



# Friends of Thetford Forest

Celebrating  
25 years

**SPRING/SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER No. 69**

**E-mail: [info@fotf.org.uk](mailto:info@fotf.org.uk)**

Hello Everyone,

As you can imagine this newsletter is somewhat different to what we had intended to celebrate our 25th Year – We had many things planned, but as with many other organisations, events have overtaken us and changes have to be made and as a result this issue is mainly a retrospective look at what we have achieved over the last 25 years.

**We now have a partnership agreement with Forestry England which sets out the responsibilities for both organisations and provides for a positive future. We're now looking forward to enhancing and developing our work to help care for Thetford Forest.**

As the Coronavirus situation evolves and settles down, we will of course let you know what we will be doing later in the year by means of e-mail (so please make sure we have your correct details on file ), our website and social media feeds.



Three new members of the Conservation Group, at the very last event we were able to hold before the lock down came into force, working hard on the Quakers Walk trail which is located in Mildenhall Woods.



You can follow us on Twitter and Facebook

[@fotf\\_uk](https://twitter.com/fotf_uk)



## What FOTF does for Thetford Forest.

Membership currently stands at around 1000 members. In the financial year 2018/2019, Friends raised more than £10,000 from external sources and spent almost £14,000 in direct support of Thetford Forest.

Fourteen corporate members demonstrate their support for our work with an annual subscription and receive benefits in return.

Friends of Thetford Forest has its own logo/branding which is used in all communications and publicity. This is currently being revised. It has its own branded clothing, but it is not compulsory for FOTF members to wear this unless it is required for safety reasons.

It administers all its volunteering groups, undertaking its own risk assessments and method statements and follows Forestry England's safety at work guidelines.

It generates its own publicity and has extensive local and regional media contacts. Members of the Committee are frequently contacted by the media.

It has brought to Thetford Forest nearly £300,000 in external grants.

Since 2007, when detailed recording of volunteer hours began, it has given between 3500 and 4000 hours a year, an in-kind contribution of over £280,000.

### In addition, FOTF

- helps shape the District's strategies and plans through informed challenge and debate and as a 'critical friend'
- acts as an ambassador for Thetford Forest and the Public Forest Estate.
- suggests and initiates projects
- independently recruits new volunteers as well as administering all its volunteering groups.
- offers a means of volunteering for people who do not wish to volunteer for a government organisation but who care about our PFE forests.
- deals with queries and concerns from the public and act as a 'go-between',
- advising Forestry England of the views of forest users.
- invites MPs, Ministers, the Press and Media to generate greater understanding of PFE multi-purpose management.
- campaigns as 'the voice of the people' when Forestry England staff are silenced.
- uses the diverse range of skills of individual committee members and benefits from their networks of contacts.
- nurtures a group of people informed about the multi-purpose management of the Public Forest Estate.

When Royal Forestry Society judges assessed FOTF in 2017 (and awarded FOTF a Silver Medal), the citation included: *They are efficiently run, effective in their aims and have good governance which will guarantee a secure future. This is an outstanding success story brought about by an equally outstanding organisation which works closely with the Forestry Commission in a mutually beneficial manner. .... We would recommend that all similar organisations with similar aspirations take time to see how effectively the Friends of Thetford Forest operates.*

Also, in 2017, FOTF was given the **Queen's Award for Voluntary Service** in recognition of its outstanding volunteering and support for Thetford Forest.

## **The Work of FOTF over the last 25 Years has included:**

### **Conservation**

- 🌿 Repair, construction and replacement of over 400 Bird and Bat Boxes
- 🌿 Clearance work at many sites to improve habitats for flora and fauna, particularly rare Breckland species
- 🌿 Maintenance of Rex Graham Reserve for Military Orchid and other rare orchids and plants
- 🌿 Establishment of a new site for Breckland Mugwort
- 🌿 Re-opening and care of the Goshawk Trail
- 🌿 Installation of bird-viewing screens on the above trail
- 🌿 On-going clearance at Croxton newt ponds
- 🌿 Refurbishment of High Lodge Bird Hide
- 🌿 Construction of tern rafts for Lynford Water
- 🌿 Maintenance of Pool Frog re-introduction site habitat
- 🌿 Construction of a toad pond and catch-fence at a road crossing point

### **Lynford Arboretum**

In 2007, Friends took over the practical day-to-day management of Lynford Arboretum under the guidance of the Forestry Commission. The volunteers at the Arboretum meet on Wednesday and Sunday mornings to carry out tasks detailed in the Management Plan (largely drafted by FOTF)

These include:

- 🌿 the improvement of the shrubs' layer
- 🌿 the addition of understory trees.
- 🌿 the maintenance of the 'Parkland feel' of the site
- 🌿 the provision of seating along the pathways.

As a direct result of this work, when the Forestry Commission carried out a survey in 2009 into its arboreta and forest gardens, Lynford was placed third behind Westonbirt and Bedebury which were ranked joint first.

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## Archaeology

### Investigations have included:

- 🔍 carrying out a surface investigation of the site of Brandon Warren Lodge
- 🔍 carrying out a surface investigation of the site of Ickburgh Warren Lodge
- 🔍 consolidating the standing remains of Ickburgh Warren Lodge
- 🔍 taking part in test pit surveys to determine the wider extent of Neolithic flint workings
- 🔍 investigating the site of the 19th century farmhouse at High Lodge.

In addition, Friends has twice conserved the scheduled monument of Mildenhall Warren Lodge, consolidating the standing remains in 2000-02 with grants of £50,000 and constructing a roof of timber from East Anglia's Public Forest Estate in 2013 with grants of £80,000.

It has held an annual open day at Mildenhall Warren Lodge every year since 2002, with over 1,300 visitors.

### Monitoring of Archaeological Sites.

FOTF members visit non-scheduled archaeological sites annually to monitor and report on their condition. These sites would otherwise not be visited.

## Campaigning

Friends of Thetford Forest represents the users and visitors to the Forest and acts as their 'voice', advising Forestry England of their views and concerns.

Friends led the campaign against the proposed sell-off of the Public Forest Estate in 2010. FOTF is one of six members of the 'Forest Campaign Network (FCN)' and is involved in the on-going plans and draft legislation for the future Public Forest Estate Management Organisation. It was involved in visits by the Minister for Forestry; DEFRA and Treasury Officials and personally invited and hosted the visit of Elizabeth Truss MP, two weeks before she was appointed Minister of State for the Environment.

The Chair and Vice-Chair had an hour's meeting with Elizabeth Truss MP, Minister of State for the Environment and Rory Stewart MP, Forestry Minister, with only their respective PAs as the others present.

**For our early days, we unfortunately have no photographic records – so here are some text highlights for the first 7 years.**

Regular Committee meetings took place with Forest Enterprise (as they were then known) from the very beginning, with a member of FE joining us for most meetings.

## Some of our public and group events

October 1995 – Inaugural meeting, created our group then known as FoTFP – Friends of Thetford Forest Park

1996 – Ron Hoblyn took us on some rambles, and we walked along the Little Ouse Walk and affixed the path roundels.

Newsletter launched, totally in house, no pictures, and duplicated for us by FE at Santon Downham and then put in envelopes and posted by our Treasurer at the time, Maggie Marshall, a founder member.

1997 – Kate Sussams led a Bracken Bash, We got a lottery grant for the Oak Tree sculpture by Ben Platt Mills during the summer when he stayed on site 24/7 to carve it all by hand.

1998 – Second Oak Tree sculpture unveiled , Easter Treasure Hunt, Halloween Story-telling



1999 – FoTFP secured a place on the Forest enterprise Environment Panel which enabled us to put forward our members views on all things in Thetford Forest, and have the chance to influence local thoughts and plans by the Forestry Commission – An important step for us. A Birthday event in May saw us welcome a respected local photographer give an illustrated talk at High Lodge. Another Halloween event, but this time much more ambitious in conjunction with FE. The Secretary of Friends, Dave Goodrum, appears on BBC TV as a requirement from the National Lottery to take part in the Saturday Evening live lottery draw programme.

2000 – Mildenhall Warren Lodge grant applications to EH, FHDC, HLF are lodged. We arranged an evening visit to STANTA battle area for our members. We successfully applied to the Millennium Festival Awards for funding for 12 benches to be located on the newly built all ability trail at High Lodge. The first idea of getting Corporate members was raised and how to approach this task. A tour of the working forest was organised, again in conjunction with FE for our members.

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2001 – Foot and Mouth disease curtailed virtually all our activities at the start of the year. MWL grant application finally approved in September, but due to the restrictions imposed by Foot & Mouth, work scheduled to start Spring 2002

2002 – Having had to cancel the planned 2001 visit to STANTA due to FMD, we then re arranged for June. Forest Tour again for our members.

FoTFP help FE with a Saturday Young rangers scheme.

This year also saw the start of the restoration of the building known as Mildenhall Warren Lodge.

After the Conservation groups' activities being curtailed in 2001, we moved to meeting 6 times this year, working at High Lodge, Mildenhall, Santon, and two visits to Hills and Holes.



A young ranger insect identifying at High Lodge

Our Visit to the battle training area known as STANTA for our members.







2003 - Mildenhall Warren Lodge restoration works completed and the walking trail is opened.



2004 – The Friends launch the all-ability cycles at High Lodge



2005 – Conservation Group putting in tress around the wildlife ponds on the Goshawk Trail.

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We also installed “Mac's seat” at Santon Downham in recognition of a long serving FE employee.

We held an event in June to celebrate our 10th anniversary.

2006 – Installing the new walking trail signs at the Goshawk Trail (shown left).

We had our initial meetings with FE to discuss setting up a separate group within FoTF to assist in looking after the arboretum at Lynford, Which led to the first meeting on site late February 2007, seen below.

We also installed a Pool Frog nursery at Santon Downham and notified FE that the Goshawk Trail needed some more attention.



2008 – The conservation group assist the BTO with a field walk near Santon Downham to count birds on the site.

The building to be used as a lodge at Lynford Arboretum is installed by FE for our use.

The EDP publicised our work at the arboretum in a half page spread.





2009 – Helping the local Bat Group installing bat boxes near the new hibernaculum at Santon Downham – We also held a public day making bat boxes at High Lodge in December.



2010 – Putting up bird boxes on site at Lynford Arboretum.

We also installed a bird viewing screen at the second pond on the Goshawk Trail.



2011 A member of our team at High Lodge, taking the campaign to save the PFE to the public – the start of our involvement with the ultimately successful decision to stop the governments sell off of the UK forests.

We also helped with the preservation of the ruins of Ickburgh Warren and we started the project to put a roof onto Mildenhall Warren Lodge.



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2012 The roof for Mildenhall Warren Lodge is constructed (Work finished late in 2013)

We help FE with the new event Discovery Day event held at High Lodge, to further our aim to involve and educate the public on things about the forest.

We also continued with many high-level meetings concerned with the forest sell off.

2013 – Taking to the water, our first tern raft gets a trial launch prior to being put out on to the old gravel pits at Lynford.

We also helped again at the Discovery Day, and helped the Toad Watch group install a fence to help reduce the number of toads being squashed during the migration over the road to their mating grounds.



2014 FoTF Chair Anne Mason meeting with Liz Truss MP at High Lodge to discuss forestry matters.

We arranged a visit to a Sawmill, to see how the timber gets processed.

We also did a large amount of coppicing at Lynford.

2015 – Arts and Crafts at the Discovery Day event at High Lodge.

We also started some major clearance work at Lynford water edges to improve the habitat.



2016 Involving the public making Owl Boxes for the BTO at the Discovery Day.

We also held a very successful moth evening at Lynford Arboretum.



2017 - An evening walk for our members, as part of the celebration of receiving the Queens Award for Volunteer Service in June.

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This year also saw the 10th anniversary of the Lynford Arboretum group with FE helped us celebrate with a picnic at the site for the team and members.



2018 – We hold an evening walk around the new Heritage Trail at High Lodge.

We also coppiced the birch beside the trail to improve the view and the habitat for the birds.





2019 – As a stakeholder in the new project, we were invited to the launch of the Future Forest Art installation at High Lodge. Heritage Trail at High Lodge.



2020 January sees the improved toad fence at Cranwich being put back up for the annual migration.

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A brief resume of the main events of the Campaign to save the PFE written by Alan Spidy, who with our chair Anne Mason, headed up our activities during this worrying time in our history and attended many meetings with the powers that be.,

Twenty-five years ago, as Friends of Thetford Forest Park started its journey, nobody would have imagined that it would lead to a prominent campaigning role to defend our publicly owned forests.

But that is exactly what happened in 2010. Under pressure to balance the books after the financial crisis of 2008, the new government under David Cameron announced that the Public Forest Estate (PFE), including Thetford Forest, was to be sold off. The Forestry Commission would be broken up, with only regulatory, research and grant funding roles remaining in an ill-defined rump organisation within DEFRA.

The public outcry over the sell off took everyone by surprise. It was clear from the outset that government ministers and civil servants did not understand the strength of feeling people had for their forests. Friends' was quick off the mark, publicly campaigning in the local media and lobbying hard to defend our rights to access and retain public ownership of our forests. It was a major part of a national alliance of campaign groups from across the country – Kielder, Sherwood, Forest of Dean, the New Forest and Sandlings.

The immediate success of the campaign led to the first U-turn of the Cameron Government. The sell off was stopped and an undertaking not to dispose of any part of the PFE to balance the books was made. Previously, up to 15% of the estate could be sold in any given year for this purpose – an un-noticed slow decline in the PFE that would ultimately have led to it becoming unviable. For the first time, a public declaration that there should be no net loss of the PFE was announced.

However, our work had only just begun. A public enquiry – the Independent Panel on Forests and Woods in England - to establish what the nation's forests really meant to people was set up. From the start, Friends' knew that there were three strong arguments that proved the worth of the PFE and the organisation, Forest Enterprise, charged with running it – commercial forestry that under-pinned the national domestic timber market, public access to the countryside and landscape scale nature conservation.

We also knew that we had to make the same arguments to Government. The initial announcement of the sell-off not only exposed an ignorance of the public's love of their forests but also a lack of knowledge of what the PFE was actually about – timber, public access and nature conservation. We met with a number of Forestry Ministers and civil servants and attended meetings with other forest stakeholders

from industry lobbyists to conservation NGOs. But most importantly, we were able to invite local MPs and DEFRA civil servants out to show them in person the many varied and essential aspects of a modern publicly-owned forest – to allow them to see the true value of a place as special as Thetford Forest.

There were some interesting diversions along the way. We had twice to defend our forest from Germaine Greer who wanted the whole lot felled!

The legacy of the campaign remains to be seen. Certainly, there would have been no Forestry Commission Centenary Celebrations last year.

Forest Enterprise has undergone significant changes as it reshapes itself for a future where public interaction is going to be more important. As it re-launches itself as 'Forestry England', we hope it remembers the role that so many members of the public played in giving it the opportunity to plan for the next hundred years and ensure that it continues as a much-loved national institution.

At the time of writing, access to the forest is restricted due to the coronavirus. Had things turned out differently ten years ago, that access would have been denied to us permanently.

During May 2016, representatives from DEFRA joined our chair Anne Mason to see the working forest in action.



**To celebrate twenty five years of the Friends of Thetford Forest and the life of long time member and volunteer Bob Greef, we are giving five free memberships to students of any age studying in horticulture, arboriculture or land management.**

To be known as the Bob Greef Student Membership Scheme they are on a first come, first served basis. The only condition is that the successful applicants will attend a minimum of six conservation or Lynford Arboretum events in the year their membership runs for.

The membership will Be extended for a second year under the same conditions if the student successfully completes the first year.



**Applications should be made to [membership@fotf.org.uk](mailto:membership@fotf.org.uk)**

# Friends of Thetford Forest

## Your current Committee

Anne Mason  
Chair

Alan Spidy  
Vice Chair

Dave Goodrum Secretary  
/Newsletter + www /  
Conservation

Katherine Jones  
Volunteering Co-ordinator

Owen Moore  
Lynford Arboretum

Clare Tough

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