**Heartwood Environmental Monitoring Group Minutes 10 October 2017**

**Sandridge Village Hall at 19.30**

**Present:**

Brian Legg (Chair), Pippa Legg, Louise Neicho, Judith Parry, Brian Doble, Pete Cutforth, Jane Eldridge, Karen Hornigold, Ian Denholm, Brian Barnard, Tim Wright, Sue Wright, Alla Mashanova, Agneta Burton, Andrew Steele, Chantal Helm, Ian Flack, Katie Gallagher, Claudia Harflett, Peter Wilkinson, David Utting, Jim Paterson, Richard Inglis

Meeting opened by Brian at 19.36

**1 Welcome, Apologies, Items arising from previous minutes**.

Welcome - Brian L noted record attendance tonight and introduced new faces.

Apologies: Linda McArdell, Chris Shortall, Geoff Horn, Andrew Harris, Julian Nest, Lisa Hewitt, Colin Shawyer, Chloe Harmsworth

Minutes of last meeting on 28 March 2017 Information and actions (not covered elsewhere)

Wetland pond - Brian Legg reported on pleasing results over the first year since creation in 2016

Small blue butterfly project - Louise Neicho and Brian reported Kidney Vetch put in 3 patches as a pilot by Butterfly Conservation, Hertfordshire branch (more planned if these patches survive despite unfavourable soil)

Guided walks given :

Judith reported guided photography walks with Linda

Linda and Pete C did landscape history walk twice,

Peter W and Brian L did a dawn chorus walk

Chantal H and Ian F did bat walk

Andrew S did butterfly walk

Brian did two arboretum walks with Edric and reported that Pam had presumably done more talks.

Louise asked if we could commit to dates for walks for 2018 to enable brochure/advertising? **ACTION ALL**

Drone photography - Brian Legg reported: not yet happening but hope to estimate canopy coverage, useful for correlating with other data. Chantal said University has drone. ERC also has a drone, and HERC. Brian asked for volunteer to push this. **ACTION** Chantal to look for a student to do this.

Heartwood Festival – Brian reported it happened in 2017, full tent for all 5 hrs, e.g. owl pellet dissection and other activities well attended, so was successful and is in programme for next year but needs helpers.

**2**  **Fixed Point photography**

Brian L reported we have website now that features 3 series of photos:

1. Long term monitoring plots. No photos have yet been entered . **ACTION,** volunteer needed, possibly from flora or mammal monitoring groups.
2. Sapling survival posts: 100 or so long term monitoring points. Brian showed slides of examples.
3. Photopoint series. These are positions where photos are taken in several directions in the winter, spring, summer and autumn. Judith Parry and Brian Doble showed print-outs. (Team is Linda McArdell (in absence), Jim Paterson, Brian Doble, Judith Parry)

Website being arranged to make it easy to watch sequence from same site, by end of this year. Pictures include arboretum. **Action:** We need more volunteers ready to visit 4 times per year to take photos.

**3 Update on Heartwood development and management** - Louise Neicho reported

1) resurfaced car park top surface to make it conform to planning requirement. Hub area not yet finished, may be next year.

2) Langley Wood stone path finished.

3) This winter is final tree planting season year 9, ordered 45,000 trees community day 19 Nov, 11 March, celebration day 25 March. Corporate and schools planting as usual. Will do more scalloped edging, and can do more edging planting in future years. Final trees will be 3 trees planted by Lady Verulam, WT trustee and representative of volunteers. End of day will have special thank you to volunteers.

4) Ancient woodland management will be reviewed this year, WT policy now allows intervention if condition assessment warrants, so re-coppicing may happen, maybe 3-5 year plan. Grove near scout hut not doing well. Peter Wilkinson asked if deer will prevent coppice re-growth? Yes, said Louise, we will need fencing. Pete C asked if wood pasture is possible, as it’s a habitat that was common but is now rare. Louise said, no, too difficult to manage livestock here and no established history of that habitat at this site.

**4**  **HNHS Heartwood webpage & archiving results**  - Alla Mashanova reported on archiving, and said that our current policy is that detailed raw data sets are stored but do not have public access. A summary of the data is displayed on the web site and does have public access. Monthly bird survey results and flora records from 2016 are already publicly accessible. **ACTION:** Please will people with data send summary data to Alla with text describing what the data shows, and also send raw data if desired, as a backup copy. If a member of the public wants access to the raw data, Alla will point them to the recorder who submitted the data.

Karen H reported that WT headquarters is creating a central repository of monitoring and survey data and reports for internal use (e.g. for communications/PR, research, student work, long term monitoring of different sites). This will ensure that that valuable data is not stored on one person’s harddrive which can be lost in the future. Having a central repository will mean the data is stored in perpetuity, but it will not be publicly accessible. Brian B and others suggested comments, summary data, or meta data could be shared by linking to our present data source on the HNHS website, not by creating a second copy of the data. It would be useful to WT to have access to full data sets. Alla and others were happy for WT HQ to have a link to the summary data, but very cautious about giving full access to the raw data due to concerns about methodology changes and potential misinterpretation. Such access would be given only after reference to the person who had collected the data or to a local custodian. One person commented that National Biodiversity Network (NBN) might apply pressure to get access to such data.

Brian B said that storing data as pdf files means that they cannot be searched, and suggested that another form, such as a database, would be preferable.

**ACTION:**  Alla, Karen H, Brian B to meet to discuss and prepare a report in advance of the next meeting. It was suggested that a member of the HNHS, on whose web-site the data is stored, should be invited to join the discussion, David Utting suggested Ian Carle be invited.

**5**  **Destination sites and conservation areas** - Louise Neicho & Brian Legg. Louise reported that WT wants to invest in 10 destination sites, e.g. to attract visitors from further afield and to enhance quality experience for all, and spread more understanding of the importance of woods and trees, could imply visitor centre, café, more events, purpose to attract members and enhance presentation and enthuse and learn about trees. 6 months discussion so far. Fiona of WT, who has been leading the discussion, was open minded about what a destination site might mean but is leaving the WT. Brian L reported that one aspect could be zoning Heartwood into conservation areas, high traffic visitor areas and kids zones. E.g. conservation areas saying no dogs in nesting season. He showed a map of Heartwood and asked for input. Various people suggested areas for conservation: 1) Valley for butterflies, 2) wetland area, 3) Buryfield, 4) Farfield, 5) Broad Arrow 6), High trees

Claudia suggested we can nudge by not providing seats, paths etc.

Louise asked for comments before 2 Nov when there is a relevant meeting.

**ACTION:** Brian to circulate (now attached with these minutes) draft map of Heartwood and for all to reply indicating the highest priority areas for conservation zones.

**6 Monitoring programme -short reports and plans for 2017**

* Sapling survival and growth - Brian L, ongoing.
* Mammals - Chantal H, Ian F reported yellow-necked mouse found after not being seen for a few years. Chantal reported a water shrew on edge of Langley wood, which is a first record for Heartwood, and a surprise since no water near (is also known from Panshanger etc ). Noted no harvest mice again, perhaps because woodland growing. Tentative conclusions from 6 years data, Brian commented that overall numbers show healthy increase in some places, Chantal said data is too sporadic yet, should not draw any conclusions. Note: no pygmy shrews this year. Good numbers of bank voles fewer field voles. Re bats, first record Barbastelles this year.
* Reptiles and amphibians - Ian Flack reported common lizard seen, first on site. Note very few records of common lizard in entire county. Note no slow worms yet. Have recorded frogspawn, toads, frogs.
* Birds
* breeding bird survey – Ken Smith reported in absentia similar number of species 40-45 each year, this year 3 new species ring necked parakeet, hobby, grasshopper warbler. (they used to be fairly common in scrublands, and so nice to see them back. Also Willow warbler recovering. Skylarks showed drop in 2017, Meadow Pippets better. Whitethroats up generally, Goldfinch down, Starling numbers volatile.
* monthly bird survey – Rupert Evershed (in absence Brian reported) typically seeing 35-40 species each monthly walk. Total numbers about 400 birds per walk excl. wood pigeons. Skylarks down in Aug but Peter W explained they moult then so don’t fly much. Whitethroat peaks in May-July. Yellowhammer again drop in Aug probably due to moulting.
* nest boxes for barn owls, tawny owls & kestrels - Colin Shawyer & Peter W, - Peter W reported 2 pairs kestrels and no dead ones. 3 pairs of Barn owls produced 10 chicks in broods of 5, 3, 2. But no second broods which is a bit disappointing. 1 box had stock doves but (dead), another box filled with acorns.
* Invertebrates
* butterflies and moths - Andrew Steele reported better year except whites down (probably because earlier higher numbers were on rapeseed). Survey only on west side of road. Pollination and plant spacing may be setting a limit on numbers. Meadow brown dominant amongst browns, Small heath has increased nicely from low start. Amongst Blues common blue is dominant and up and down. Amongst Skippers large and small are dominant. Brian noted these are results of weekly visits, so a lot of data summarised in each dot on graphs.
* earthworms - Pete Cutforth continuing monitoring but nothing to report yet.
* Flora – (Ian Denholm, Alla Mashanova, Agneta Burton & Linda McArdell) Ian reported 2 strands, 1) inventory of species over whole site, over 200, list accessible via website, could be in position to produce a leaflet about key plants. 2) transects. Seeded red fescue grass in one area means little diversity. Real decrease shown in diversity in natural regen as it gets thicker, as expected.
* Bryophytes - Agneta Burton no data for 2017 as monitoring is intentionally less frequent than annual.
* Lichens - Andrew Harris no data for 2017 as monitoring is intentionally less frequent than annual.
* Fungi - Steve Kelly no data for 2017 as monitoring is intentionally less frequent than annual.
* Fixed point photography - Brian Legg reported earlier, see above.

**7 Research plans at Heartwood - brief updates**

* Students (University of Hertfordshire (Chantal Helm) none at present.
* Brian noted no contact from Kings College London (Martin Wooster);
* links with Rothamsted Research (Agneta Burton) nothing to report at present.

**8 AOB**

Agneta Burton reported East of England orchard initiative launch regarding recording and history and volunteering. Louise noted that Rachel Savage wants to come visit our Orchard.

Louise reported Volunteer nominations, re Andrew Steele, WT want to do video in November including nominees. Louise will arrange date for this.

Brian and Louise asked for volunteers to consider doing series of booklets/leaflets following his on the arboretum.

**9 Date of next meeting 20 March 2018. ACTION** Louise to reserve Sandridge village hall.

Meeting closed by Brian with thanks to all, at 21.35.