

Appendix A to Minutes 14th May 2019

Visit to Gransden and Waresley Wood 8 May 2019

Present: Martin Baker, Conservation Manager, Wildlife Trust
Matthew <Johnson?> Wildlife Sites Officer, Wildlife Trust
Michael Capps, Nick Ginn, Jeff Gorton (Gt Gransden PC)
E Jack, M Gordon (Waresley PC), I Jack, S Gordon
O Hipwell, S Sullivan (Lt Gransden PC)

These notes taken by S Sullivan

M Baker said that the meeting had been called following temporary closure of the paths to the public, for parish councilors to look at the site, for him to explain the current management, wildlife conservation problems, and plans for future management and for the Wildlife Trust to benefit from local knowledge and to gain thoughts from the local community about ways in which the reserves could be managed in the future.

(Mrs Sullivan gave Councillor John Jefferies' apologies and presented the notes he had made earlier, outlining his own thoughts on the wood.)

Mr Martin Baker explained the structure and aims of the Wildlife Trust.

The Wildlife Trust Mission:

Conserve local wildlife, by caring for land ourselves and with others

Inspire others to take action for wildlife

Inform people, by offering advice and sharing knowledge

Gransden and Waresley Wood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. An example of fine ancient woodland, carpeted with oxlips, primroses, bluebells and violets in spring (Leaflet attached as PDF).

We met in the car park, official entrance off Gransden–Waresley Road. We walked across Brown's Piece into the woodland ride, to the stream and returned at about 8 pm. The paths were muddy and had puddles following a day of steady rain, but the mud was not deep and the sun shone. A song thrush sang loudly for much of our visit.

Current management – to date, management of this once coppice-with-standards woodland has tended to be on a *laissez-faire* basis, with little intervention. One officer is responsible for several reserves. An area on one side had regenerated naturally as a result of prevailing winds and was developing a layer of shrubby bushes such as hawthorn, blackthorn and bramble, important habitat for birds; an area on the other side had not regenerated well, but had been replanted with saplings.

Wildlife conservation problems – degradation of woodland habitat, loss of understorey, degradation of woodland flora such as trampling of bluebells and loss of woodland ride species due to widening of paths caused by visitor pressure, reduction in wildlife species – especially notable bird species which are suffering nationwide declines.

Future management – the Wildlife Trust was working on a plan for woodland management in order to preserve existing species and enhance biodiversity, will have to take account of predicted extensive loss of trees due to ash dieback; commercial potential does not exist – the trees are of limited value – diseased trees are of no value – access for contractors' vehicles is difficult and intrusive; public access will have to be managed for safety reasons when contractors are working and to prevent erosion of paths. Martin Baker said that he welcomed suggestions for managing public access.

Questions from attendees included enquiries about how the Wildlife Trust was funded, the costs of running the reserve, the extent of visitor pressure, and approaches to management, particularly drainage of paths and the construction of french drains, relations with local landowners, creation of a wildlife corridor.

Comments from attendees included:

- It was unfortunate that the gate from the car park onto the public footpath had been locked during the temporary closure.
- The Wildlife Trust was a victim of its own success – it encouraged visitors to the wood from outside the local communities.
- The Wildlife Trust should improve its public relations; the local community could have been informed in advance of the closure; better signage and explanation would encourage more respect for fragile plants and ecosystems and potential disturbance to wildlife.
- Historically, the woodland had been essential to the economy of the local villages – those historical links remained over several generations for long-established families in the villages.
- Local communities, individuals and parish councils had financially supported the acquisition of the woodland by the Wildlife Trust.
- Local communities from Waresley, Great and Little Gransden accessed the wood from several different points.
- The Wildlife Trust was unusual in allowing public access free of charge. It would be nice if local people demonstrated their sense of 'ownership', appreciation of the woodland and love of nature by becoming members of the Trust.
- Local people could be encouraged to become more involved in the work of the Trust and to become volunteers.

Martin Baker agreed that the Wildlife Trust could have handled the closure of the woodland much better. Closures would be necessary in the future but it was hoped that a degree of access could be maintained rather than blanket closure. He looked forward to better relations in the future and thanked everyone for attending.