

FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS



ISSUE 17

NEWSLETTER

December 2017

www.footscraymeadows.org

email : ffcm06@gmail.com



To all members of the Friends of Foots Cray Meadows
may we wish you a very

Merry Christmas and a **Happy New Year**

we look forward to your continued support
in the coming year

Sid Wilkinson Tree and Woodlands Officer in the Parks and Open Space team, retired at the end of October after 52 years' service with the Council.

Sid joined Bexley on 26 May 1966, when Bexley's Education department was run by Kent County Council. At his interview he was asked two questions: "Why do you want to work in Bexley?" and "Can you start tomorrow?" He started the next day as a trainee gardener. Working six days a week (Saturdays included) earning around £24 a month.

Sid took his gardening exams and became a craftsman gardener. He was later promoted to a groundsman. At the time, he was based in the office at Foots Cray Meadows (the office no longer exists), covering the south of the borough. In the mid-70s, Bexley started its own tree department and Sid has been part of the team ever since. His role involved pruning trees, responding to queries and complaints and dealing with dangerous trees. Since the service was contracted out in the 90s, he no longer is up in trees, but he always carried a chainsaw in the car, just in case!

Sid vividly remember the Great Storm of 1987. The next morning, he was out by 6am with a team of

people. The priority was clearing trees from roads; also removing trees from houses and cars. In Belvedere, a tree had cut a boat in half. The owner had been building the boat for months and it never made it out to water! Within weeks, other crews were brought in from around the country to help clear woodlands and parks. It was definitely a busy time and was a real adrenaline buzz. Ironically, the night before he was up late writing a new tree planting programme - unfortunately it had to be postponed!



Sid has lived behind Foots Cray Meadows since 1961 and it's still his favourite place. His biggest achievement while at Bexley was receiving an achievement award from London Tree and Woodland Awards 7 years ago and also a London in Bloom Judges five years ago - that was a particularly proud moment.

He intended to retire eight years ago but has been delaying it. He says he will miss Bexley badly - he has met a lot of great people over the years. He still gets up at 6am and perhaps who knows, he may be back... ..

Well he is, he has agreed to become FFCMs Conservation Manager on our committee so we are not losing the many years of experience.

WELCOME BACK SID

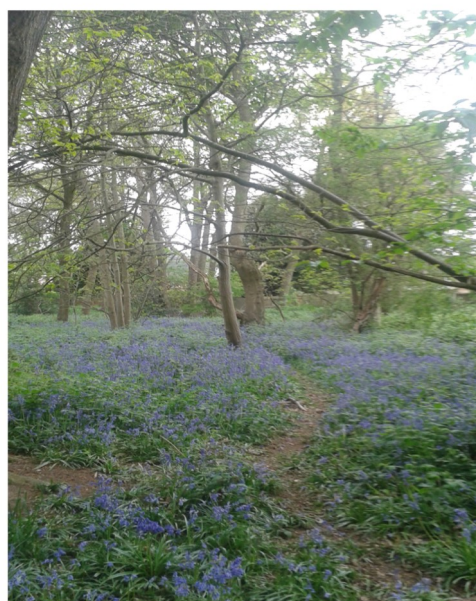
Chairs Chat

The committee and our volunteers have given a lot of time to supporting our aims by working with schools and youth groups to bring young people on to the Meadows to undertake volunteering work. We do like our activities to provide the opportunity to raise awareness of some of the environmental and wildlife issues.

Our biennial Fun Dog Show is an opportunity for people who (arguably the most popular human activity on the Meadows) take the dog for a walk to come together and enjoy entering their dog in informal and fun show. We hope to hold another show next June.

Being so popular, a reoccurring theme is the balance between Nature and People. The Meadows in parts a Local Nature Reserve are also a Public Amenity. As such they should be available and enjoyed by the wider communities.

What we as a Friends group can do is to ensure that all those who visit are mindful of this clash. Whilst the vast majority enjoy and use the site responsibly where's the harm in us all being reminded and going home with a greater understanding of the



standing at about 2m high above the brambles. I am looking forward to working with Phil Louis Bexley's new Tree Technician for the parks and open spaces and Patrick English our dedicated Grounds Maintenance Officer with their plans for volunteer woodland management including some more whip planting. New trees to add youth and strength to the woods, the older parts can be coppiced and paths cleared which allow access and encourage bluebells.

In the spring (it will soon come round) a walk through our own woods will reveal a delightful carpet of bluebells.

What we do need as a viable group is for you to come along join and help out at next year's events we require some of you to get to know us and take the Friends forward for the next ten years.

Michael Heath

natural environment and how it can be disturbed by us all.

One activity that the Friends should be proud of is Woodland Management under the guidance of Sid (Now our Conservation Officer) we have



protected the North Cray Woods and other woods by planting whips, these are small 50 cm long single branch trees grown from locally sourced nuts and seeds.

Sceptically we asked will they grow. Probably lose 40% was the reply. Well next time you are passing take a look; there is a healthy band of established trees



is an Animal Charity which has helped sick, injured and homeless pets since 1897.

Each year the Friends of Footh Cray Meadows host "Paws for Tea" at the Information Centre where visitors to the meadows can enjoy refreshments and their dogs get treats. Thanks to the members of the FFCM Committee who made it such a worthwhile event, baking cakes and supplying other refreshments which raised £83.06.

Again, thanks to you all for the donations which were sent to Blue Cross.

Margaret Dodd
FFCM Membership Secretary

As the owner of the Meadows Bexley Council are responsible for the Management of the site. Editor

A number of the willow trees abutting the lake have been pollarded. Pollarding is a pruning system in



which the upper branches of a tree are removed, promoting a dense head of foliage and branches and is practised

today in urban areas worldwide, primarily to maintain trees at a pre-determined height. It is not harmful to the tree.

One consequence of pollarding is that pollarded trees tend to live longer than un-pollarded specimens because they are maintained in a partially juvenile state, and they do not have the weight and windage of the top part of the tree.

Work has also taken place to trim back the foliage on the islands in the lake and our partners in thames21 have been working to repair the banks.

Swans

Whenever you see a photograph of Foots Cray Meadows it invariably either has the “Five Arches” The Swans or both. Over the years we have been lucky in having a pair of Swans making cont... the lake their home and producing up to 7 cygnets each year. Sadly, not all the cygnets survive as they are, when young, predated by other birds and pike. It has also been the case that some have died as a result of the activities of people fishing.

This year our swans produced 7 cygnets, sadly only 2 survived this has been unusual in that on this occasion it has been the activities of irresponsible dog owners who were primarily responsible for the majority of deaths. These owners failed to keep their dogs under control in the area around the lake which has signs clearly indicating dogs are not allowed in the lake.

The response has been to blame dogs as dangerous or out of control because they have chased the swans and cygnets when they are on the bank or in shallow water whereas if in the water the dog would risk being attacked by the adult swans as has unfortunately happened and resulting in the death of the dog. It's the natural instinct for some dogs to go after birds so it remains the responsibility of their owners to keep them under control around the lake.

Editorial

What you can do if you come across anti social behaviour on the Meadows is to note the date, time and what is happening and report it to Bexley Council on 020 8303 7777 and the Police on 101 in the case of a serious situation ring 999.

You can let FFCM know by emailing to ffc06@gmail.com as we have 2 members of FFCM on the Cray Meadows Ward Panel which meets regularly with the designated ward Police Officers. Building up a record influences priorities and will hopefully lead to resources being given over to stopping this problem.



Committee Members

- **Chairman - Michael Heath**
- **Secretary - Karen Wheeler**
- **Vice Secretary - Margaret Dodd**
- **Treasurer - Margaret Dodd**
- **Membership Secretary - Margaret Dodd**
- **Events Manager - Lesley Grant**
- **Newsletter Editor - Nick Grant**
- **Publicity Manager - Sally Lands**
- **Conservation Officer - Sid Wilkinson**
- **Committee Members - Vera Heath, Jan Harmer, Raj Gajebasia, Steve Brown**

www.footscraymeadows.org

email : ffc06@gmail.com

Aims and Objectives

- Working in partnership with Bexley Council to encourage public interest in, and the conservation of Foots Cray Meadows (FCM).
- To protect the wildlife and its habitat within FCM.
- To provide a focus for involvement by the community and users in the open space, to volunteer and work with the Council, in the conservation of FCM and its development as a public open space.
- To advance the public's awareness of the open space by promoting FCM its plants, wildlife, landscape, sustainability and supporting appropriate recreational facilities for the benefit of community groups and the general public.
- To develop and deliver information, interpretive material and educational opportunities for FCM
- To raise funds for the purpose of achieving the above aims.

A year on the Meadows

Over the past 12 months we have either organised or supported a number of activities and events on or relating to the Meadows. We have also represented the Meadows in the Community.

February

10th - FFCM and Bexley Councillors/Officers tour of Meadows

March

5th - Bexley Civic Society History Fair

24th - River Bank repairs Foots Cray Meadows in Partnership with Thames21

25th - River Bank repairs Foots Cray Meadows in Partnership with Thames21

May

1st - FFCM "Paws for Tea" in support of Blue Cross Animal Charity

22nd - Hextable Beavers Pond Dipping

June

20th - FFCM AGM

August

14th - River Bank repairs Foots Cray Meadows with Thames21

September

9th - Queen Marys Hospital Fete
- FFCM Bat Walk

26th - Hextable Beaver Scouts Bat Walk

October

29th - River Cray "Chalk Bed" Habitat Enhancement with Thames21

Between March and November the Information Centre has been open on the first Saturday of each month. In addition it was also open in support of many of the activities described.

FFCM Bat Walk

For a number of years the Friends have organised a Bat Walk in early September this year we did two which attracts Adults and Children alike.

All UK bats eat insects. Each species has its favourite types and hunts them in its own special way. Most insects are caught and eaten in mid-air, though bats sometimes find it easier to hang up to eat larger prey. All bats have very big appetites, because flying uses up lots of energy. A common pipistrelle for example can eat over 3,000 tiny insects in a single night!

Bats are not blind, but at night their ears are more important than their eyes. As they fly they, make shouting sounds. The returning echoes give the bats information about anything that is ahead of them, including the size and shape of an insect and which way it is going. This system of finding prey is called echolocation - locating things by their echoes.

Bats are the only mammal that can truly fly (rather than glide). Their wings are actually hands that have adapted for flight, which means they are very flexible and able to move independently. This fantastic manoeuvrability arguably makes bats better at flying than birds!

Locally the two most common bats are the Common pipistrelle



and the Daubenton's. Known as the 'water bat', Daubenton's bats fly back and forth across water taking insects from the water's surface with their large feet or tail.

Dates for your Diary: Future Events

We hope you are interested in joining in the many events we will be hosting or supporting in the coming months. At all the events listed there will be Committee Members attending. Dates (where known) and a brief description are below; look out for publicity in the weeks leading up to each date. For further information please contact the Events Manager on 07858 762530

- ◆ Week Commencing 29th January 2018 “Planting of whips” (tbc)
- ◆ May 2018 “Paws for Tea” in support of Blue Cross Animal Charity
- ◆ 23rd June 2018 Fun Dog Show (tbc)
- ◆ 8th September 2018 - Bat Walk (tbc)

Information Centre is open 1st Saturday each month (March to November)
between 10.00am - 1.00pm

Posters advertising FFCM Events will also be in the noticeboards at the entrances to the Meadows at the following locations- Car Park, Riverside Road, Leafield Lane and outside Stable House and the Information Centre.

Alternatively you can visit www.footscraymeadows.org

Join Today **Membership costs just £5 per household annually**

The Friends of Foots Cray Meadows is a voluntary group funded by its membership & fund raising activities.

Membership will grant you

- Seasonal Newsletters that will include updates on projects.
- Reduced admission on any talks or events that we are not able to host for free.
- Additional Meadows related contacts, whether you would like help with
- Getting an event off the ground or simply would like to share some ideas or concerns regarding Footh Cray Meadows.
- Early notification of meetings, events and talks.

Money raised will help to:

- Fund projects that will both protect and benefit The Meadows.
- Encourage interest & enthusiasm in the area.
- Organise outdoor events & talks.
- Improve facilities (initially the Wildlife and Information Centre).

Any names and contact information gathered by The Friends of Footh Cray Meadows will only be used by themselves or Bexley Council on their behalf and not passed onto any third parties.

Name _____ Enclosed is my/our subscription. £5

Children's Names (if applicable) _____ Enclosed is a donation to The Friends. £ _____

Address _____ *Please make cheque's payable to:*
Friends of Footh Cray Meadows
and send them along with your completed form to:

Margaret Dodd
FFCM Membership Secretary
32 Riverside Road
Sidcup
Kent DA14 4PU

Phone _____

Email _____