominated by nutrient loving species and the wildflowers that we want to prosper would be outcompeted.





In addition to the meadows we create temporary glades by coppicing. This provides opportunities for woodland plants such as bluebells and foxgloves to flower in the first couple of years before the shrub layer grows back.

Havant Borough Council is now introducing similar mowing regimes in parts of their open spaces like Waterlooville recreation ground. By allowing grassland to mature and set seed in clearly defined areas, the Council is increasing the opportunity for biodiversity. There is also the added bonuses

of reducing the cost of maintaining the open spaces and adding colourful interest to the spring and summer landscape.

Hopefully, wildflower diversity will increase and currently rarely seen species will flourish given the right management. Improvements to wildflower numbers and diversity have already been recorded because of the change to mowing schedules.

At Park Wood we will continue to manage the grassland areas to provide as broad a range of habitats and wildlife species as we can have within our small site. If you would like to be more involved in caring for the meadow species we hope to be able to offer some volunteer opportunities next year for monitoring and recording species to assess the effectiveness of our management. We will keep you posted.



2024 Annual General Meeting

Thank you to everyone who managed to make it on the 10th June to our AGM at the Baptist Church hall.

At the meeting our chair Pete gave an account of group activities over the last year and a financial report. The group accounts being quite healthy at £7646.34.

Both Meg and Gary Smith were standing down from the committee this year. The new committee for the current year now being Pete Hodges, Maureen Nye, John Leach, Andy Peters and Peter Forrest.

The business part of the meeting was followed by an enjoyable and informative presentation on the Hampshire Forest Partnership from Sarah Pocock – Project Officer with the partnership which encourages new tree planting across Hampshire.

Our provisional date for the 2025 AGM is Monday 9th June. We have asked Tristan Norton to be our guest speaker, Tristan is the Ecologist at Havant Borough Council and will talk to us about how the Council is improving and caring for nature in our borough.

Volunteer opportunities at Park Wood

Practical conservation work parties – these are held monthly on the first Wednesday and last Sunday. You don't need to bring anything other than yourself. Please wear stout footwear like boots and appropriate clothing for the weather, time of year and that you don't mind getting dirty. We supply the tools. We provide tea, coffee and other refreshments. If you are new to the group don't worry there are experienced volunteer leaders who can help you and will explain what needs doing.

Volunteer wardens – These are people who regularly visit the wood and act as eyes and ears as to what is happening in the wood so that we can minimise problems with managing Park Wood.

Committee – we have vacancies for our committee which meets roughly every two to three months for a 2 hour meeting to discuss and decide on group activities and any other issues to do with Park Wood.

Publicity – we are looking for someone to help with publicity, which could include taking photos of group activities, putting up posters in the wood, helping with the display boards, social media posts or letting the local press know what we are doing.

25 Years Project – we are looking for volunteers willing to give a bit of input into events to celebrate the 25 years that our group has been going in particular help with our Park Wood Festival in June.

If you are interested in taking on any of these informal roles please contact our chair Pete for more details.

Working with the Woodland Trust at Park Wood

Since 2017 we have been classified as a third party independent group of volunteers. Our status was set out in a third party agreement defining our relationship with the Woodland Trust at Park Wood. Evidence of formal training and insurance certification is required by the Trust in order to allow our activities to go ahead in the wood. As the Friends of Park Wood are independent and separate from the Woodland Trust, we are required to fund ourselves.

To help with funding future activities in a more sustainable way and following discussion with the site manager we have decided to become a Woodland Trust Supplier for when we are asked to do essential site maintenance such as mowing, replacing fencing or clearing ditches. Other tasks such as coppicing and raking the meadows are not essential site work and will not be affected by the new working arrangement. Any income raised this way can be redirected by the group into the management of the wood on projects prioritised by the group.

Must have high(viz) fashion now trending at Park Wood

We now have available dedicated Friends of Park Wood Volunteer high-viz waistcoats. This is to make people aware that we are working in the wood for their and our safety. Regular volunteers have already got theirs and there will be spares to borrow on the Sunday work parties.



Dates for your diary

Autumn and winter is when we are busy in the wood coppicing. This creates new temporary woodland glades as well as renewing the strength and vigour of the hazel and other understory trees in the wood. If you haven't coppiced before, come along and discover an ancient sustainable way of managing our native trees for timber and which benefits wildlife. On Sunday the 24th November there will be an introduction to coppicing session available to those of you are new to coppice work.

To welcome in our 25th Anniversary year as a group we have a walk on New Years Day and in February we will be making nest boxes which you can either put up in the wood or, for a donation to cover the costs of materials, take home.

September 29th Sunday Work party – meadow mowing and raking

October 27th Sunday Work party – clearing ditches and cutting the meadows

November 6th Wednesday Work party – coppicing

November 24th Sunday Work party – coppicing

December 4th Wednesday Work party – coppicing

January 1st Wednesday – New Years Day Winter in the woods afternoon walk – meet at 1.30 pm at the main gate

January 26th Sunday Work party – coppicing

February 5th Wednesday Work party – coppicing

February 23rd Sunday – Nest box making and checking

March 5th Wednesday Work party – stump cutting, ditch and path maintenance

March 30th Sunday Work party – path and ditch maintenance

Pete Hodges
Chair of the Friends of Park Wood

Membership

Just a reminder that membership of the Friends of Park Wood runs from the 1st of April to 31st March each year.

Membership Application

Membership is due annually on 1st April each year. It is open to all those who are interested in or care for Park Wood. All friends will receive regular Newsletters with updated information on Park Wood.

NAME

ADDRESS

POSTCODE **TELEPHONE No**

E-MAIL

I / we support the objectives of the Park Wood Project and apply to join The Friends of Park Wood. Membership covers everyone living at the same address. I enclose a donation towards the Friends of Park Wood; a minimum donation of £5.00 is suggested.

Signed

Please return this form to the Secretary:

Maureen Nye, 6 Deanswood Drive, Waterloooville, PO7 7RB. Mobile: 07894 015041 Email: maureenye@ntlworld.com
