

CHAIRMANS REPORT AGM 2017

I start this year's report with some very sad news. As many of you already know, John Pike, our former chairman sadly died peacefully earlier in the year. John will be remembered for his gentle and considerate approach in his long stewardship of the Friends.

I can report that the year has been both successful and productive for our Cttee and Volunteers. We have been very fortunate in receiving supportive grants from the Town Council for the printing of leaflets. Money raised from the Waitrose Community Matters scheme and a donation from SDNPA enabled us to buy much needed new tools and, finally, three East Hants District Councillors arranged a substantial grant for the future replacement of our leaking equipment container. We must also not forget the continuing financial support of Churchers College and the hard work of their students on the Heath.

Last summer saw our volunteers progressing well with bracken control with help from SDNPA and farmer Peter Cains with his tractor and topper kindly financed by the Town Council. With funding for materials from The Town Council, members also completed improvements to the edging of the Heath Road car park.

We once again had a stall at the ever popular Secrets of Heath event and hope to do so again this year enhancing our attraction with more activities for children.

During the winter our team of volunteers undertook sapling removal from the fairways with our new Tree Popper and cleared woodland margins of encroaching brambles and seedling trees. They also supported the People of the Heath project by clearing a couple of the northern barrows ready for surveying this year, using the cut material to finish off the dry hedge along the brook. The 4 yr archaeological project comes to an end this summer and we look forward to some of their significant finds on display at the Museum.

There has, controversy, been a significant loss of habitat due to the archaeological project. The Friends are committed to restoring as much of this as possible while still enabling the Neolithic cemetery to have the right presence within the Heath. The Town Council will be conducting a survey to assess if badger sets or bat roosts are present so that any future disturbance can be avoided.

The SDNPA together with the Town Council have produced a new Management Plan for the Heath. The guide lines will enable the Town Council and ourselves to focus on future maintenance priorities and help to find the right balance between necessary work and conservation.

It has been clear for some time that the working relationship between the Town Council and the Friends needed to be put on a better footing. To facilitate this, a core group has produced a Memorandum of Understanding and updated our Terms of Reference. These has been approved by the Town Council. We also took

the opportunity to update our Constitution all of which we will be asking you to consider approving this evening.

The Pond working group, of which we are participant's, is still considering options for bank reinstatement and are planning a public consultation day to take the ideas forward. Work has already started on large willow tree coppicing to enable better reed bed growth which will support wildlife and protect the banks from erosion.

Our new website and facebook page is now up and running. It will be carrying news of our work, and wildlife sightings together with contact details for membership etc. and many thanks to Melanie and John for this and the regular updating of information.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to thank all our volunteers, Ctte members and work organisers for their support and hard work over the year. We have achieved a lot together and I look forward to another successful year ahead. However, it will be my last year as chairman as I will have to hand over the batten at the next AGM.

Clearly the Friends are going to need a new Chairman. If you feel inspired to take over or know someone who might be, or just want to have a chat about the role please make yourself known and we can take it from there. I would be happy to support the new chairman for as long as needed.

Before I close I would just like to thank the Town Council for their continuing support and the use of this room for our AGM and the council chambers for our Ctte meetings.