



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

CONSERVATION : PROTECTION : ENHANCEMENT : ENJOYMENT

Newsletter – Spring 09



Wildflowers in Ashenground Wood:

Wild Daffodils - May 09 (left); Native Bluebell - Easter Sunday April 12th 09 (right)

Welcome to all our supporters. The Wild Daffodils were particularly prolific in our Nature Reserve this year and there were some beautiful displays from the end of February onwards. Primroses and carpets of Wood Anemones have also been numerous and today (Easter Sunday) in Ashenground Wood I saw the first of the Native Bluebells. We feel that the woods as a whole have benefited from being opened up to let in more light through the canopy to the floor, enabling the woodland plants to thrive. In this edition of our Newsletter, you can read about the annual meetings of the Steering Committee that coordinates our activities (including woodland management) on p. 4. We hope you enjoy this Newsletter – **Sarah Witts** has contributed articles on the **Archaeology** of our Woods and on **Hedgerows**. Do come to Sarah's illustrated talk on Hedgerows in Ashenground on Sunday May 17th at 2.30 p.m. in Ashenground Community Centre – when a date for a field walk will also be set – see back page for more details of Sarah's talk. **Stuart Meier** informs us about the latest challenges presented by **Crest's development plans** and **Alastair McPherson** updates us on progress with **Bolnore Village Primary School**.

Janice Tipping

Conservation Volunteering

Do you look at notices? Back in 2004, as I was walking down the Bridleway, a notice on a tree asked if I would like to 'help look after this wood'? I thought it might be interesting – I seem to have lived and breathed it ever since!

We always say 'you don't need to help with the conservation work – there are lots of ways in which you can support us'. But in fact we *do desperately* need lots more help on conservation days. Please think about it. Tools are often simple shears and loppers, and we always collect litter – it's one of my favourite jobs because I can have a good prowling around! We also have rather more exciting tools for special jobs! Tea breaks are for chatting and biscuits?

Give it a try! Just turn up, or give Stuart (441645) or me (415339) a ring.

Gill Rogers

Hedgerows

Hedgerows have existed since Roman times and provide a pleasant background for everyday life. Hedgerows are lines of wood shrubs or trees historically planted to confine stock and to protect crops from browsing animals.

Today's neatly trimmed garden hedges usually consist of just one shrub type. However older, infrequently trimmed, mixed native shrub hedges are much richer in wildlife, providing large numbers of insects, birds and mammals with greater food and shelter than that found in many other habitats.



The FoABW Bug Hunt found some interesting specimens in a local hedgerow

In the past hedgerows provided local people with valuable timber, underwood, medicinal plants and a vital source of nuts and berries. Historically hedgerows marked boundaries, so providing living records of change and greedy land grabbing!

Find out more about the wildlife and historical value of hedgerows, learn to identify species and how to 'read' the hedges in Ashenground fields at an illustrated talk in Ashenground Community Centre on Sunday May 17th at 2.30 p.m. At this event a date will be set for a field walk.

Sarah Witts

Phase 4a Development Stalls

Crest say bridleway shaw will be protected but now Phase 4a development is stalled. The first sign of development on Phase 4 of Bolnore Village was last autumn, when black plastic fencing was installed around Great Poplar Field to protect newts from the

development. But little else has happened on site. And progress behind the scenes has now stalled too, due to the Credit Crunch.



Earlier this year, Crest modified their planning application submitted last autumn to address concerns, including the LCO's Council's Opinion that Bridleway Shaw should have a 15m buffer because it is ancient woodland. So, that buffer WAS enlarged to 15m minimum on the latest plan, as we demanded.

However, in late March Crest told the joint steering committee meeting (see article on back page) that they were re-assessing their plans in an attempt to reduce costs – and that they may change their application plans again, by carrying out development in small parcels, one sub-section at a time.

So the current Planning Application is (for now at least) on the back burner.

Will the development still take place? Yes, but we can expect it will be slower. Will the environmental safeguards we won at the Inquiry be followed? Yes – we will fight to ensure that no short-cuts or half-measures are allowed!

Bolnore Village School

During the past few months a number of developments have been made on the new school.

From 20th April 2009 Sharon Allen will start as Head Teacher. After 10 years in London she will be looking to relocate to Mid-Sussex over the next couple of months and it is hoped we can start a dialogue with her soon to introduce her to the woodland environment that the school is located within and discuss how FoABW can evolve a

sustainable relationship with the newly named 'Bolnore Village Primary School'. With this relationship in mind FoABW have been asked by the Temporary Governing Body of the school to advise on the management of the buffer areas surrounding the school. This will try to ensure that the woods and school areas are managed as 'one', and that the correct management schemes are put in place at the correct times of the year.

As far as planning applications are concerned the first set of plans for the non-build areas of the school have been submitted and passed as of mid-January. Phase 2 of the planning application (for school buildings) was considered by the MSDC Central Area Planning Committee on 5th February. No objections were made, indeed the planning application was actually welcomed, and the MSDC officers have subsequently sent a letter of support to WSCC and have now been approved. The building will start in the summer with the school being ready for pupils by September 2010 on site. (The first year's intake of the school is to be housed at St. Wilfred's School, Haywards Heath).



Newt fencing around the School Site

We wait to see how the building plans develop and hope to report back as the school build progress in the next newsletter.

Alastair McPherson

How do we know people worked in the woods?

Up until the 2nd World War woods were noisy, busy places providing employment for people managing, cutting, preparing and transporting wood. People required firewood for heating. Wood was widely used as plastics or manmade materials were few. Most fences were wooden as barbed wire or electric fencing was scarce. Vast quantities of poles were needed for hop poles, bean poles, fence poles and even washing lines, while cart wheels, furniture and construction work all required wood.

Today, although the woods are quiet and the workers have gone, signs of past activity remain; some hidden under leaves on the woodland floor, others easily seen.

In both Ashenground and Pierce's Wood shallow, rectangular holes mark the site of old saw pits. The picture below shows the **outline of an old saw pit**.



Old boundaries, sometimes with older, marker trees growing at regular intervals, are marked by low banks.



Bridleway bank with pollarded trees

Hazel and chestnut trees in Ashenground and Bolnore Woods, once cut to the ground every 10 - 15 years (coppiced) lie untouched, although MSDC recently recoppiced Bolnore Wood. Neglected coppice areas are seen to the right of the central path in Ashenground Wood.



Neglected coppice

If only some of the older trees could talk! What stories could they tell of the activities in Ashenground and Bolnore Woods?

Sarah Witts

Annual Spring Meeting of MSDC Joint Steering C'ttee

The pithily named 'MSDC Ashenground and Bolnore Woods Steering Committee' meets twice a year to co-ordinate the Friends' activities with MSDC and with the residents associations. MSDC and the Town Council are represented by councillors, and MSDC officers come in force. So it is a big meeting!

This year for the first time Crest attended with four of their team, and we were pleased to have the support of Tony Whitbread of Sussex Wildlife Trust.

So what does it discuss? Anything which needs to be co-ordinated between FoABW, woodland users and the councils can be put on the agenda.

Included this year was discussion on:

- Ecological remedial works (not yet finished) on the wildlife corridors in Bolnore Village Phase 2
- Problems caused by people dumping rubbish and garden waste in the woods
- Communication by Crest to Bolnore residents – a leaflet is planned by Crest but we think their proposal is inadequate
- Local Nature Reserve – future strategy
- Phases 4 & 5 implementation (see article regarding the slow down)
- Tree work, including the first phase of much-overdue coppicing in Catts Wood
- Bridleway upgrade (delayed by Crest *again*)

Just like the Forth Road Bridge, we will no doubt be going back over the same ground next year. In the past year we have made good progress on woodland management and the nature reserve – so we hope we have made more progress in the coming year too!

Stuart Meier

Conservation Work and Special Events

See our **Programmes** on the **notice boards** on the Bridge at the Ashenground Road entrance to the Woods, and at the entrances to Pierce's, Catts and Bolnore Woods.

Don't forget to check out our **website** for our Newsletters and Programmes. **www.foabw.com** There is also a link to an album of photographs taken in the woods over the years plus a link to an album of photographs taken as part of our ongoing photographic survey of the woods.

Join us to help with **Conservation Work.** We normally meet on the **1st Sunday** (meeting place Ashenground Bridge) and **3rd Saturday** each month (meeting place the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village) at 10.00 a.m. However this changes in the summer months to just once a month. In May we meet on Sunday 3rd, in June on Saturday 20th, in July on Sunday 5th and in August on Saturday 15th. Back to normal in September.

We arrange **Special Events** throughout the year. Here are two for your diaries:

- **Sunday 17th May** – 2.30 p.m. – Ashenground Community Centre. Sarah Witts will give an illustrated talk entitled '**All about our local hedgerows**'. Find out more about the wildlife and historical value of hedgerows, learn to identify species and how to 'read' the hedges in Ashenground fields. A date for a Field Walk will also be set.
- **Sunday 26th July - Bug Hunt** – with Dr. Martin Hall of the Natural History Museum. This popular annual event is enjoyed by adults and children alike. Meet at 2.00 p.m. on the bridge at the end of Ashenground Road.

General Information - Janice on 01444 414053 or 07752 003529

Information about membership - Fleur Carey on 01444 473179

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