

## **Bishops Waltham North Pond Conservation Group Report**

I would like to report back on the North Pond Conservation Group's activities under five headings:

1. Lease
2. Work parties
3. Communications
4. Next steps
5. Fund raising

### ***1. Lease***

The North Pond Conservation Group now has a 15 year lease on the Dukes' owned part of the pond. This is the area from just south of the foot bridge down to the Winchester Road, but excluding the small area around the lay-by which is owned by Hampshire CC. It is at a peppercorn rent and renewable for a further 15 years on the same terms. Dukes paid the legal fees to set up the lease. Chamberlains kindly donated their time for the legal side to register it with the Land Registry.

### ***2. Work Parties.***

Fantastic progress has been made since we restarted the autumn/winter work parties on 24th September last year. We now have 61 names on our work party volunteers list and regularly get 15 to 20 at each session. Last Saturday we had 26 volunteers present. The combination of Norman Holland, a qualified chain saw operator, and a lot of volunteers enables us to achieve a lot each session. Barry Jerome and David Mclean organise the work parties.

The work parties have become a real community event. A new volunteer (from Havant), who had come along with his grand daughter who is doing her Duke of Edinburgh Award, commented "I can't believe how many people have come along to the work party from the community and how well everyone gets on. I think Bishops Waltham would be a good place to move to when I retire."

The focus of the work parties is in four areas: the channel, a pilot hole, view from the Corehampton lay-by and the stream from Pondsides.

Following discussions with Winchester CC Open Spaces (Damian Offer), we agreed to clear the channel using volunteers rather than with contractors paid for by Winchester. This would leave more money in the limited pot for work on the pond that cannot be done by volunteers. The problem was that the channel had become choked with fallen trees and debris so that there was a potential danger of flooding if we had a very wet winter. Many trees were also leaning and would possibly fall onto fences and into the gardens of houses in St. Bonnet Drive and Southfields Close. The Channel has now been cleared all the way from the Corehampton Road down to the sluice on the Winchester Road. This involved approximately 375 hours of volunteer time. If costed at £5/hour (minimum wage) it would have cost £1,875. A more realistic figure is if we had to pay for tree

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contractors to do it. Based on quotes received for other work, it would have cost about £9,000.

As part of our discussions with the Environment Agency (EA) about silt removal, we needed to dig a pilot hole to find out about water levels below the silt. A hole was dug 1m deep at one of the Saturday morning sessions in November. Although muddy the hole was dug without too much difficulty. At 1m deep, water was slowly seeping into the hole. Three days later the hole was full to within 20cm of the top. It has maintained this level ever since. This is a good sign that when silt is removed that it may be possible to retain some water in this part of the pond all year, during a normal summer.

Work was begun on the view from the lay-by just before Christmas and was completed last Saturday, after a two week break for Christmas. The intention is to have a path and bench seats and possibly a picnic table near the lay-by, with a view across the pond.

The next step is to clear fallen trees along the stream which flows into the pond under the Corehampton Road. This is a potential alternative source of water when the groundwater level is low. There are also trees to clear up which blew down in the recent storms.

### ***3. Communications.***

We held a public meeting in November to provide an update on progress and plans. It was well attended. We had to hold it in St Peters Church Hall as we were unable to get a booking in the Jubilee Hall. I believe that a concern was raised because we did not hold the meeting in the Jubilee Hall. We would have preferred to hold it there but despite having a four week window and attempting to book a month in advance, no dates were available. We were having problems trying to arrange an available date in May for the next public meeting, but this is now fixed for May 10<sup>th</sup> at 8pm in the Jubilee Hall.

A North Pond leaflet was designed, and kindly printed by Portsmouth Water who support us. This was distributed to every household in Bishops Waltham, made possible by part of the Parish Council grant. We received a lot of positive feedback and the number of volunteers has increased.

A weekly news sheet is sent out to all of the volunteers about plans for the next Saturday's work party. This normally includes some photos from the previous work party.

We have a web site which is kept updated and reports are published in the Parish News

Regular communications are held with the EA, Winchester CC Open Spaces, Portsmouth Water and Dukes

### **3. Next Steps.**

A major activity for 2012 is silt removal. By removing silt from an area near the Winchester Road we hope to be able to retain water in the North Pond for much longer. By doing this we plan to increase biodiversity considerably by maintaining a more stable wet environment and by introducing suitable native plants. This should expand the number of water bugs, insects, amphibians and other wild life species. We are in negotiation with Southern Water and one of their contractors (BTU) to achieve this. BTU initially wanted to know who else would be contributing. Dukes (Georgina Harvey) has agreed to contribute and we were also able to say that we have received a grant from the Parish Council towards the overall restoration plan, as well as many other contributions. I believe that this encouraged BTU to proceed. There is an on-site meeting on 27th January with Southern Water and BTU where we hope to gain agreement to the work being done in August. We will need planning permission from Winchester CC and the EA to proceed.

Most of the excavated silt will be used to construct viewing areas, one by the sluice and one by the lay-by. The silt will need to be allowed to consolidate, but following this the viewing areas will be created. Portsmouth Water have agreed to supply the Information Boards for these areas and to print the contents.

Other work will be planting up areas around the excavated silt with water plants, and other areas around the pond with suitable native trees.

### **4. Fund Raising.**

We are receiving support from a wide variety of organisations, including the Parish Council. We have also received several individual contributions. We have set up a page on our web site to acknowledge the contributions. A major contributor in 2012, providing all goes well, will be Southern Water and their contractor BTU. One disappointment is the lack of support, with a few exceptions (Chamberlains & Bishops Waltham Gallery), from the businesses within Bishops Waltham. Another source of funding which we are following up is the Hampshire CC small grants. We are applying for two grants in 2012.

One potential source of funding which initially looked very promising was Spacehive. This is a new proposition to link business contributions with community projects to get funding for those projects. It is run as a business with Spacehive taking a commission from the money raised. The North Pond was selected as one of their pilot projects and Robert Shields did all of the hard work in getting the arrangements in place for us. Unfortunately, as the arrangements have proceeded we have become disillusioned with Spacehive. They use a model which does not fit well with our Conservation Restoration, it works better with a fixed project such as getting funding for a building. We worked around this and Robert set up the agreement between Spacehive and the Parish Council. As it is only a part of our funding we could work around not getting any money from them until it was all raised. We had concerns before Christmas in that Spacehive's communications were assuming that they were the only ones providing funding and that work could not start until they approved it. We discussed this and thought we had reached a satisfactory outcome. A particular problem is that we do not have editorial control of what they are saying on their web site. The words they are using

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appear to have been constructed by a tabloid journalist and this is likely to give the wrong impression of what we are trying to achieve. The last straw was when they approached the H & IOW Wildlife Trust for support without our knowledge and without understanding the details of the restoration. We have representation of the Wildlife Trust on our committee, Jane Gentry, whom we would use to direct any requests for support as Jane has a good understanding of what we are trying to achieve. We believe now that using Spacehive will damage our cause and have therefore decided that it is not worth trying to use them to raise funds.

One good outcome from the involvement with Spacehive is that when Robert presented about the North Pond at a conference, that Southern Water approached Robert afterwards to help with silt removal, via a contribution in kind.