



Friends of Island Pond Wood Ltd

Report for Launton Parish Council Annual Meeting 2023/24

We reported last year that it had been busy in the wood and I can confirm that we have kept up that momentum over the last 12 months. New grant funded projects have been started by local contractors and our excellent volunteers have initiated regular monthly work sessions. We have however had to contend with significant flooding of the wood on 4 occasions over the winter. Full details of the projects and maintenance activities were presented at the March AGM with 22 members and 1 guest in attendance.

New projects completed in 2023 included:

- The replacement bench by the Pond was installed in April 2023. A big thank you to Charles Cooper for creating the bench and the donation by Kathy Skinner to fund the bench in her late partners memory.
- Installation of a RADAR gate lock at the entrance to the wood
- The first year Trust for Oxfordshire Environment grant enabled:
 - Creation and fencing of a new wildlife pond - T L Jenkins
 - Thinning the side wood and around the new pond - Alchester Tree Services
 - Hire of a cut and collect machine, to cut the southern meadow area, western strip and area round the original pond for meadow restoration, from Helpful Hirings. Thank you to Neil Hewitt for volunteering 2 days to operate the machine.
 - Vale Countryside Volunteers undertaking hedgerow management.
 - Baseline ecological survey to track the impact of future improvement works - Future Nature.
- The second year grant from Trust for Oxfordshire Environment enabled further woodland thinning and the creation of a second wildlife pond:
 - Selective thinning is whereby a tree is chosen to keep. The trees within close proximity are removed to allow growth. Has been a 1 in 3 thin.
 - Light to the woodland floor promotes growth of floral interest and creates dappled shade for butterflies
 - Brash and log piles left as deadwood benefit insects, many of which lay their larvae in rotting dead wood
 - Group of 10 aspens removed to prevent sucker growth encroaching into the wildflower meadow to allow a second wildlife pond to be created in the northern meadow where the aspens were taken out
 - Removing the aspen stumps whilst digging will prevent suckers
 - Pond will be fenced to prevent disturbance
 - This work was intended to be completed by now but the extensive flooding has prevented the contractors gaining access to the site
- Introduction of monthly Tuesday and Sunday work sessions for local volunteers to help with maintenance activities.

During 2023 the following events were delivered to encourage more residents to discover the benefits of a local community woodland:

- Dawn Chorus in May supported by 13 members
- Bat Walk in May supported by 20 members
- Woodfest in October supported by many residents and visitors with:
 - Stallholders: Peekaboos, Muddy Feet Forest Schools, The Hummingbird Centre, Friends of Launton Parish Hall, Paul and his

Apple press, Ed with LES, Copper Pot catering and Launton Village Players.

- Raffle prizes from: The Launton Arms, The Bull Inn, The Cattleshed Candle Company, Blenheim Palace, Imagex, Coles Books, Jump Inc Bicester, Canine Captures, The Garden Room, Tesco, New Pond Farm, Costcutter, Vue and Jewsons.

We will follow a similar format during 2024 but with additional small events that have already been publicised on local social media and in Lawnton Lines.

Our plans for 2024 include:

- Finalisation of our 20 year management plan
- Final block of woodland to be thinned winter 24/25
- Continued rotational coppice of hedgerows
- Lay final section of northern boundary hedge
- Annual cut and collect of wildflower meadow and restoration areas
- Investigate brook clearance on the southern boundary to reduce the impact of flood water - EA state it's technically a main river so will need permissions for any changes
- Dredging of the original pond over two years. Done in autumn to limit disturbance to pond life.
- Boundary works on the Blackthorn Road boundary. This will involve coppicing and laying some of the scrub, but leaving some standing, to promote regeneration and different age structures.
- Pruning of the fruit trees
- Re stoning of the entrance path from the road to the kissing gate
- Reed cutting on two year rotation

The above work is subject to securing funding and/or sufficient volunteer support as we continue to invest in enhancements to the wood and pond.

The pond is well stocked with fish and 12 members hold fishing licenses. The current visitors include moorhens with chicks, ducks with ducklings, the occasional heron and the geese are considering the pond again after successfully breeding 2 goslings in 2023. Unfortunately, we were not successful with a couple of grant applications to get the pond dredged – this will be our focus for future grant applications.

During 2023 we maintained a sound financial position and introduced a reserves policy to ensure any short-term financial impacts are manageable. We thank Launton Parish Council for continuing to fund the grass cutting of the paths and access areas.

Membership has declined from 112 members in 2022/23 to 86 this year. Please renew, sign up and encourage more residents to join to ensure we have funding to continue our activities.

We are always delighted to welcome new volunteers to our activities. If you can offer a little time and are interested in taking part, please come along to any of our work sessions or events and discover more about what we do.

Do contact us on fipwlimited@gmail.com if you would like to become a member or you would like to become more actively engaged with your local wood.

Rob Dowman (Chair of FIPW Ltd)