

OB Parish Council Working Party - Green Management Committee

Report for the Annual Village Meeting - 31st May 2019

This report covers the activities of the Green Management Committee for the Financial Year 2018/2019. The objectives of the management committee are:

Maintain the Green and keep it safe & attractive with defined areas for general amenity, recreation and conservation

Improve key features such as grass, ponds, tracks & paths over time

Engage with the Village – both in terms of meeting their wants & needs and getting local people involved with the work and conservation

Resource - use PC funding & ceded GRP income judiciously – obtain grant funding and sponsorship wherever possible

We met monthly and issued written reports of our activities to the Parish Council and Green Right Proprietors. The committee includes representatives of: Parish Council; Green Right Proprietors; Lord of the Manor and OB residents but all significant decisions are ratified by the full Parish Council who also authorise all financial expenditure. It has been a pleasure to work together looking after the Green and the support of the Parish Council has been the crucial factor for successfully maintaining one of the biggest assets in our village and a defining feature of Old Buckenham. As well as Parish Council support, it has again been particularly rewarding to receive so much support and encouragement from OB residents.

First two objectives – “MAINTAIN” & “IMPROVE”

GRASS & VEGETATION

- The Green was cut by Mr Suggitt three times in 2018 and he also made a final tidy-up cut of the edges and areas which could not be cut with his larger machine.
- Mr Suggitt will be mowing again in 2019/2020 and we have asked him to leave some of the large central area and the Pound uncut until wildflowers have set seed.
- Footpaths for walkers were cut before the main cuts when the grass was long.
- Vegetation around Green Pond and Rod Alley Pond has been cleared – including willow trees growing into the wall of Rod Alley Pond.

PONDS & TRACKS

- We were very grateful to receive assistance from Attleborough Retained Firefighters when on training duty and not required on call-out, who used their equipment to aerate Rod Alley Pond and save the distressed fish during very hot weather last Summer. Firefighters have expressed an interest in using our ponds for training exercises in future.
- Nobody can have failed to notice the major refurbishment of Ottomer Pond. Trees have been removed (all with Breckland Tree Office approval) and the brash cleared away in accordance with a strict timetable for the preservation of newt habitat (and supervised by a representative of Norfolk Wildlife Trust). The pond has been dug out, stumps removed and buried and the sides re-graded and re-seeded. NWT provided a list of plants suitable for planting around Ottomer Pond – some have now been acquired (with thanks for a kind donation) and planted.

- Repair/resurfacing of potholed track outside Gamekeeper has been completed - 50% of the cost was met by Enterprise Inns Estates.
- Donated topsoil was used to try and raise the edge of the Green alongside the pull-in for parking opposite the shop and the track across the Green from Abbey Road to Sunnyside House, both of which have deteriorated and been unofficially extended by vehicles eroding the edge of the Green. The slopes of the soil banks along Abbey Road track have been graded, reducing the profile to ensure a tractor can be used for mowing.

TREES

- A professional tree survey was commissioned, and a report produced detailing the species, condition and grid reference for all 298 trees on the Green. Each tree has been tagged with a small numbered metal disc on the trunk. If residents have concerns or enquiries about any tree, they may contact the Parish Council and refer to it by number.
- Three trees highlighted as 'high risk' on the tree survey have now been dealt with. The very tall tree close to the War Memorial has been inspected by the Breckland tree officer (as we had been advised it should perhaps be reduced at the top). He indicated he would not object to the proposed reduction but suggested that it would possibly cause more problems with new rapid growth at the top as the tree is a very healthy specimen. His recommendation is that we plant some replacement trees, more hardwood varieties, and in 8/10 years fell the offending tree totally. This should be more cost effective and beneficial to the Green.
- UKPN worked on trees close to overhead wires at Ottomer Pond. We made the most of their visit, requesting they use their available time for felling rather than clearing up, which we organised ourselves.
- Trees behind the bus shelter have been felled and the area cleared of brush.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

- Work at Ottomer pond ceased temporarily while the position regarding protected newt species was clarified. A June 2018 survey by Norfolk Wildlife Trust did not find any newts in or around Ottomer pond and in September, members of the working party met with a representative of Norfolk Wildlife Trust at Ottomer Pond who checked for the presence of Great Crested Newts around the pond and around the demolished wall of West View Farm. No newts were found but advice was given on how best to work in the possible newt territory and how to conserve and protect them and other wildlife. The team prepared a report for the PC which demonstrates full compliance with the rules for working in areas which may contain Great Crested Newts.
- In March, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust talk about wildlife on Commons was well supported. NWT have asked everybody to record wildlife seen on the Green and will prepare a survey and advisory management plan for us. They will give us up to 100 hazel 'stools' for underplanting through the wooded areas to provide more cover for birds etc. In due course, they would like to prepare a historical survey of the Green & surround.

OTHER

- The circular tree seat which has surrounded the large tree at Abbey Road junction for the last 34 years has been repaired and restored and now bears a memorial plaque to Bill and Bailey – thank you to Bill's family for their contribution towards the cost.

- The Drain on road between Hargham Road & Mill Road has been cleared by NCC and seems to be flowing now.
- The waste bin stolen/removed from Green (Hargham Rd) has been replaced.

Third objective – “ENGAGE”

- Litter picks in May, July, September, October & March and bulb planting around Ottomer Pond proved successful and were well supported by the Village.
- Following a presentation at the January PC meeting, Oliver Lee from The Landscape Partnership (professional land use consultancy) has been engaged to assist the team in developing objectives and a development strategy for the Green. The project will be partly sponsored by a Parishioner. The team have discussed the Strengths and Weaknesses of OB Green and the Opportunities and Threats it faces – an initial ‘SWOT’ analysis as suggested by Oliver. Further work will follow.

Final objective – “RESOURCE”

- Received £2,000 grant from the Greggs Foundation to assist with the refurbishment of Ottomer Pond. Many thanks to Kerry Talbot for helping with the application.
- Reviewing our income and expenditure for last year, the second year of new arrangement - Total expenditure made by the working party in the last financial year was £5,300. This was funded by: sponsorship, donations, commercial activities & Green Right Proprietors £1,100; Greggs grant £1,800 (£200 left to spend in the current year); OB Parish Council £2,400.

Work in progress

- Investigating Defra grants and Stewardship Scheme payments which may be available and appropriate and will revisit again in September/October 2019.
- Considering additional bat boxes for the Green – also a bat survey (equipment to do this is provided free of charge by the British Trust for Ornithology).
- It has been suggested to us that the sides of Manor Pond are too steep – looking for help (digger) with grading to improve access for water birds and other wildlife which might in turn help control weed.
- Investigate feasibility of repair of track from shop to White House – likely to need digging out, levelling and re-rolling.
- Continue to look for grants which may be available for community resource, conservation etc.