

Friends of Emery Down - Status 13/1/16

In the summer of 2015 the owners of Emery Down Wood, Aldworth road, Upper Basildon, (opposite the end of School Lane) placed it up for sale. In the light of historical concerns about the risk of development, it was suggested that the village might try and buy it to prevent development and to allow public access. Edward Golton was the project's prime mover and did much of the initial work as he had experience with CPRE. After a lot of hard work, research and fundraising by residents and local organisations, it became clear that a charity (Friends of Emery Down) had to be set up quickly so as to enable some organisations to make substantial donations and to allow the purchase to be take place without complications. An offer was made and readily accepted but the legalities took many months. The sale finally went through just before Christmas 2015.

The founder trustees are Edward Golton, Peter Twitchett, David Goosey, Mark Stanley and Anne Dewing. Peter has experience as a former Parish Council chairman and David, Mark and Anne are neighbours of the wood, with expertise in fundraising and project management. The objectives of the charity can be summarised as

"To secure for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Basildon in Berkshire the environmental protection of the wood known as Emery Down and its use for educational purposes."

We have consulted widely to identify what could be our main priorities this year, bearing in mind what would be of benefit for the village. More local consultation is needed and it's proposed to have an open meeting on 20/2/16 at 11.00 in the wood. Some of the work has been easy to identify, mainly due to the insurance requirements, as in order to have full public access, we are obliged to have insurance cover and this in turn requires us to survey the site and carry out remedial work to minimise hazards such as unstable trees with dead limbs. There is a lot of clearance needed in the wood especially brambles and holly, to remove fallen trees, make safe some of the larger trees and open up better access in some parts of the wood. The wood has not been consistently maintained and there is much to be done. Full public access will have to wait until the basic work has been done to make it safe. We will be consulting with WBC's Tree Officer to ensure that any work complies with the existing Tree Preservation Order and we will gain the necessary permissions.

In addition, preliminary work with Basildon Primary School has identified the potential for a woodland classroom. The school already use the wood informally and are keen to continue on a more formal basis. It has very little in the way of structures, largely cut trunks and frameworks for shelters. Pang Valley volunteers have worked with Yattendon Estate and Yattendon Primary to construct a similar outdoor space which is used for educational work and we hope to make use of their expertise. In due course we hope to carry out flora and fauna surveys and try to improve the habitat to enhance biodiversity.

Initial work includes

- Surveying the site
- Identify areas in the wood that need safety work using Arborist expertise
- Consult with donors and the wider village to gather views and ideas
- Start to carry out essential work to satisfy Insurance requirements
- Create woodland classroom area

We will need to have tree surgeons to do some of the work as well as volunteers so don't be surprised to see activity in due course. Any site work will have to finish by the end of March before the bird nesting starts so not much may get done before then. Work would continue in the autumn. We currently have a modest surplus from the initial generous donations after the purchase and associated costs, but recognise that professional tree work can be expensive. We will be looking for volunteer help in due course, if anyone is interested in helping please contact Anne Dewing on 671266 or anne.dewing1@gmail.com.

We are planning to provide regular updates in the Country Neighbour and at village events.

Some thanks are needed. Many people have been involved in setting up the charity and raising the money generously donated, so thanks to those people, most of whom wish to remain anonymous. A number of people have given support and advice which has been invaluable. Especial thanks are due to Edward Golton, without whom the project and charity may never have got off the ground.

Anne Dewing, Trustee