

HFG AGM Chairman's Report 2022 Clive Manvell

Profile: HFG has maintained its positive image in both villages particularly clearing the silt from Botney Bridge, clearing drains and ditches around Headings Pond, removing fallen trees from the water and banks of the Brook, identifying the issues with the persistent flooding in Berry Lane, attending Michaelmas and Platinum Jubilee Fayres

Improved Letcombe Brook: The Brook continues to flourish, flowing faster, more freely with visibly less silt from the work undertaken by the HFG in conjunction with Mark Bradfield the Letcombe Brook Project Officer. Approximately 25% of the normal water flow passes through the fish pass around Lower Mill, however the stretch from there to Lower Mill is becoming more silted than it used to be. The area around the fish pass needs to be handled carefully as there is a large water vole colony nearby but the fish pass and other waterways need to be kept clear of debris, Himalayan balsam, brambles and weeds.

Water Voles: We are so lucky to have Water Voles in the villages. This year they appear to be in higher numbers and in more locations than in the past, which is really good news. They are a protected species. They are very vulnerable to disturbance. Oxfordshire is one of the very few counties in the whole country to still have populations of Water Voles and they are only found in three areas in Oxfordshire. As an organisation can we actively remind dog owners that there is another water vole colony in the Letcombe Brook between the Iron Bridge and the fish pass channel. The bank immediately downstream of the Iron Bridge is now in a terrible state and water vole burrows have been damaged. A number of us have already spoken to a couple of dog owners to make them aware of the water voles and I know other people have also tried to make people aware. Disturbance by dogs is a major issue for water voles and the bank is starting to be eroded in a couple of places where dogs are repeatedly wearing it away getting in and out. Water voles are the UK's fastest declining mammal and protected in law, as are their burrows. It is an offence to disturb them under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and they are a priority conservation species. Offences include intentionally capturing, killing or injuring water voles, damaging, destroying or blocking access to their places of shelter or protection (on purpose or not) by not taking enough care. Please remind people to keep dogs on leads, especially by the Iron Bridge and preferably out of the Brook.

Phil and I attended a Water Vole Survey training course run by BBONT last autumn, learning how to identify and record signs of water vole activity, but have not yet undertaken any surveys locally. Hope to do some next spring.

River Fly Monitoring: Philippa Manvell and Stella Brecknell have continued their survey of invertebrate numbers in Letcombe Brook as part of a water quality monitoring initiative, the River Fly Monitoring Project. Each "month" they take controlled samples from set locations, as others also do along the length of the Brook, and count the various invertebrates present in the sample. The numbers and type of invertebrates present, such as Caddis Fly Larvae, are an indication of the water quality. A significant drop in numbers might be the result of a pollution incident and trigger an investigation by the EA. This project has been running now for four years and is ongoing. More survey teams are needed, if you are interested in doing this important work please discuss it with Phil or with Mark Bradfield who can organise training and equipment.

Nitrate and Phosphate Sampling: Carried out twice a year by Philippa Manvell and other members of the Letcombe Brook Project team.

Water Level Monitors: Disappointingly this interesting and important project has not progressed. We have two monitors which have been collecting data since they were installed - the first one (just upstream of

Dandridge's mill, (in David Kirk's garden) from June 2020, and the second (upstream of the iron bridge) from around August 2020. We are hoping that the development of a real time system is continuing.

Timetable: The shift of the maintenance session to July after the nesting birds have fledged and when water vole activity is in full swing has been successfully trialled this year. There are plenty of daylight hours and good weather to deal with unplanned issues. We also have an opportunity to do some training with the Emergency Equipment in the summer months.

Hanney Hut: For the record the annual lifejacket inspection and safety check, Jeyes fluiding the concrete step and ramp (slippery safety issue), trailer tyres, wheelbarrow tyres, sack truck tyres checks have all been done. The Hanney Hut needed a spring clean, masses of cobwebs and dead spiders were removed! The equipment inventory has been checked and updated with recent additions including the platform truck donated by WHPC, lightweight shears, new waders and strimmer. As well as the increasing number of dents in the walls of the Hut there is evidence that somebody may have tried to force the personnel door earlier this summer. Fortunately they were unsuccessful but can we all be more vigilant when around the Hut and check that all is well. Although already fitted with security locks we are looking at ways to further increase the security of the up-and-over door.

Funding: Both East and West Hanney Parish Councils continue to donate essential funding for the general administration running costs and some for specific pieces of equipment for which we are very grateful. We have stable financial income for the ongoing running costs but will still need grants and donations for key items of new equipment.

Donate Button: From time to time we have received donations from individuals and other village organisations. To make life easier for those people kind enough to make a donation and to make it easier for the Treasurer of course we have created a "Donate" button on The HFG Website. So far we have received a few hundred pounds via this route.

What's the money for? Approximately 40% goes on insurance. The rest is for maintenance, repair or replacement of key equipment. Waders now cost around £85 – they are not bramble or blackthorn proof, nor resistant to barbed wire. Please take good care of them.

Items we would like some help with sourcing.

Looking for funding in the region of £800 - £1500 for a weather resistant shelter which may be needed as a temporary shelter for any residents or volunteers out in the open during a disaster scenario – hot or cold weather extremes.

Thank you to Jane and Mark for looking after the accounts, Adam for the continued mastery of the website, Ian, Dickon and David for towing the trailer and all of you for not only turning out at the regular working parties, but also patrolling the villages when the weather has been awful and being prepared to get stuck in at short notice.

Mapping Project

Still looking for a computer geek to lead this project. Had six people offering to be foot soldiers after the last AGM but no leader. I have spoken to someone since who is approaching retirement but COVID has rather got in the way.

Your Committee is:-

Chairman: Clive Manvell

Vice-Chairman: David Stubbington

Treasurer: Jane Taylor

Secretary: David Blomley