

Greener Staplehurst Group Meeting – 24 May 2021 (Zoom)

Present:

David George (Chair)
Jose Castro
David Charge
Sue Forward
Mina McPhee
Stuart McPhee
Adele Sharp
Richard Smith
Peter Spearink
Natasha Thomas

1. Apologies

Louise Pettifer
Jacqui Veitch
Martin Ralph
Paddy Riordan

2. Minutes of last meeting

Approved.

3. Election of new Chair

David George was re-voted in as Chair. All eight attendees voted in favour.

4. Extension of bed at Station Road/Chestnut Avenue

This is a high-profile mixed site where both wild and cultivated flowers are to be grown. Wild/natural vegetation is to be encouraged although some cultivated plantings to also be positioned here for visual interest. There has been discussion at previous meetings about extending the existing bed to the end where the hedge is. It was agreed that this area should be rotavated since that was the quickest way of preparing the site for planting this summer.

Action: DC to undertake rotavation.

5. Payback team at Wimpey Fields

During lockdown it was difficult to undertake work at Wimpey Nature Reserve due to social distancing restrictions. The site is looking somewhat overgrown and in need of attention. The wildlife is, however, thriving. The Payback Team has been promised for the site for 8 weeks. The Payback team will need to be supervised. The work to be undertaken includes:

- cutting down/thin saplings in the wrong place (mainly oak). This particular task will need to be done when the trees are dormant and must not be undertaken now.
- Cclearing/tidying the scallops.

- letting in more light in the wild wood (as advised by an MBC tree officer).
- making secure the dead hedges with chestnut stakes – 200 of these 5ft stakes are to arrive shortly.
- digging in stumps (John xx has some) to create stag beetle habitat.

It is proposed that the Payback Team take one or two sections per week and work through.

Action: PS to brief Hazel on works to be carried out.

There are two issues to address:

Supervision: DG is unavailable for a few Saturdays. SF has offered to keep an eye (along with Robert) by dropping in every week. SM has requested that PS show him (and anyone else interested) round the Fields and explain the works that need to be undertaken so that there are others who are also briefed on the requirements of looking after the Fields.

Action: SM will liaise with PS on time for the tour. Anyone else interested in joining should notify SM to be included in the visit. SF has also kindly agreed to accompany them.

Access: Access to the site has always been a problem and it must be resolved before the Payback Team can get in. This is not something that GSG wishes to manage as a general rule but it must be organised on this occasion before the Team can to work. If it cannot be organised then the Team will have to walk in through the path opposite Gybbon Rise.

6. Planters

PS has been making wooden planters for locations around the village. He has been using wood specifically for this purposed that was donated but this has now been used up. There was a discussion about what additional supplies should be sourced – hardwood or reconstituted plastic. DC has some redwood that he is happy to donate for the planters.

Action: DC and PS to liaise for delivery/collection.

There was a discussion about the need to have more people involved in the maintenance and watering of the planters and other GSG sites around the village. It was pointed out that some planters, such as the one on the southern side of the village on the A229, for example, are difficult to reach since there is no parking and the traffic is very fast. Since there are safety issues at some sites, these would not be suitable for families with small children to engage with. It was concluded that while care needs to be taken with some of the locations, a list of all GSG sites should be circulated with these minutes. Also see later discussion about volunteers.

The point was made that this time, for the first time, the cow parsley at the edges of the village have not been mown down. The point was made that it should not be cut down until it has seeded, even if it is obstructing the planters.

Action: All GSG members to adopt a planter or site and notify MM so that the list can be updated and re-circulated.

7. MBC Tree Officer visit

A meeting with the Tree Officer has been arranged by DG for Monday 21st June to discuss locations for tree planting in Staplehurst. Both small and large transplant will be considered.

8. Bricks

There has been a recent GSG WhatsApp conversation about the use of bricks to create stepping stones to the herb bed. This was extended to consider the use of old bricks elsewhere in the village. The point was made that although old bricks are abundant and a call could be put out for them, they cannot be used on public paths (this would create a slip risk). If a good use is found for used bricks, the group can use the FaceBook page to call for brick donations which can be stored in NT's barn, if necessary, until there is a need for them.

It was suggested that slabs make good, non-slip, stepping stones.

Action: DC has some slabs he can use for the stepping stones and he will put them into place at the herb bed.

9. Volunteers

There was a discussion about the need to involve more of the village in the work of the GSG. This is so that the sites can be better maintained, with local people volunteering and also as the start of the campaign to educate the wider public about the benefits of greening Staplehurst. While Covid restrictions have meant that volunteers have been difficult to engage, there is also the wider issue of engaging volunteers for the longer term.

The point was made that the group has not made a concerted effort to start the engagement process (especially not through the Covid restrictions) and that there are opportunities using local events and social media to start to engage people and develop a good volunteer base.

Action: To discuss in more detail at next meeting and group members to take lead on putting together a plan for wider engagement and education

10. Any other business

Sunflower seeds planting – NT: NT has a good supply of sunflower seeds which can be planted round the village and she asked the group for suggestions about which sites should be planted. The consensus was that the sunflower seeds could be planted in any good location.

Action: NT will supply seeds to any group member who would like to plant seeds.

Mina McPhee

3 June 2021