

M.A.G. Meeting Notes
7pm, Monday 4th December 2023

In Attendance:

Carol Leo, Trustee	Katie Scott, Trustee
Rita Du Rocher	Paul Du Rocher
James Mackellan	Matthew Adamson
Andy Pennington	Jan Allon-Smith
Karen Lees	Gabby Crisp, Skell Valley Project

Discussion Notes

Tree Planting

Carol outlined plans for the Tree Planting scheduled for Friday 8th and Saturday 9th December indicating the planting areas on a site map. Open Country volunteers will be on site on Saturday.

A mix of large saplings and small whips, all of native species will be planted. Two new hedgerows to be created plus underplanting of existing woodland areas and infilling of any existing hedgerows as required. Dead hedging will be used to protect newly planted areas as needed.

Agreed that larger saplings need to be sited carefully to give room for growth. Locations to be determined when on site.

Potential for hedge-laying was discussed, for example along the Choir School Boundary. Gabby noted this would not be for about 10 years, but should be included in for future planning.

Tree Marking

It has been reported that many trees on Hell Wath are being marked with blue spots. FOHW have been in contact with North Yorkshire Council (Tree Officer and Public Rights of Way) and Skell Valley Project but the markings have not been made by them. It's a bit of a mystery !

If anyone notices trees being marked, or any work being done on any trees within Hell Wath please report it immediately to Jem (sec.fohw@gmail.com) or the Tree Officer at North Yorkshire Council via Fran (Community.har@northyorks.gov.uk)

Scrub Management – Winter 2023/24

Gabby explained the proposals for cutting back additional blackthorn scrub on the lower meadows in Zone 3 to reduce encroachment into the grassland areas. This is part of the overall plan to manage scrub on a cyclical basis to provide different ages and layers of blackthorn across the site.

This work will be undertaken by volunteers. Cut down materials will either be moved to other areas for the purpose of creating dead hedges, or chipped, with the chippings put back into the area of existing blackthorn scrub.

Gabby offered to be available on Wednesday 6th December, meeting at the Clubhouse at 12.15, to show anyone interested the proposed area and explained the plan of action and several members expressed an interest. Carol will ask Jem to publicise.

Grassland Management

Grass cutting is needed to improve the quality and biodiversity of the meadows. A plan for managing the grasslands by mechanical or manual scything on a cyclical basis is being drafted.

Paul noted that the plan needs to give consideration to the seeding patterns of grassland plants and to the provision of flowers and overwintering habitats for insects when planning the timing of cuts. It was also noted that some meadow areas need to be cut to reduce the spread of Himalayan Balsam across the meadows.

'Waste Materials' Management

Concern has been raised in the past about piling up grass cuttings along the margins of Hell Wath. Whilst mounds of grass cuttings can provide good habitat for grass snakes and slow worms, FOHW recognise that large amounts of waste materials left on site is not ideal.

Annual hay cutting and baling of the top meadows is no longer commercially viable, so alternatives are needed. It is proposed that grass cuttings be left on site when small areas are cut. These may be left in mounds in the margins or left in a specific area on site if a suitable area can be identified. For larger cuts, there is the possibility of manual raking and hay baling. Gabby and the SVP are going to make a manual hay baler over the winter so this can be tried in 2024. It may also be possible to collect grass cuttings to dispose of them by hiring a skip.

Ecology Surveys

2024 Bioblitz

A Bioblitz is to be organised during Summer 2024. Gabby asked members to provide details of local experts able to help with organising the surveying of any flora and fauna, or advise if they think any particular surveys should be undertaken so experts can be sourced.

Site Survey System

Matthew provided information on the potential to overlay the map of Hell Wath with 50mx50m grids to assist with the recording of ecological data. The system would allow either informal sightings or formal surveys of flora and fauna to be recorded with the grid location. It was agreed that this could be very useful. Matthew and Jem will further explore the use of MAPMATE to ensure it meets our needs.

It is expected to continue with our formal weekly butterfly surveys, and monthly bat monitoring. We will also organise another fungi survey next Autumn. It is proposed that members and volunteers be encouraged to complete informal surveys of grasslands, trees and hedgerows, reporting their findings to MAPMATE administrators to enable us to build a picture of the species present across the Hell Wath site.

Tree Survey

This has been a key objective of the FOHW. Carol reported that a tree survey has been commissioned for Hell Wath, funded by a grant from Ripon City Council. This survey will take place before the end of March. It is not intended to map every tree, but to identify specific areas of tree and hedgerow habitat and provide recommendations on how best to manage them in future.

Other Site Issues

Bat Boxes – John Pearse has examined the bat boxes recently put up at six locations around Hell Wath and reported that roosting bats were found in every location which is great news.

Tawny Owl Boxes – This year's FOHW membership fees have been used to purchase 3 Tawny Owl boxes, made for us by Ripon Men's Shed. Jem is painting the boxes prior to them being located on trees within Hell Wath.

Plantlife

Carol and Jem had a long conversation and site walk with Plantlife, the organisation who took over the Woodland Meadows Trust. There is the possibility of Hell Wath being accepted as a project site for Plantlife. This would give us access to funding, knowledge and experience to improve the grassland habitats on site.

Miner Bees – Paul asked if a location could be prepared to provide a habitat for Miner Bees on site. Paul has identified a potential site and this will be considered as part of our ongoing plans.

Annual General Meeting

Carol issued a set of papers to the members present. The papers included:

- Proposed AGM arrangements and schedule
- AGM Agenda
- Trustee Nomination Form

Carol advised that these papers will be issued to all members via email on the 5th December and made public on the FOHW website and social media accounts on the 6th December.

Carol also advised that two Trustees have confirmed that they will be resigning at the AGM which leaves two vacancies to be filled. Carol asked that members consider becoming a Trustee to enable the good work of the FOHW Charity to be continued into the future. The arduous work of drafting policies and procedures has already been completed, so the Trustees now need to focus on completing a new Management Plan in 2024 and organising activities that enable our charitable objectives to be fulfilled. Current Trustees would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Close

Carol thanked everyone for attending and contributing to the discussions. The meeting closed at 8.35pm