

## FRIENDS OF LITTLE BUDWORTH COMMON

### NOTES OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT LITTLE BUDWORTH VILLAGE HALL ON THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY 2016

Thirty-four people attended, including Councillor Eveleigh Moore-Dutton. Paul Healey, Acting Chairman, welcomed everyone and passed on apologies from Ray Hall, who is recovering from a knee replacement. Paul also introduced the new CWAC Ranger, Stephanie Hefferan.

Joan Johnson read a note received from Ray:

*The following is a little of the history of Little Budworth Common. The Common was used during the war, from 1939 to 1945, as a tank training area, destroying much of the woodland. After the war, birch tree woodland 'invaded' the Common, leaving very little heathland.*

*In 1974 Cheshire County Council secured a lease of the Common from the Egerton/Oulton Estate for a high rent. In 1984 Little Budworth Common was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, described as the 'best surviving example of low land heather in Cheshire'. In 1994 the lease was renewed for a further 20 years and more heathland was developed.*

*In 2011 I discovered that the newly formed Cheshire West and Chester Council would, as a cost cutting measure, not be renewing the lease of Little Budworth Common when it expired. The terms of the original lease with the Oulton Estate stated that, if CW&C did not renew the lease, they, CW&C, would have to reinstate the Common to its original state, ie the toilets and adjacent car park would have to be removed. Failure to renew would more importantly mean that walkers, dog walkers, horse riders and university studies would lose the right of freedom to use the Common.*

*For the following two and a half years there were negotiations between the Council and Oulton Estate. There were many heated discussions, we were getting nowhere fast, and so I phoned Mr William Egerton and explained the situation to him; after which things began to move forward.*

*Thanks to the assistance of Ranger Charles Baillie, Little Budworth Parish Council and the Friends of Little Budworth Common, a new lease was agreed and finally signed on 11th June, 2015, for a reasonable rent of £250 per annum.*

*During the negotiations the Ranger secured a grant from Natural England of £110,000, over a period of 10 years. This was to provide an increase of heathland by 5.5 hectares. The tree felling is now complete and the preparation of the ground will begin as soon as the weather improves."*

**Stephanie Hefferan**, CWAC Ranger, then spoke. For the past 13 years she has worked for Cheshire West on other sites in the area. She has now taken Charles Baillie's place as Ranger for The Common in addition to other responsibilities.

**Heathland:** The wet winter weather has hindered the tree felling and clearance for heathland expansion. The work is now anticipated to be finished by April but, if Spring growth and bird breeding starts early as seems likely, then tidying up will have to stop and be renewed in September/October. Seeding will take place in Areas 1 and 2 which were cleared in the Winter of 2014/2015. Bracken will be cut twice a year for 2 years. Weed wiping machinery using Roundup or similar product will be brought in to kill the growth of silver birch on the cleared areas before regeneration of the heather can take place.

**Woodland** In September Stephanie plans to thin an area of woodland to open it up and let the sunlight in and encourage regeneration. Weedy specimens will be taken out in a naturalistic way. The whole Common is a SSSI but our aim is to reclassify an area of woodland near the main car park by the toilets as woodland.

**Work Schedule** The priority is to re-sign the paths using wood left over from the felling. Work is to be done on the ponds.

**Dave Lee**, Friends website, then gave an illustrated talk on the work covered by the Friends in the 2 years since it was established. He showed a film of the work done in 2014, followed by one showing the restoration of the areas 1, 2 and 3. Trees were removed, logs sold, and areas joined up to provide a corridor between the 2 large heather areas. A stumpery was made from tree roots. In late summer 2015 regeneration of the cleared areas started and seeds were sown in Area 1. This February bird boxes have been erected. There have been organised Fungi Forays and over 140 different species were discovered, some new to the Leader of the Foray. It was a great success, very popular and will be repeated in 2016. Work is continuing on the restoration of Areas 4 and 5 and paths will be reinstated soon. Volunteers are still needed and offers of help will be very welcome. Dave thanked all who have given their time and energy so far. There are a variety of jobs suitable for all levels of fitness.

Stephanie mentioned the special event to mark the Queen's 90th birthday ie a national event to tidy up Britain. Jenny Marshall said that Little Budworth parish is already organising a litter picking day on 5th March.

**Joan Johnson**, Treasurer, put the Financial Statement August 2013 to January 2016 on the screen. This details total funds raised of £1,530.00 and expenditure of £1,290.47, leaving a bank balance of £239.53. It is essential that more funds are forthcoming soon as the yearly insurance cost alone will exceed this sum.

**John Sellers** stated that more than 100 people have registered as Friends. As there is an urgent need to raise money, he suggested a £10 per family donation. Dave will email everyone with this appeal. £10,000 has been raised over the 2 years by selling timber from the cleared areas but this is earmarked by CWAC to pay for contractors to do the woodland thinning.

**Stephanie** then answered questions such as:

Where will mowing and cutting back paths be done? Grass mowing opposite the Bailey bridge; paths where necessary.

Tree roots? To be left in certain areas to rot down; some to be removed.

Concerns re ivy on ash and oak trees? This is beneficial to birds and bats and will only be removed on trees of concern.

The bad state of the second car park opposite the old school which has been damaged by contractors' equipment and timber lorries? When no more access to heavy vehicles is needed then Stephanie will arrange for road planings to be put down.

State of the wide routes through the Common which have also been damaged by heavy machinery? These will be levelled once the equipment leaves the site.

How will thinning of woodland be done? Standard management practice to achieve a naturalistic look. Open glades will be left. Trees will be taken out individually not by heavy machinery.

Some small standing trunks of dead trees have been left. Why? Stephanie said they are of benefit as perching posts for birds.

**Paul** reminded everyone that there would be a Working Party on Saturday, 13th February, meeting at the car park at 10 am. Newcomers would be very welcome. He then thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.