

Friends of Emery Down – March Update

We held our open meeting and visit last month as planned, the fine weather nearly held out until the end but we persevered and soldiered on despite the cold wind and steady drizzle. About 15 people came along to hear what has been achieved already both in terms of buying the wood, setting up the charity and carrying out the first working party. We then had a short tour of the wood, pointing out various features such as the large notable trees surrounded by hollies, a fallen tree showing glacial stones and some tiny lichen *Cladonia* on a large tree.

We also explained what had been done already especially in the woodland classroom area. We explained that the management of the wood will be a balance between the possibly conflicting needs of trees, birds, insects and people. This will take time to discuss and agree. We have plans to put up a notice board (courtesy of the Parish Council) with information and news on future events. We talked about the flora and fauna surveys we hope to carry out in conjunction with Reading and District Natural History society (RDNHS) as previously mentioned in articles. We emphasised the need to keep the wood safe so please no fires, but you're welcome to picnic.

There were a number of queries and questions, people seemed happy with the progress made so far and were encouraged by what they heard. Some people were keen to help in working parties and we'll keep them up to date. Questions included

- any plans for a walkway on the verge in Aldworth road to help with journeys to the school? *It's under consideration by the Parish Council and we await firm proposals. Ownership issues are being investigated.*

- will dogs be allowed in the wood? *Yes, as long as they are under control and people clear up any mess. It's possible that a dog mess bin may be put up.*

- where do we stand on insurance? *We explained that we have insurance for public liability, volunteer work and some damage cover. We will be advising users to take care when using the wood especially in windy weather, and take their normal precautions when being in the countryside.*

- Can I take fallen wood away for my woodburner? *Dead wood is an important habitat for insects and fungi and we ask that nothing is taken from the wood without prior agreement. Please don't pick the flowers either, we want any that grow to set seed for the future*

Next steps are to finish the site survey to identify areas for work and areas which need to be left alone. Then we'll continue consulting experts and draw up a management plan, identifying priorities and general timescales.

Thanks to all those involved in the visit. It was good to meet people who are interested in the wood and to spread the news on our progress.

Anne Dewing

Trustee FoED