



Gatley Carrs Conservation Group Notes from the Annual General Meeting held at the Elm Road United Reformed Church, Gatley on 16th March 2022

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME and Review of the Past Year (Peter Owen)

Firstly welcome to you all for our first “real” AGM since April 2019, the AGM’s of 2020 and 2021 were both “virtual” as Covid devastated our social interactions. It’s a pleasure to be able to meet in person and present the various committee reports to a live group.

Despite all the restrictions we have maintained the Carrs and made improvements wherever possible. 2021 started with an ongoing issue about an area of land on the Carrs that no-one admits to owning. We were attempting to get repairs carried out to the “39 Steps” but hit a brick wall and failed, more about this later. April saw work on the wildflower meadow, restoration really started to pick up with plans and budget agreed and with Chris Mullin leading the effort, the meadow was cut and weed wiped in preparation for the planting to come. Our Fields in Trust local officer was made redundant and this, in combination with the intransigence of the Council and Covid, has totally frustrated progress here, hopefully we can resurrect this in some form in the future. Correspondence with SMBC about our disabled footpath plans also took a dramatic turn with the intervention of the Environment Agency and their new idea to widen the stream to help with flood relief and divert the current path near the nursery. This issue is still ongoing and hopefully we can get an update this evening from David Jefferies. Our next “virtual” meeting was in June, and despite May being a washout birdlife was enhanced by the arrival of a Mandarin duck who was christened Pip. Michelle reported on donations received in May from Round Table £500, Elm Road Church £250, Police Crime Community Fund £592 and donations from Delgado and Tinkler of £100. These represent a tremendous help to our efforts for which we are extremely grateful. The meadow made further progress with seedlings being planted by Chris and his team of volunteers. We were very pleased to get a new bench installed on site in memory of Derek Brennan, a lovely man and a very active supporter of our Group. In June the Trust Conservation Volunteers offered us a free tree planting scheme funded by NatWest bank. This was to be of no cost to us and all the labour would be provided by the TCV. We suggested to SMBC that a hedgerow around the meadow would be a great use of this offer but they were concerned about the ongoing maintenance of such a

hedge, so several other ideas were discussed over the ensuing months. Finally an agreement was reached to plant 1,000 whips around the site and I am pleased to report that planting was carried out in the last month. Due to the resignation of our Secretary mid- year I was very grateful to Emma Burrows for stepping in temporarily and then to Lesley Larkin for taking on the task and doing a great job from the beginning. At this point I also want to thank our committee for resolving the issues that arose and I am extremely grateful for their support and the way they pulled together to keep our Group on track. September saw the need for another quarterly meeting to be “virtual” and once again all the reports were produced and circulated to all the members. In the autumn we were all saddened to hear of the passing of Geoff Skitt, a founder member of the Carrs and another “good guy”, he provided enormous support to the Group in those key formative years and beyond.



Geoff Skitt

The winter bird feeding rota was drawn up to start in October through to the end of this month and once again we are extremely grateful to all the volunteers who give up their time every week to carry out this task. The meadow proved to be a spectacular success and tremendous credit must go to Chris for his dedication to the task and thanks to all the volunteers who helped with hours of back breaking work to create such a beautiful result. SMBC helped out again with a full meadow cut and clear at the end of the flowering season. Our first “live” meeting took place on December 15th and it was really good to see the team and members once again. The Christmas tree dressing event was very well supported and a great success. Lesley started work on our new constitution, more on that later this evening. We joined in with the RSPB weekend bird watch survey on the 29th January and with several volunteers recorded the variety of species seen over an hour on the Carrs, Chris collated the results and sent them off. Michelle was

working on our new bank mandate to add Lesley and also hopefully finally give us access to online banking as processing cheques with so many banks closed has become more and more difficult and statements were always out of date, Michelle can update progress in her report. Early January brought a problem with a large fallen tree once more in the area nobody apparently owns. I have pursued this with some vigour and based on the Land Registry search that Anthony Crook from SMBC carried out the area does appear to be owned by Manchester, even though they continue to deny this. We are grateful to Anthony and his team for realising the danger and clearing the problem as well as carrying out other remedial tree work all around the Carrs. I have submitted our application for Green Flag status once again and await their check site visit. So yet again a busy year and I have to thank the officers of the Group and committee members for their continuing hard work and support throughout the year.

2. ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

Attendees: Peter Owen, Michelle Inwood, Lesley Larkin, Chris Neild, Chris Mullin, Alan Butler, Emma Burrows, Angela Bent, James Arkwright, Adrienne Booter, Russ Booter, Margaret Brennan, Janet Evans, Neil Kellet, Alan Musgrave, Stuart Priestley, Jean Skitt, Bettina Taylor, Lesley Witton,

Apologies: Keith Marsden, Mary Robinson

3. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING

Approved

4. MATTERS ARISING

None

5. TREASURERS ANNUAL REPORT (Michelle Inwood)

The annual financial accounts for 5 March 2021 to 7 March 2022 have been audited by Peter Owen and show an increase of £1921.55 over the financial year.

		£	£
Opening Balance (5 March 2021)			2936.87
Income	Events (Christmas and Easter)	381.94	2861.44
	Donations	1932.00	
	Membership	547.50	
Expenditure	Event (Christmas)	90.00	939.89
	Annual Indemnity Insurance	157.00	

	Wildflower Meadow	566.17	
	Flower Bulbs	40.00	
	Bird Food	86.72	
Closing Balance (7 March 2022)			4858. 42

6. SECRETARY/MEMBERSHIP REPORT (Lesley Larkin)

The detective work to get all our membership records validated continues. Some progress has been made but it's a moving target. As each membership has a different renewal date based on when they actually joined, in effect, as each month goes by, memberships can lapse unless they're paid by standing order or we take some action to notify the member. Unfortunately I don't yet know all the renewal dates but to resolve this, Michelle has requested our bank to allow me access which will enable me to see the account statements of who's paid in when. This should then give me the information to start actively managing the member subscriptions.

At present we have 127 confirmed memberships and another 38 that we are aware of. Of the confirmed ones, 31 are Family, 8 are Single memberships and hopefully I'll be able to categorise the others and have visibility of their renewal dates once I see the bank statements. In terms of our communication to our members we still have a couple of problems. We have 2 members with incorrect email addresses, 22 members for which we have no email addresses and another 45 who haven't confirmed their email addresses. As I'm not getting delivery failure messages for these 45 when I send out the quarterly newsletter perhaps I shouldn't worry about these and assume they are actually correct. Anyway, wish me luck. As I've explained the membership totals will change potentially each month, be prepared for different numbers as we progress the validation.

7. BIRD REPORT (Chris Neild)

January 2022 was the warmest on record. During the month we had 2 serious Winter Storms bringing in strong winds and heavy rain. Certainly it was not good weather for walking around the Carrs with so many trees that could blow down. Of course birds hunker down too so it is pointless trying to see them. Eventually I managed to get there hoping to see the Mandarin Duck pair that had arrived at the Pond. They were originally reported earlier in the month by James Arkwright. Although they stayed throughout January they were very elusive and I never got to see them. On my next visit it was still very quiet around the Reserve. I counted 20+ Mallard, 6 Moorhen and 3 Domestic Duck. A Grey Heron was by the Pond as well as the ever present Ring-neck Parakeets.



Ring-necked Parakeet

On the 29th of January it was the RSPB Garden Bird Count. A few of us met at the Carrs to carry out the walk around the Reserve to see how many species we could find. The weather was quite kind to us so it was really pleasant on the Reserve. The total number of species seen was 20! The best bird of the day was a Sparrowhawk. Peter Owen, Angela Bent and I were on the car park when I spotted a bird on top of a tree in front of us. Obviously it had tried to take a bird. It flew up and soared above us, circled a few times, then moved away. Such a lovely sight to see and much enjoyed.

Early February we had the third Winter Storm which was the worst of all. It produced up to 90mph winds which caused so much damage to many Nature Reserves. Eventually it did quieten down and became quite pleasant. On my first visit to the Reserve, on the pond, I saw 15+ Mallard, 3 Domestic Duck, 8 Moorhen and 4 Canada Geese had arrived. Around the Reserve quite a few birds were starting to sing including Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Woodpigeon and Collared Dove. Along the brook path a pair of very noisy Ring-neck Parakeets was around and I do not doubt that they are already nesting nearby. A Nuthatch was also in this area close to the Dipping Pond. It was also very nice to see a Blackbird on the ground amongst the Snowdrops that were in flower.

Spring is just around the corner and a great time to be at Gatley Carrs.

Comment:

A question was raised about the sparrowhawk being there. Chris explained this is actually a good sign as it shows there is an ample bird population around to attract the sparrowhawk.

8. WILDLIFE AND NATURE REPORT (John Pollard)

Two months of a mild and wet winter and the beginning of Spring. There was one day of snow and one to two days of floods when the dipping pond walkway was submerged and logs flooded on to it!

Tree work was carried out by SMBC on the terrace above the Lorna Grove steps where a Goat Willow had fallen bringing down other trees and this and various other areas by the stream and dipping pond provided wood chips for the muddy paths. One ancient Beech is also down on the Green Close bank where the Primroses are and the English Bluebells are to come.

The foundations have been laid for a new path inside David Jefferies' land where the old cycle speedway track used to be. The Environment Agency are diverting the path and remaking the course of Gatley Brook to prevent flooding.

Small patches of Scarlet Elf Cup fungi have been seen at several locations on the Carrs and on a visit to the Carrs by our fungal expert Dave Higginson- Tranter in late February 28 species of fungi were recorded including Large Yellow Slug, Lemon Slug and Elegant Brittle Moss. Plants seen include Snowdrops from mid-January, Golden Saxifrages, Celandines, purple Crocuses and rare Lungwort.



Scarlet Elf-cup

A Fox was seen by the bird pond on March 6th but there has been no sign of the popular duck "Garry" since November. A Dipper was seen on Gatley Brook and a pair of Mandarin Ducks visited the bird pond in February. The Canada Geese are now choosing places to nest, so we know that Spring is really here at last!



Dipper

This is always an exciting time of year as plants burst back into life and we look forward to seeing the wildflower meadow develop again this year.

9. SITE MAINTENANCE REPORT (Alan Butler)

For the first time in preparing my report, due to having a full knee replacement in November 2021, I have very little to report, but as you can see everything on the Carrs Reserve is up to date due to forward planning and delegation, and willing volunteers to help out. My sincere thanks go to Noreen McClean for taking over the daily Duck feed while I've been indisposed, and my thanks go to Chris Mullin who kindly took over the task of keeping the seed dispenser topped up for the daily bird feeding volunteers.



Enjoying breakfast on the Carrs, 2 male and 1 female Mandarin ducks with Donald, the Indian Runner looking on

I'm pleased to say I'm now back doing light tasks and with help from Andy Day, recently taped off the Purple Crocus area as this was being walked on by visitors and dogs. The Purple Crocus are looking lovely, though they have a short life, it's nice to appreciate them whilst in flower. My secateurs are again being used daily, cutting Brambles encroaching the pathways and anything else that's a trip hazard. There is always something needs doing on the reserve and I'm happy to say our WhatsApp volunteer group works very well when we call for help.

Thanks to Joe Huyton for helping with Freddie's morning walk, very kind gesture indeed.

Also many thanks for all your good wishes and get well cards, and I'm pleased to report everything's going to plan. Spring is round the corner, so let's look out for the Marsh Marigolds near the dipping pond.



Marsh Marigolds

10. WILDFLOWER MEADOW REPORT (Chris Mullin)

Since my December report I have planted 200 wild (native) daffodil bulbs (*narcissus pseudonarcissus*), 100 wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) rhizomes, 100 snake's head fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) bulbs and 50 wild tulip (*Tulipa sylvestris*) bulbs. As the meadow

reawakens the spear tipped leaves of the bulb plants are beginning to show and some of the daffodils have started to flower.



Wood anemone

The issue I raised in December is, do we want a wildflower meadow 'enamelled' by colourful wildflowers, or is a mix of pollinators, which includes grasses, a more pleasing and educative goal? For example, rough meadow grass and some fescues and bents are favoured by butterflies, including the gatekeeper, small heath and the meadow browns. Furthermore, mature Yorkshire fog plays host to the eggs and caterpillars of the small skipper butterfly. Thus it is the combination of grasses and flowers that will deliver the greatest amount of biodiversity. However, the grasses need controlling so I intend to sow yellow rattle in the grassy areas and then scythe distinct parts of the grassy areas at various times in the summer. I am hoping this will promote the growth of wildflowers (and is a lot amongst the grasses) give succour to the butterflies, birds and bees whilst maintaining a sward that is hospitable to mammals and invertebrates. For example, I came across caterpillars hibernating soundly in the hollows beneath grass cuttings. Apparently, the temperature in the hollow with the grass cover can be several degrees warmer than the air temperature.

I have enough seed to sow approximately 600 square meters thus doubling the size of the meadow. The seed mix is the same as last year, so I am hoping to get a good display. The newly sown areas will once again feature the cornfield annual species like poppy, corncockle, cornflower and night flowering catchfly. The two areas sown last year will hopefully feature a greater number of perennial flowers like greater knapweed, musk mallow and yarrow. This year preparation of the meadow surface will skip the turf cutting and removal process that we undertook last year which proved just too arduous to be repeated. However, I intend to lightly rotavate the surface of the meadow and broadcast the seeds in the same way as last year. The rotavating will be completed by Tuesday 22nd March and the seeds sown on Thursday and Friday.



The wildflower meadow preparation after rotavation and the first Cowslip indicates spring is definitely in the air



Comment:

It was recognised that the work on the wildflower meadow requires significant effort and Chris was encouraged to draw up a timetable for this year's work and request help via the volunteers Whatsapp group as required.

11. SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT (Emma Burrows)

As the numbers continue to grow and we are now only 4 people off 1000 members on the Gatley Carrs Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GatleyCarrs>), this is a wonderful opportunity to use as a springboard for our "1000 x 1000" initiative to help raise funds for the disabled pathway.

Lots of photographs from all different people have been posted showing their enjoyment and use of the Carrs and again with all the directives towards promoting and protecting mental health, this shows just how much people are benefitting from the space.

The Facebook page will be used as the main driver of our continued growth to promote membership as well as our planned activities throughout the rest of the year. The feasibility of implementing a link to a Paypal payment option is being investigated as this would facilitate both the easier joining for members and for the collection of any one off donations that anyone would like to make. The 1000 x 1000 initiative will include a standing order form as well to encourage potential new members to join. We are hoping to be able to launch this soon when we reach our 1000 member on the Facebook page.

All in all, the Facebook page is a very pleasant and gentle place online to share space with others. Its growth has been steady and we don't lose many numbers which is a good indicator that people enjoy interacting with us and seeing what's going on. It's a pleasure to administrate it.

12. PROPOSALS**a. Revised Constitution**

The draft document (v0.3 dated 1 March 2022) was presented and discussed. The main area of discussion focussed on the objectives of the group and it was determined that this needed to be amended as shown in the red text below to give a better description.

Objectives: The Group is a volunteer organisation with the aim to promote and encourage the conservation, use and enhancement of the area known as Gatley Carrs Nature Reserve which is owned by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council. **Members support the Carrs by payment of their membership subscription which helps fund the day to day management of the reserve and the duck/bird feeding programme. Members, if they wish, can also**

assist in task days arranged by the Conservation Group to help manage the routine maintenance on the reserve. As an open space Gatley Carrs does not have a postcode but it is bounded by Green Close, Green Walk, Brookside Road, Carlton Drive, Thornton Gate, Lorna Grove (all in Gatley, Cheshire), the Network Rail Altrincham to Stockport railway line and Junction 1 of the M56 Motorway – see Figure 1.

Subsequent to this amendment, the document was unanimously approved.

Comment:

Lesley will now convert the document to be a Final version and will issue to all members with these AGM minutes.

b. Plans for 2022

The renewal of the Green Flag award, the development of the wildflower meadow and the Environment Agency work to remake the course of the stream have been highlighted in the individual reports in these notes.

13. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

All current officers confirmed they were willing to stand for re-election in 2022 and there were no other nominations for these committee roles.

Role	Name	Proposer	Secunder	Approved
Chairman	Peter Owen	Emma Burrows	Bettina Taylor	Yes
Treasurer	Michelle Inwood	Peter Owen	Alan Butler	Yes
Secretary	Lesley Larkin	Emma Burrows	Jim Arkwright	Yes
Officer 1	Chris Neild	Michelle Inwood	Emma Burrows	Yes
Officer 2	John Pollard	Peter Owen	Chris Mullin	Yes
Officer 3	Alan Butler	Michelle Inwood	Jean Skitt	Yes
Officer 4	Chris Mullin	Alan Musgrave	Russ Boler	Yes
Officer 5	Emma Burrows	Angela Bent	Jean Skitt	Yes
Officer 6	Angela/Nigel Bent	Jim Arkwright	Alan Butler	Yes

It was agreed that Neil Kellett will take on the previously unfilled auditor role.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a. Alan Butler raised the possibility of having a formal “Welcome to Gatley Carrs” sign to help promote the Conservation Group.

Action: Peter Owen to investigate the costs of this.

b. The proposed date for the next Ordinary General Meeting is June 15th 2022 at 19:30hrs.