

FOLK Annual Report – 2023 / 2024

Chairman's Introduction

- FOLK was formed on 26th June 2000. Next year will be our 25th Anniversary. So, a time to reflect on the past, but also an opportunity to look to the future.
- At this point it is also appropriate to step back to thank all the work party volunteers and members of the executive committee past & present for the thousands of voluntary hours given. Without them FOLK would not have been so successful over the last 24 years.

FOLK Aims / Objectives

- First and foremost, we remain a conservation and education group.
- Since COVID, demands on our limited green spaces have been increasing and changing. And new challenges, in particular meeting the needs of members of society with reduced mobility, and young people.
- We need to reflect these in our goals whilst maintaining a focus on core activities re SSSI, habitat management and protection of key species.
- To this aim we have undergone a review of our future activities, and funding.

FOLK Highlights 2023 - 2024

- FOLK has been nominated for the King's Award for Voluntary Service.
- We were one of over 20 display stands at High School Leckhampton's Eco Day.
- FOLK has been very successful in obtaining grant funding for our running costs.
- We had our display stand at Party in the Park (Pittville), a No Child Left Behind free event.
- FOLK now has a team of six work party coordinators job-sharing the on-site work parties.
- The Quiz night was very successful and a Wildlife on the Hill site walk took place in May.

FOLK Activities in 2023-2024

- FOLK on-site work parties are still our core activity and continue to be well supported. We are still running three work parties a month. Habitat and nature conservation remain a key focus but we also have to consider public access for less mobile members of the public, making footpath maintenance a high priority.
- We support conservation work parties with company community volunteer days and students from High School Leckhampton as part of an evolving education partnership.
- We should have a new Cheltenham Borough Council / Charlton Kings Parish Council Site Management Plan, for which funding has been obtained, by the end of the year. This plan will include a work action plan that can be used by FOLK.

FOLK People

- FOLK has a membership of 515 which we continue to offer free of charge.
- FOLK contributed a total of 2,560 volunteer hours to the benefit of the site.
- 1,641 hours were actually working on the Hill and Common.
- 507 hours attending meetings and administration.
- 152 hours on the RCEG project.
- 77 hours producing the Folktalk Newsletter.
- 78 hours preparing for and attending events.
- 26 hours web site management.
- 79 hours were given by volunteers to attend training courses.
- The FOLK Facebook page is still very popular with 2,600 members.
- Our FOLK website continues to serve as a large store of information for members.

Partnership Projects

- The National Grid RCEG work project ends in April 2025. We were able to negotiate an extension with additional funding of £26,000. This has funded the new path at Brownstones car park, additional gorse clearance and tree and scrub maintenance.
- FOLK are working with CBC to secure future funding and support the application for Countryside Stewardship funding to replace the Higher Level Stewardship and Basic Payment Scheme.
- We work with the Cotswold Wardens particularly on the drystone wall from Hartley Lane running towards the Hill Fort. The wardens have contributed this year a total of 1,895 volunteer hours to the site with 1,155 hours building the dry stone wall and another 740 hours for project and maintenance on the hill and common.
- FOLK volunteers are working with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust to deliver the first stage of the Recovering Adders on the Cotswold Escarpment scheme. This project will provide improved habitat areas for adders and butterflies. One project has been completed on Charlton Kings Common and another will be completed before April 2025 in the Hill Fort area. We have a good population of adders on the site mainly in non-public areas.
- Natural England wants to make Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common a National Nature Reserve (NNR) to protect the beauty spots of Jurassic Rocks. The site has rocks dating from 165 million years ago. It would join only 221 NNRs across England.

Major Works on the site in 2023-2024

- **Paths** A new access path from Brownstones car park and the resurfacing of the path running along the side of the quarry have recently been completed.
- **Dry Stone Wall** The building of the dry stone wall from Hartley Lane to the Memorial Wall has been completed by the Cotswold Wardens.
- **Fencing** Daisy Bank field has had fencing installed to allow cattle grazing. This will cut the cost of cutting and clearing. A number of gates have been installed for access.
- **Veteran Trees** Site visits have identified a number of oak trees that will be monitored and trimmed by the tree surgeon this autumn.
- **Lime Kiln** Contractors attended the Lime Kilns in September to do conservation work to reduce water ingress and rebuild a section of the kiln base.

FOLK - Our Future

- As FOLK rolls into its 25th year there are big challenges ahead. We have already made great progress in reviewing the challenges facing FOLK and how we need to reflect these in our future priorities and initiatives. We now have a shortlist of 10 key 'themes' that will form the backbone of our activities in 2024 and 2025.
- At the same time we will remain true to our core conservation and education objectives, and will continue to focus on habitat conservation and site maintenance for the benefit of all users of the hill.
- And we will, of course, be celebrating 25 years of voluntary service and planning for the next 25.

Financial Report Financial Year 1st October 2023 – 30th September 2024

Highlights. Full Treasurers Report with AGM Papers

- Income for full year £4,839
- Expenditure for full year £2,766
- Surplus (Excess Income over Expenditure) for full year £2,073
- FOLK Reserves at 30th September 2024 £4,073
- Folk does not collect subscriptions from members and as a result relies upon the generous support of local individuals and grants from organizations to fund activities
- Grants and donations from organisations totalled £4,400 in the year - all relating to funding of specific projects.
- **Our thanks go to the following for their financial support in the last twelve months**
 - local individuals.
 - Gloucestershire County Council for the Build Back Better Grant.
 - Shurdington Parish Council for a grant for volunteer training.
 - Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council for a grant for volunteer training.
 - Cheltenham Borough Council for their contribution towards our insurance costs.
 - Charlton Kings Parish Council for the free use of Stanton Hall for FOLK meetings.
- FOLK Insurance for Public Liability, Personal Accident and Equipment costs have risen this year by 26% to £636. Work party costs relate to fuel and oils, new hand tools and servicing of our powered machinery.
- After successive shortfalls, this welcome return to surplus income generation reinforces the importance of effective and targeted funding of our activities. Most important, as FOLK enters its 25th anniversary year, our reserves remain prudent, and our fund raising has effectively "future proofed" FOLK financially for at least 2024 and 2025.