



Newsletter – Winter 08/09



A wintry scene in Ashenground Wood (in fact this photograph was taken in April 08!)

As winter draws in, FoABW has ongoing challenges. Crest's plans for Great Poplar Field, the Bridleway Upgrade and the School Site in Bolnore Village all require our ongoing attention to ensure that we continue to protect our ancient woodlands and their rich flora and fauna for future generations. Stuart Meier updates us regarding Phase 4a of Bolnore Village and the Bridleway Upgrade. A report regarding the new school and its implications for FoABW is provided by Alastair McPherson.

Please support FoABW's objection to the Phase 4a buffer at Bridleway Shaw (shown in the plan as only one metre instead of the necessary 15 metres). See article on p.2 for details of how to send a letter of objection.

Looking back over the time that FoABW has been in existence, we have achieved a great deal and it is important that we recognise these achievements. Our chair, Christine McLean, reminds us of these achievements on p. 4.

We enjoyed some Special Events over the summer months. Our annual Insect Walk took place in the summer and once again we were very fortunate to be led by Martin Hall of the Natural History Museum. All of us who attended had a very interesting time finding, collecting, examining and learning about various insects in the woods and meadows. The children (and the adults) found Martin's nets great fun. We also had a fascinating Bat Talk by Jenny Clark of the Sussex Bat Hospital. Jenny brought some of her remarkable bats with her. See a report about this event on p. 3.

Finally, check out our new website on the following link: www.foabw.com

JaniceTipping

AGM – 30th January 2009 at 7.30 p.m.

Our AGM will be on **Friday 30th January 2009 at 7.30 p.m.** in the Ashenground Community Centre, Southdown Close, off Vale Road, Haywards Heath. We are very pleased to tell you that Heather Warne, archivist at Arundel Castle, will talk about 'the early history of Hayworth and Trubwick in Haywards Heath'. All current members are warmly invited to attend. And those readers who are not yet members are also very welcome to come along and find out more about us. It will be possible to join on the night.

Legal Advice says 'At least 15 Metres' for the Bridleway Shaw Buffer

FoABW has now submitted a Counsel's Opinion to MSDC supporting its demand for proper buffering of ancient woodland north of Ashenground Wood. The legal advice stresses the need for the minimum 15 meter buffering for the Bridleway Shaw, whereas plans propose as little as ONE meter between the Shaw and houses Crest want to build on Phase 4.

FoABW's barrister, Charles Banner, has stressed that the Planning Inspector made it clear that ancient woodland like the Shaw should have a 15 meter buffer – and that it is not open to Crest to avoid proper protection because (unlike Four Acre Wood and Reading Wood) the Shaw was not explicitly named in the conditions.

All the Local Community Organisations have written jointly to MSDC (you can see the letter on the MSDC website), objecting on several grounds, including Crest's failure to incorporate the construction management arrangements agreed at the Inquiry. Wildlife and public safety both matter!

Sussex Wildlife Trust are also objecting that the buffering of the shaw is ecologically unacceptable, and that the detailed design of the buffers must include proper fencing on the housing edge, not buried in the middle of the buffers as Crest propose.

Unless you have already done so, please can you sign a letter of objection urgently. To be valid, it must include your address. Please send it or drop it into MSDC in Oaklands Road. Thank you for supporting FoABW!

Stuart Meier

Bolnore School Update

The school seems to be starting to take shape metaphorically. Since the last newsletter the temporary governing body has started the recruitment of the head teacher, there have been various feasibility presentations on the project design, architects have been appointed, an open evening for prospective parents has been held at St. Wildreds School and a school dinner tasting evening has been held to decide on the provision of catering within the school.



Guelder Rose – found on the eastern border of the school site – adjacent to Ashenground Wood

Of more direct interest to FoABW, the school site has now been cleared to a height of a few centimetres ready for the topographical surveys that are now being carried out. There has been a lot of discussion with regards to 15m buffers around the school site and these have now been kept in situ. WSCC have advised that they will be submitting a two-stage planning application.

Planning Application 1 is an early application

which will allow WSCC to get full planning permission for the site which can then be submitted to Natural England with the environmental mitigation plans. By getting the application in to Natural England earlier than previously planned, WSCC hope to get the new licence earlier which would allow newt capture and relocation at the optimal time – we understand this approach has been discussed in principle with Natural England. A two-stage planning application also allows for more time to be spent on the building design – although timescales are still tight. Re-Format, the architects, are currently working up plans for the school building which will go out to wide consultation at the appropriate time. As part of the planning process Stuart Meier and Gill Rogers were invited to attend the learning environment sign off meeting of the first planning application to ensure FoABW were totally satisfied with the initial plans. The meeting was very constructive and I believe all parties were happy with the outcomes. We now begin working on the planning applications for the second stage of the school – the buildings. So far the plans look very promising and hopefully in my report for the next newsletter I'll have some positive news regarding these planning outcomes.

In the meantime there is now a noticeboard on the school site. Also of course there is the School website bolnoreschoolgroup.org which is a constantly updated source of information that I would encourage you to visit.

Alastair McPherson

Further Delay to Bridleway Upgrade

The start to the bridleway upgrade has now been delayed till the New Year, we were told by Crest at a recent consultation meeting. Residents will recall that WSCC shocked everyone this summer by announcing closure of the complete bridleway at very short notice – but nothing has happened since.



Protesting about the bridleway closure notice put up by WSCC

Bat Talk by Jenny Clark

Jenny Clark of the Sussex Bat Hospital came to talk to us about the service which the hospital provides. She brought along several bats for us to see and admire – including the brown long-eared bat shown below. Jenny emphasised that the bats she brought along were ones that were unsuitable to be released back into their natural habitat.



Jenny has been caring for bats for about 25 years and the Sussex Bat Hospital is in her home – so it has become a full time occupation. Her love for these tiny creatures was apparent. Jenny rescues bats that are in trouble. She tries to restore them to health and fitness with the aim of returning them back to where they came from.

Jenny felt it was unfair that they had such a bad reputation and decided that they needed someone to fight their corner. She says that they are gentle, friendly, non-aggressive and she finds them absolutely fascinating.

At the recent meeting Crest's construction team explained that they would phase the work to minimise inconvenience to the public, although it was unavoidable that at times some access points would be impeded.

Because FoABW (and others) have insisted there should be no digging on Four Acre Wood, a drain will have to be 'microtunnelled' under the wood and under the bridleway. The construction of this will need to precede the bridleway upgrade, so the final section of Bridleway upgrading near Ashenground Bridge may not take place for some time.

It was a very helpful and positive meeting, and I thanked Crest's construction and technical people for keeping us informed.

Stuart Meier

For many of us it was our first opportunity to see bats up close. Because they are night creatures, seen only dimly at dusk in their natural habitats, most of us only catch glimpses of them as they swoop down after insects. Their large wings make them look bigger than they really are, making some of us feel uneasy in their presence.

Some facts about bats:

- Bats are mammals and like all mammals they are warm blooded.. They are the only mammals that can fly.
- There are 17 species of bats living in Britain and Ireland and some are extremely rare.
- British bats eat insects, including midges, moths and beetles. They have very big appetites. A common pipistrelle (which Jenny brought along) can eat over 3,000 tiny insects in a single night!
- Bats do not make nests, but choose various places to roost. Some prefer hollow trees, some caves and some roof spaces.
- Bats are not blind but at night their ears are more important than their eyes. They make sounds (often inaudible to humans) and the returning echoes give information about anything that is ahead of them.
- Bats are unlikely to attack people or pets.

Thank you Jenny for sharing your passion with us.

Janice Tipping

The History of Friends - Our Achievements to date!

Local residents wanted to set up a Friends' group to protect, conserve and help manage Ashenground Woods many years ago. However, it only became possible when Mid Sussex District Council became the landowner in 2004. Initially we were called **Friends of Ashenground Woods**. MSDC and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers gave us a great deal of advice and in December 2005 the Friends of Ashenground Woods held its inaugural meeting, attended by 60 people, which showed how much local people cared about the woods. A committee was elected to organise a programme of events, conservation work and a management plan.

We had to make sure we had sufficient **training** for what we intended to do and embarked on a series of courses. We wanted everyone to enjoy the woods but realised early on that we would need paths to avoid the undergrowth being trampled on randomly. Some paths were laid by MSDC but others were made by our volunteers on the monthly **conservation days**. We also made seats from wood and one of our members hand-made a notice board in the shape of a leaf. We have cleared and cut back some areas as part of the management plan, as if the trees and undergrowth are too dense there is no regeneration and plants become suffocated.

Right from the start we organised **family events**. Fungus Forays, Bird Watches and Insect Walks/Bug Hunts are some that have been very successful.

As more houses became occupied in Bolnore Village, the new residents joined us at events and on conservation days. Bolnore, Pierces and Catts woods were to be handed over to MSDC and in April 2006 we held a special meeting to agree the change of name to **Friends of Ashenground & Bolnore Woods** to recognise the inclusion of the extra areas.

We had become aware that there was a threat to the woods if the proposed Phases 4 & 5 Crest development went ahead as proposed. We needed to ensure that wildlife corridors and areas of ancient woodland were protected and we **campaign**ed to have sufficient buffers and save Four Acre Meadow. Readers will know the story of the subsequent **Inquiry** and the support we received from the community. Although we were successful at the Inquiry, we remain vigilant.

So where are we now after four years? We have a healthy involved **membership**, although we always welcome new members and helpers. There are usually two **conservation days** a month, as one is not enough to manage all the woods, plus regular **review walks**. We have recently introduced **indoor events**, as some are not suitable to hold in the woods. A **photographic survey** is being undertaken so that we can see changes through the seasons and years. This will help us fine tune the management plans and conservation work. We are also pleased to announce that we now have our own **website**. Find this on: www.foabw.com

Christine McLean, Chair of Friends of Ashenground and Bolnore Woods

See our **Programmes** and details of **Special Events** 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. Our Newsletters and Programmes are on our website. They are also on the **MSDC Website** under **Environment and Planning - Nature Conservation - Ashenground and Bolnore Woods**. www.midsussex.gov.uk

Join us to help with **conservation projects**. We meet on the **first Sunday** each month (meeting place Ashenground Bridge) and **third Saturday** each month (meeting place the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village) at 10.00 a.m. You are also welcome to join us on our monthly review walks, which take place on the **second Sunday** of every month. To find out more about membership contact our **membership secretary, Fleur Carey on 01444 473170**.

Photographic survey: <http://picasaweb.google.com/FoABWphotos>

Photographs taken in our woods:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/JaniceTipping/AshengroundandBolnoreWoods>

Published by Friends of Ashenground and Bolnore Woods, c/o Janice Tipping, 17 Pinewood Way, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 4JU, 07752 003529