

Friends of Naphill Common

Fello to all our members. This newsletter is intended to keep you in touch with the Friends of Naphill Common group, let you know what we have been doing and lay out the future programme.

The first year of the group's existence is within two months of completion and what a year it has been! So far we have held ten events, including walks for health, botany walks, a picnic, a treasure hunt and a Heritage Open Day walk that attracted forty-eight people. We have held six committee meetings, set up a bank account, designed and launched a web site, issued a newsletter, and communicated with various organisations and individuals to further our aims. Our newly recruited, and very welcome, membership secretary announced that our membership has reached 105 – that is more than we could reasonably have expected for a brand new village organisation in such a short time. Thanks are due to all those who helped do all these things and to all who took part in them.

Inevitably, some events were more successful than others but none were a real flop. We are trying to learn from the experiences while

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devising a new programme for next year, and we will explore different ways of advertising our events. One big change will be the start of working parties for those who are interested – but more of that below.

www.naphillcommon.org.uk

If any member has ideas or observations – including those that are critical – please let the committee know.

The common is a wonderful asset to the village and the wider community

and we want to conserve its best qualities and improve what is not-so-good. It has a rich flora and fauna, but it could be richer still if we can help to diversify the habitats a little.



It has some noble and venerable old trees, but they are vulnerable and need care in their old age: this year several have been damaged by winds and one of the finest is in the last stages of dying. We have begun the task of improving the path signs but many of the paths themselves are remain overgrown and liable to becoming quagmires. The ponds did well in the wet summer but they are in desperate need of some clearing and maintenance.



Download this map from our website to get the footpath numbers now added to posts.

Working Parties.

We would like to organise working parties to undertake relatively small tasks such as widening paths, clearing around the few remaining junipers, cleaning out the ponds and so forth. However, because the common is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest of international importance, and a Special Conservation Area,



not to mention being part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, we – quite rightly – have to get special permission to do any significant work upon it. We have to get permission from Natural England who are responsible for the SSSI, the landowners, and the tenant to whom most of the common is leased.

At last we are making progress. We now know that the area right up to the wall of Bradenham Manor is part of Naphill Common and this includes “The Clumps” and the open grassland near the Umbrella Tree. This is owned by the National Trust and we have just received permission from them to do work there. Over by the edge of Bradenham Wood is the last few fragments of the heather which once covered much of the area, when the common was open heath-land and wood pasture. This heather is disappearing as the wood gradually extends outwards. If this continues we will lose another piece of history and ecological diversity. The National Trust has already removed some of the saplings overshadowing the heather but more remains to be done. Some members may want to get involved and we will let you know when a work-



To Come

We hope you will be able to join the remaining events in our programme.

- (1) On **Wednesday 28th October 2009** Derek Schafer and Penny Cullingham, both of the Bucks Fungus Group, will lead a “**Fungus Foray**”, starting from the Village Hall at 10 am. They will help us to identify the woodland fungi and tell us which are edible and which are best avoided.
- (2) On **Sunday 17th January 2010**, the botanist Andrew McVeigh of the Bucks CC will lead a walk to inspect our last few remaining **Junipers** – once the pride of Naphill Common – and take cuttings as part of an official project to save this retreating species and establish new plantings. Look out for details of time and place on the website and in the Naphill and Walter’s Ash Gazette nearer the time.
- (3) Please come to our **AGM** in Naphill Village Hall on **Friday 22nd January 2010**, beginning with a cup of tea or coffee at 7.30 pm. There will be two main speakers, one telling us about the **Red Kites** that are now such a feature of our skies – and which roost on the common – and another giving a brief account of the new scheme to study the **Fruit Orchards** which were once such an important part of the local economy and to save some of the traditional and local varieties of apples, cherries, plums and pears. There will also be a chance to have your say, make suggestions about future activities, and pass judgement on the old committee and vote in the new.

ing party is being arranged.

Getting permission for the area of the common owned by West Wycombe Estate – and that is the great majority of it - is proving more difficult, but we shall persist. Our aim is to begin next year, perhaps starting with one or more of the ponds.



Surveys.

Our two walks, one looking at grasses with Angus Idle, the other at flowers with Dr Alan Showler, were very successful, and made us think about undertaking more ambitious surveys. We need to know what is on the common and make “before and after” surveys when we do work to improve the bio-diversity, so as to measure our success (or failure). There have been quite thorough surveys in the past but the common is a dynamic system and

things change.

For example, the entomologist Peter Hodge surveyed the insects on Naphill Common in 1996 and 1997, just when felling had taken place and the bridleways had been opened up. He found several ‘ancient woodland indicator species’, and fourteen insects categorised as ‘nationally scarce’ and one ‘Red Data Book’ species – which means it is especially rare or endangered. (This was a social wasp *Dolichovespula saxonica*.) In May this year the entomologist M. G. Bloxham made a very brief survey and found four ‘nationally scarce’ insects, but not the same species as in the earlier surveys. Now that the common has become overgrown again perhaps we could commission a thorough survey to reveal the changes.

