

## Friends of Raleigh Park

### Chair's Report 2021, with Treasurer's Report

This has been another year of COVID-19, and its limitations on group activities. Our butterfly walks have remained suspended, and there were no half-term events for children, but this does not mean that there has been a lack of action. You will hear later on of Adam Bows's research on biodiversity, badger vaccinations, Freshwater Habitat Trust fen regeneration work, Wild Oxford developments, and the birdbox project.

Last year we reported the sad death of Sue Cassettari, whose work on the Forest School at North Hinksey Primary School was closely linked to the Park. The Friends were glad to be able to contribute to the funding of a memorial bench which was placed in the school's own Forest School area in September.

We offer many congratulations to Judy Webb, our ecological champion, who was recognised first by inclusion in the Woman's Hour Power List for 2020, and subsequently by the award of the British Empire Medal for services to Oxfordshire wildlife.

Raleigh Park continues to be used by local residents as a place of recreation. It was included in the Botley Health walks list of venues, with at least one guided walk. Plans for a green yoga session were not able to go forward. Cattle were grazed in the park this year, and seem to have been less threatening to walkers and dogs, though they have not been so kind to the wildflowers, as Adam will report. Our local cowpat expert, Linda Losito, reported a significant drop in dungbeetle populations, which was traced to a regime of antibiotics administered to the cattle. Work parties have carried on below the radar, primarily run by Carl Whitehead using his volunteer group, and Adam working with Rob d'Ayala for the Freshwater Habitats Trust. We hope that the workparty scheduled for 13 Nov, with participation by student volunteers, will be the start of a renewal of this activity, with greater cooperation with other groups.

Planning issues continue to occupy the Committee. A proposal to build three houses on the field immediately adjacent to the fen has been going back and forth between the developers and the Council Planning department, with the Friends (and many individuals) participating in successive consultations. The proposal would have resulted in extensive building on the most important part of the rainwater catchment area of the fen, not to mention the destruction of a large badger sett. It has been pulled from the agenda of a string of Planning Committee meetings, and we still hope that the weight of ecological evidence will force the developers to abandon their plans. We are grateful to Cllr Debby Hallett who has coordinated local responses to the plans and communications with the Planning department, to North Hinksey Parish Council, especially Adam Rankin, who have been steadfast in their defence of the Park, and to Harold Grant who has co-ordinated residents' objections. A very similar and equally damaging development plan is currently threatening Lye Valley in Oxford City: I encourage members to object to this proposal, as it will set a precedent for the protection given to our rare habitats.

The birdfeeding station set up in 2019 is still being maintained by Clive Smith and David Brown, and replenished by a small team of volunteers, with some seed purchased centrally.

Our website, ably managed by David Brown, is now being supplemented by regular Twitter posts using the hashtags #raleighpark and #raleighparkoxford. Watch out in particular for Adam's sightings of exotic fungi.

Our continued thanks go to the Julian Cooper, Laura Harlock, Carl Whitehead, and Judy Webb, for keeping things going over the year.

On the financial front, the outgoings this year have totalled £102 (£50 seed, £25 bench, £27 website) almost balanced by subscription income of £95, so that we ended the financial year with a balance of £762.44, including donations reserved for signage projects still under discussion. Accounts to the end of August will be posted on the website. More renewals online and by SO, more the better.