

Chair's Report:

Yet again, we've had a very busy and active year helping everyone access and enjoy the Forest and supporting the Forestry Commission.

For Discovery Day on 20 March, FOTF led on publicity for the event and organised the displays and activities in the two marquees, showcasing the timber production, wildlife, and archaeology of Thetford Forest. It was fantastic to have a forwarder and harvester on site, with the Forest Operations Team demonstrating what these machines could do. Wildlife Rangers joined us to talk about deer management and explain to the public how to identify the deer they see in the Forest.

Sunday 29 May was the joint open day at Mildenhall Warren Lodge and the Rex Graham Military Orchid Reserve, notable for having four new members join at the lodge. Two weeks later, FOTF members and Forestry Commission Staff visited the Enterprise Building at the University of East Anglia, Britain's greenest building and one of the most sustainable buildings in Europe. Especially significant for us is that its timber frame is of Corsican Pine from Thetford Forest.

In May, a group of volunteers from a government office in Cambridge worked with us and FC to refurbish the facilities at Lynford Stag car park. The first weekend in July saw seventeen FOTF volunteers helping at the concerts, both with car parking for the disabled and in the Information Marquee in the arena and we gave 120 hours of our time over the four evenings.

Seven FOTF members helped at the High Lodge Open Day on 21 July and then thirty attended the heritage walk at Lynford Arboretum on 3 August. Special thanks are also due to Owen and Carol Moore who organised wine, coffee, biscuits and cake at the Friends' Lodge after the walk.

We'll be publishing a leaflet related to Lynford's historic landscape next year.

A new event was a Moth Evening on 24 August at High Lodge, led for us by Tim (High Lodge Manager) and Teresa Frost. They had set up traps in four locations and so we were able to see at first hand (literally, as the moths rested on palms and fingers) this fascinating night-time world as well as receiving expert guidance in identification of the various amazing species. Another new event was our attendance at the community day at the Charles Burrell Centre in Thetford and thank you to Katherine Jones for organising our stall there. Katherine has also taken on the role of volunteer co-ordinator and is keeping all our volunteering records meticulously up-to-date.

With so many events happening, it is a wonderful testament to the strength of volunteering that the conservation work has continued one Sunday a month; that Lynford Arboretum has been cared for as diligently as ever, that the 'Meet and Greet' role is carried out at High Lodge and the walking trails are regularly checked - we've taken over the administration of meet and greet and of checking the Forest's walking trails - each one of these is now checked by a FOTF volunteer.

We are still campaigning and lobbying for the safeguarding of our Public Forest Estate and will continue to do so until the PFE is protected in law. We're attending the national forestry forums and writing to the Prime Minister and the DEFRA Ministers but are conscious that we lost our 'best hope' when both Elizabeth Truss and Rory Stewart were moved in Theresa May's reshuffle.

We did have one encouraging outcome as we arranged for two members of the DEFRA Forestry Team to visit Thetford and be shown round by FC staff. They described their visit as ‘truly inspirational’.

As Chair, I’m incredibly proud of all that FOTF achieves and the support we have from our members and from our corporate members. The committee works incredibly hard but we simply wouldn’t be able to do so much for the forest without you all.

Of course, we need the help of FC too and truly value how we work together , with special thanks to Nicky Russell and Terry Jennings and the apprentices at the arboretum; Neal Armour-Chelu and Rachel Riley for conservation and Rachel also for being our official liaison with FC . Megan Bradsworth and Owen Manson have helped us at High Lodge and Tim Frost, in his first year as High Lodge Manager, has definitely won our approval as he understood very quickly the nature of our partnership and has been incredibly supportive.

Jim Lyon is retiring next year so this is his last AGM as Forest Management Director. Jim – it is much too soon for any goodbyes but nevertheless, thank you for your unwavering and steadfast support over the years; it is very difficult to think of Thetford Forest and Friends without you.