

Before we begin the AGM, it is with deep sadness that I have to report the deaths of two of our members: Charlie Cooper and Bob Greef.

Charlie and Denyse came to the 10 year celebratory party for Friends' management of Lynford Arboretum in 2017 and both immediately volunteered to help there. They took on the task of updating the database for the tree species in the Arboretum, not done for many years. Though they were guided by Forest Research's Chris Reynolds, it was Charlie's extensive knowledge of tree species and his meticulous attention to detail which enabled him to do this so expertly. His sudden illness meant that he was unable to complete his work – but we hope this might be possible, as a fitting memory of his dedication to the Arboretum and his love of trees.

Bob Greef joined FOTF 12 years ago and then became a Committee Member. In his professional life, he was a lecturer in countryside management and his abiding interest was the historic landscape, especially parkland and gardens. He contributed to recent books on these subjects and he and I enjoyed many conversations about the heritage of the forest. Some of you here tonight will remember his leading the Historic Parkland Workshop, along with Rachel Riley and myself, for the Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge Project.

For Friends, he helped with training at Lynford Arboretum and particularly enjoyed events such as Discovery Day when he could talk to visitors. He was such a source of wise advice at committee meetings, always courteous, thoughtful and considerate. He will be missed so very much. Our sympathy goes to the families of both Charlie and Bob.

Matters arising - member James Cross raised his concern in regard to the CDM regulations and the BSI Tree protection in relation to the work of FOTF.

As promised, the Committee has reviewed its procedures and policies and the Chair has met with Owen Manson, FE's Volunteer Manager to do the same. All are in agreement that FOTF is correctly following the regulations and guidance. Thank you to James Cross for his interest – we hope this has reassured him.

Chair's Report:

In 2019, we've continued to support Forestry England as much as we can, with our regular volunteering activities.

These have included checking the walking trails at High Lodge and across the Forest; fulfilling the 'Meet and Greet' role at High Lodge; undertaking conservation tasks one Sunday a month and the day-to-day care of Lynford Arboretum two mornings a week

FOTF held the seventeenth open day at Mildenhall Warren Lodge, a day shared with the Rex Graham Military Orchid Reserve Open Day where one of our volunteers helped too. At the summer concerts, we gave 292 hours over the four nights. We jointly organised the Centenary Celebratory Event at High Lodge on 31 August and I was honoured to help cut the centenary cake.

Friends has sponsored the cost of analysing the data from the BTO trackers fixed to two cuckoos for the second year. The monitoring of the condition of archaeological sites in the Forest is being undertaken by a select group of members, but there are more sites requiring assessment, so please consider helping. Full training is given and it's very worthwhile.

As some of you know, in my professional role as a heritage consultant, I've managed the 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge Project' and during that project, we located the site of the 19th century farmhouse. Friends members have carried on investigating this site and it has proved to be a wonderful way of engaging with visitors and telling them about our work.

So – all this is very positive. However, part of the role of Chair is being aware of 'the politics' and so I have to inform the AGM of the Committee Concerns about the future of FOTF.

This is because Forestry England has moved further towards having its own direct volunteers and of course it is perfectly entitled to do that. It has put together a Volunteer Management Policy which classifies all volunteers according to what they do and how much direction they receive from FE Staff. This risks us losing much of the work we undertake and strikes at the very heart of our partnership, especially when we work alongside FE staff and learn from them.

Of course, our volunteers might decide that they don't mind being FE direct volunteers and that is their choice, but there will be significant implications for the future of FOTF because we may lose some of the work we do and our membership might fall also. We will keep you all informed.

Whatever happens, we would like 2020 to be a year when we celebrate all that FOTF has achieved – because it's our 25th year. The new committee will begin planning very shortly but all ideas as to how we can mark this are very welcome – perhaps by emailing the info@ address or speaking to committee members.

As ever, I'd like to thank FE staff at High Lodge and Santon Downham for their support – particularly Owen Manson who has to balance being our FE liaison with his role at District Volunteer Manager.

Finally, I'd like to thank my fellow Committee members for all the work they do to ensure that FOTF fulfils its aims of helping everyone access, understand and enjoy Thetford Forest.

Anne Mason
10 October 2019.