



## **Friends of Petersfield Heath (FoPH) Work Party Report 2022-23 Season**

Once again, our amazing volunteers have been out working this season come rain or shine for the betterment of Petersfield Heath's environment and visitors.

This year's work season began with the regular bracken cutting regimen which has become the norm for our team. This ongoing task of reducing the bracken allows other wildflowers and heathland plants such as heather to flourish and maintains a more open habitat for visitors to explore.

The team is truly starting to see the results of their valiant efforts over the last five years, with the bracken growth being substantially reduced each year, and the task taking just a little less time each and every time. The scythe mower purchased during lockdown continues to be a valuable asset for this task.



After the work on bracken clearance was completed, the team moved on to the task of clearing the overflow ditch which runs from the pond towards Heath Road East. Keeping this ditch clear allows for the better flow of water, and the removal of excess silt allows for the nutrient levels of the ditch to be kept under control. The team also trimmed back some of the vegetation running along the



ditch, creating a variety of both shaded and sunny areas in the water. This task however had to be put on hold due to the heavy rains during the winter which caused the ditch to fill incredibly quickly and has yet to dry out. This task will be finished during the next work season.

Our volunteers spent several sessions this season on the wildflower creation area near the Sussex Road car park. Our team rigorously cut the grass and took away the arisings in an attempt to both lower the nutrient levels of the area (as preferred by wildflowers) and to reduce the competition from the grass. This is an ongoing project which is still really in its early days, however last spring certainly seemed to show an improvement in the number of wildflowers in the area compared to before this project began.

Another task which our volunteers undertook this year was the removal of saplings in the eastern and central fairways. This is a vital task, and whilst we love trees there is also a need to maintain our open habitats which are required by a vast variety of plant and animal life, such as the Heather, Common Lizards and Slowworms which call the heath home. In a slight change from previous years, it was decided to leave the occasional sapling to grow so that they could become perch points for birds in the area.

One final task which our volunteers spent a lot of time on this season was the maintenance of our previously constructed dead hedges. These structures made up of material cut from around the heath provide an excellent habitat for invertebrates, amphibians (such as Common toads which were seen amongst the deadhedges this season) and small mammals, whilst also acting as a barrier, encouraging the public to stick to the paths and preventing

unauthorised access to the heath from the road. Two of these structures (one along the ditch towards Heath Road East and one towards to southern end of Heath Road East) had been constructed in previous work seasons, however had begun to show their age and were on the verge of collapse. Our volunteers removed and replaced any damaged or rotten posts from the deadhedges and wove in fresh material from the heath. This reinforces the structures and maintains them both for the safety of the public, and as an excellent wildlife habitat.





Whilst our volunteers are now on their summer break and will not return to regular activity until late September, there will be several sessions in the interim, keeping the bracken growth under control before the start of our new season.

The Friends of Petersfield Heath work parties will also once again be undertaking two summer work sessions this spring/summer season in collaboration with Aspire Pharma, a local company who have worked with us for the past two years as a part of our regular bracken control program, for which we are all very thankful.

In total during the 2022-23 work season, our team of 18 active volunteers have completed an incredible 498 hours of volunteering on Petersfield Heath, working in all weathers for the benefit of the public and the local wildlife.

I would like to thank all of our exceptional volunteers for their hard work this year. As always it has been a pleasure working with them all, and I personally look forward to seeing them all again next season for the continuation of their outstanding and dedicated work.

Jordan Bleach

Friends of Petersfield Heath Work Party Leader