

People power

At the beginning of 2016 I did feel that perhaps we had pushed the boundaries of what could be achieved by the local community. With the original band of volunteers being five years older, interest and enthusiasm in looking after the area would fade away. There has been a lot of changes within those five years and many volunteers have found family commitments, health and wellbeing, mean they are unable to help as much as they use to.

On several occasions this Autumn it has been frustrating in the fact we had all this dry weather but our regular volunteers had other commitments. Many of you said you need a dedicated day each month for working parties. We had less people turn up than we usually do!

Organisations such as Dorset Wildlife Trust and the National Trust for example are able to support their volunteers. In most cases they provide specialist training, discounts on entrance fees, shopping and refreshments. They provide protective clothing including footwear and gloves. They also get special volunteer events, such as lunches and social events.

What do we provide for our volunteers? We do provide tools and if you are lucky a mini Mars Bars to keep your energy up.

The Woodland Trust is getting better, in the fact they realise they need to show that volunteers are valued. We now are supplied with Woodland Trust polo shirts. We can apply for a certain amount of expenses to cover costs.

(Photo's below all taken 2nd week in Jan on the hill.)

They have also paid for two of our volunteers to attend first aid courses. We as a community group cannot afford to lavish expensive treats for all the hard work put in by the volunteers.

Volunteering seems to have taken on a whole new concept. People expect to receive something material back in return. I believe this has come about because organisations such as those I have named earlier, realise that the carrot and stick approach is the only way to convince people they will benefit from volunteering. I can't condone this approach, but it does mean that small groups like ours cannot compete and the pool of willing volunteers becomes smaller than ever.

It does harden my thinking on "if you don't give, don't take policy" and it saddens me when I see people walking off with sacks full of cut wood or heavy branches balanced on their shoulder. They never offer to volunteer, or put anything in to looking after the community area. I have actually made people put wood back. All the wood on the hill has an owner, either the Woodland Trust or Allington Parish Council. You can apply to either of them direct or through the volunteer group. We can issue timber certificates for removing small amounts of wood for personal use, such as crafts, woodwork or if you can prove you are in fuel poverty.

So what has changed over the last year to make me feel differently about the future of the volunteer group? Read the next few pages to find out.



Looking Forward

The volunteer group has now been running for six years and like everyone else we need to keep up with the times. The way we communicate with each other has changed with more and more people keeping in contact via the internet. We have less than 70 email address's to send the newsletter too, yet we have well over 200 friends on our Facebook page, keeping up with everyday news.

Although the Facebook page is more engaging than sending a newsletter (mostly of old news) bi-monthly, it can be very time consuming for the administrators, updating daily.

We will be looking at other ways of keeping in touch as there are so many apps, and social media sites to consider. One of which is an app called Telegram. Jon belongs to a group which use this system, which links mobile phone and devices such as tablets and computers. People are able to join the topic of conversation they are interested in.

With all this in mind I have had to decide how valuable the newsletter is as a tool to keep everyone informed of what is going on. I have come to the decision that a quarterly magazine would be more appropriate. You will now receive a newsletter at the end of March, June, September and December.

Local resident Sharron Leader came up with the idea of a star for Christmas, which people could attach their wishes too.

Over 30 stars were made and attached to an Oak tree near the entrance of Cooper's Field.



New fundraising project for 2017

At the Christmas Tree festival I had the privilege of announcing our New Fund Raising Project for 2017. Our project to raise funds to install a Story Telling area/ Forest School area, had been chosen by Bridport United Church as one of their main charities and our tree took pride of place in front of the altar.

We started the fund with a donation from Bridport Carnival of £200. The collection box by the side of our Christmas Tree in the United Church added another £119.23 to the total. Finally on January 1st 2017 we sold our last calendar of 100, which raised a total of £399.60. the total project fund to date is £718.83.

Events for 2017

Last year several individuals and Community groups requested to use Cooper's Field for events. This is something that we would encourage. At this stage we have no firm time line for the installation of the story telling area. We hope that individuals groups will wish to book this space.

We hope to hold our annual summer sports day and fund raising event. Aiden Cooper is very keen to hold another sponsored event to support events for children and families. At the moment Saturday 17th of June looks the most possible date, with Kate and Kipp the horse also doing a logging demo.

All events will be advertised well in advance via local media, Facebook and posters around town.

Story Telling / Forest School Area

The idea for a story telling area to be installed in Cooper's Wood has come from local resident Defoe Smith. Over the last few years we have found that more and more children are exploring the wonders of the hill and spending more time outside. The children who originally played on the play equipment are now of an age where they are looking for more adventurous things to do. Story telling outdoors can take on a completely different meaning when you have nature all around you.

We hope that local groups such as Forest Schools, local schools and groups will book the space, which will accommodate up to 30 people. We hope to be able to raise enough funds to subsidise events throughout the year to promote the area. We feel it is important that all children, even those from poorer backgrounds are able to attend these events.

A local craftsman who works in green wood has offered to build the area. The wood will be sourced from Cooper's Wood as part of the 5 year thinning programme. The overall cost of the project has not yet been established, but we may be looking at between £1,500-£2,000.



(Similar design to this photo, but better of course, Hillbilly style!)

Christmas Star

This year the Christmas Star was placed at the top of the hill. People in the hospital had commented how nice it was to see the poppy from the hospital, as we had placed it up by the bench.

They asked if we could place our Christmas Star there too. The lights were solar powered and even at this time of year stayed lit for four or five hours after dark. A local family made a wreath with material from the hill for the centre of the star.



OUR CHRISTMAS TREE

This year I did begin to wonder if I had gone a little to far with my big ideas! We approached the committee of the Christmas Tree Festival and asked them if we could make our own tree. It was a good idea, but putting it into practice was another matter. The main problem being that it had to be assembled on the day at the church. It is amazing what you can do with some hola hoops, chicken wire and a bit of oasis. I do understand why many decided not to be involved this year with my hair brained scheme and I must give much thanks to Sal our treasurer who through thick and thin stuck by my side and helped as well as many others who helped along the way. The end result was a very different tree and our collection box was full of donations, double our usual amount with a total of £119.23.



I had to assemble the tree to ensure that we had enough material. Then carefully disassemble it, flat pack it into my car and reassemble at the church. Not something I wish to repeat in a hurry.

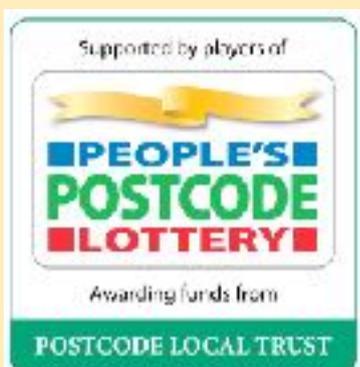
All the green material and dry leaves was collected from the the hill. As many different leaves as possible were collected, to represent all the different trees that grow in the wood.



Restoration of hedge line.

The project to restore the hedge line along Hospital Lane and Allington Hill Lane continues. The Postcode lottery have helped fund this project as well as help from Allington Parish Council. The main hedge needed laying and new saplings to extend the planting along the East side of the field. A wide variety of tree species suitable for hedging was supplied by the Woodland Trust.

The total cost of this project has exceeded £1000 over the last 2 years. The volunteers have helped at every stage, but the main hedge laying has been done professionally by the Countryside Management Team. Unfortunately we do not have enough volunteers with the experience to do the work. There is a very short section left that we hope to complete over the winter months.



Chippings and Saw Dust

We are very grateful yet again to our friendly farmer Andrew, who has moved the chippings around the site with such ease.

This meant that we could make the steps and surrounding area at the top of Cooper's Field a lot safer, as well as resurface areas on The Drive.

The saw dust being much finer has been used around the play equipment to help suppress weeds. This also needs doing annually. This time with the help of Duncan the tractor we were able to do this ourselves.

We are very grateful to Broadwindsor Cricket Club and C.G Fry and Son for supplying the saw dust.



It's a Bugs Life

I am all for community involvement, but sometimes feel that nature takes a back seat. The newsletters get more and more full of the activities and events we have done or are planning to do. So it has been a breath of fresh air for me to be able to get out in the fresh air and do some work on improving the habitat for nature. The biggest job has been restoring the dead hedges in Cooper's Wood. This brush was left over from the trees that were felled last spring, so we had plenty of material. The trees will be thinned again this spring. Some of the wood will be used for the story telling area and wood will be available for those who wish to purchase directly from us as last year and the rest for den building and topping up the dead hedges and bug hotels.

Whilst I am work other volunteers led by Jon have spent many sunny days working on the slopes of Jubilee Wood. Over the last two years the bracken and bramble have started to take over killing several of the smaller saplings. It has taken them several months, but they have now uncovered all the trees in the main area. They have found many self seeded Oaks, Hazel, Blackthorn and Holly. They have also planted some open areas with Dog Wood. As the canopy thickens it will shade out the bramble and bracken, we just need to maintain it in the mean time.



The Cooper's Wood shovel has reappeared again. It was left behind we believe when the trees were originally planted some twelve years ago. Since then it has traditionally been hidden by people who have rediscovered it. It had not been seen for at least 18 months and was found buried in the middle of the dead hedge. It now has a new home but where?

Rich Diversity in Cooper's Wood

When Alex Butler from Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group studied Cooper's Wood to provide us with a five year plan, he was amazed that the woodland had already included many self seeded saplings, ferns and wildlife within it's boundaries. Especially as the land was previously poor quality grassland.

For the first time last year we saw several individual bluebells in flower and celandine which have self seeded. Wild snowdrops, garlic, primrose and cowslip had been introduced and have started to spread. With the introduction of rotting wood within the dead hedges and dead wood lying on the woodland floor a diverse array of fungi is now present.

We know that two of the bird boxes were used and three birds nest are now visible within the trees. The first recorded. within the wood. We are aware there seems to be a resident Jay within the wood and often can be seen in the trees feeding from the flower meadow.



There is still a lack of understory within the wood so large bug/mammal homes like this are very important. Slow worms, grass snakes and toads have been seen in the area and would benefit from this type of shelter.

Family Event on Allington Hill

Activity leader: Dan Astby of Magdalen Environmental Trust

**Saturday 11th February
from 10am**



Families

Build your family den from material you find in the wood.

Children

Activity leader Dan will show children how to make their own den and one for wildlife too.

Adults

This is for every child under 90+. Invite your Dad or Mum and rekindle childhood memories, granny and grandpa are very welcome.

lots of activities to add to the adventure, treasure hunt, make a bow and arrow, learn how to use a flint and steel, camp fire, build a hedge for nature and find nesting material for birds.



To book a **FREE** place contact Cathy Harvey on 01308 423202 (evening only)
email: allingtonhill@gmail.com

Entrance: Hospital Lane, North Allington, DT6 5DR

Hosted by Allington Hill, Cooper's Wood and Field Community Group with kind permission of Allington Parish Council. Funded by Aiden's Amble and Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sustainable Development Fund



This is the third of six events that we have been able to sponsor, through grant funding received from Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sustainable Development Fund.

These events have become more and more popular, introducing new families to the area, wildlife and outdoor play.

We have had several groups interested in providing many other outdoor activities for children. We still find that it is usually the Mums that bring the children. We have arranged this for a Saturday hoping that more Dads (especially with den building) would be encouraged to spend quality time doing outdoor activities with their children.

There is an adults competition as well. No one is too old to build a den, so why not come along and join in the fun. Please book a space, we have already have more bookings than ever before.

We do appreciate that people do not want to get involved in organised working parties, but do their own thing to help out in their own time. Sadly I do not know who they were, but I saw a lady and gent in the distance the other day picking up other peoples litter as they walked along. I did shout loudly "thank you" and they turned around and waved. We do appreciate how many of you help look after the area, who are rarely seen or receive praise. Thank you, to all that do.

The working party volunteers are down to a handful for all different reasons, but due to individuals who help in so many ways, there is a vibrant mix of community involvement. No one is pressured into being involved and many help behind the scenes.

When applying for funding one question we get asked is how many volunteering hours are achieved. How long is a piece of string?

A.G.M 2017

Due to the lack of turn out to our A.G.M's over the last two years we are down sizing and will be holding the A.G.M in Cherry Tree Community Hall. This will take place on March 28th at 7.30pm.

It is an open meeting which anyone is welcome to attend. We will not be having a speaker and after a short meeting refreshments will be served.

We hope that at one of our events during the year a representative from the Woodland Trust will be able to attend. We will soon be overseen by a representative Paul from the Exeter area, who is closer to us, as Joe Middleton lives in Bristol. We hope to meet them in the near future.



This is the link to book a ticket.
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bridport-soup-tickets-30071486626?aff=erelexpmlt>

We are extremely privileged to have been chosen to "pitch" at the next Bridport Soup event. The money will go towards the installation of the story telling area.

The team from the Bridport Soup are back again for another live crowdfunding and community dinner this winter! Supporting community development and regeneration, the second Bridport Soup will take place on Thursday evening, 2 February 2017 at the WI Hall.

The idea is simple: For £4 you get a bowl of soup made from locally sourced produce and a vote. During the evening four local projects will each deliver a four-minute pitch about their project, its community benefits and what the funding will support. Each pitch is then followed by four or five questions from the audience, and then the crowd votes. The winning project receives the takings from the door and pledges to share how they've used their funding at the next Soup.



Duncan the Countryside correspondent from ITV made us feel very relaxed in front of the cameras. Being wired up to a microphone for several hours was daunting and as you can see I refused to look at the camera. But it was all good fun. He also took some arial shots of the hill and the wood, which were very interesting to see. The filming was done in Cooper's Wood with the volunteers working on restoring the dead hedges.

We were privileged in taking part in a small documentary on ITV about the fuel poverty scheme. We have been involved due to the five year plan to thin Cooper's Wood. This year the wood will be used to make the story telling area and provide an income for the group with the remainder being given to the fuel poverty scheme. The wood is not free to take. If you wish to purchase wood, volunteer in exchange of wood or use it for woodcraft or in the garden, please apply for a certificate of removal of wood direct from the group via email allingtonhoill@gmail.com.

The fuel poverty pilot is part of a much wider scheme looking to help people with poor health who are suffering due to their inability to heat their home. I am working with Magna on it, and the funds are coming from the British Gas Energy Trust. Other partners include Age UK, Citizen's Advice Bureau and Wyvern Savings and Loans. The project is being led by Dorset Community Action. More can be found here: <http://www.dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk/healthy-homes-project>

2017 and beyond

Not all like change, but things have to move on. It does seem that more and more the events on the hill will be community lead, supported by the community group rather than arranged by the groups committee. More groups are booking the community space and using the facilities within the field.

The story telling area will become a venue in it's own right, with groups and individuals able to book to use the venue.

Volunteer groups are going to be smaller with people working on individual projects.

The newsletter will become quarterly.

This has provided us with great hope that even with Brexit and Trump the group will continue to grow from strength to strength, we will survive!

Weather

It does have an affect on us all and the very reason why the newsletter is over three weeks late. I have been helping the volunteers who have put in 79 hours of work in January, working in Jubilee Wood and Cooper's Wood.

Until now it has seemed to be a very dry Autumn and dry cold winter in Bridport. This has been good news for most of the wildlife and the flower meadow, keeping the grass nice and short, which is what we want. But the actual statistics show only December has been drier than the norm.

Just a few facts for you to compare.

2015-6	2016-17
Oct 72mm	88mm
Nov 110mm	120mm
Dec 71mm	12mm
Jan 73mm	72mm

Chat on the hill

Why do you not have fixed days for working parties as do most organisations?

I do appreciate we may benefit from having one dedicated day a week. But our main volunteers are involved in so many other projects and social engagements it just does not work. We do our best to advertise events on the main gates and on the Facebook page.

Why is there a palette blocking the main gate to the football pitch?

It seems to be the only defence to stop the badger getting in and digging up the pitch.

The bench at the front gate is very wobbly, it does not feel safe. What are you going to do about it?

We are looking at applying for funding to replace the bench. We have asked for ideas on what we should replace it with. Please look at our Facebook page.

You say people mustn't take the wood, how are you going to stop them.

Education and word of mouth. A lot of the local residents are very passionate about their wood. They have confronted people before for taking timber without permission. Our certificate issued to those that have permission, worked very well last year.

Last year you had a tree survey project but we have heard nothing more about it.

This one was a hard nut to crack. Four people were able to complete their surveys for the year. Many like myself perhaps did not choose the right tree. Mine was right on one of the main pathways and I spent more time chatting than surveying. This year we will concentrate on Cooper's Wood.

I hope to give you some feed back in the next newsletter.

When will new saplings be planted in and around Cooper's Wood, you just seem to be cutting trees down?

We have Cherry, Silver Birch and Rowen trees to plant in and around Cooper's Wood thirty in total. We will not be replacing every tree felled, just increasing the diversity of the trees.

Thank you for all your hard work, it is much appreciated.

Thank you, it makes all the difference to know that people appreciate the work we do.

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