**Meeting to discuss Brincliffe Edge Woods**

**Wednesday 17 July 2013 – held at 62 Brincliffe Edge Road**

**1. Those present:**

Chris Venables (CV), Claire Bygate (CB), Maggie Ellis (ME), Sue Pethen (SP), Richard Pethen (RP), Ken Phillip (KP), Ernest Shoobridge (ES), Marian Tylecote (MT), Howard Trott (HT).

**2. Apologies:**

Jack Massey (JM), Nick Robinson (NR), Sheila Verity (SV)

**3. Context:**

The meeting followed e-mail correspondence initiated by ES early in April 2013 when he lamented the state of the woods, which led to CV contacting interested people including MT.

On 11 May MT and NR led a walk through the woods accompanied by a number of those present at the meeting. She and Nick then produced a report.

Subsequently there had been contact with SCC Woodlands staff (including by RP).

The difficulty of knowing how best to proceed had been debated and while it was agreed that most contact could be most effectively done by e-mail, the meeting had been arranged to kick start the process by bringing a number of interested people together.

**4. Discussion:**

**Personal interests and viewpoints** – in the course of discussion it emerged that each of us had different interests, priorities and positions regarding the woods. Some had a particular interest in its **history** (ME with CB, KP and HT), some in **amenity** issues such as litter, benches, dog waste bins, signage (ES – noting also litter picks by JM and Mamie Shafi recently) and some in **biodiversity and woodland management** (MT, SP, CB, RP, HT) and in this latter group some had more **expertise in plants and woodland ecology** (MT, SP, KP) while others’ skills were more **practical** e.g. bramble removal (RP).

**Background** – ME explained the work which had been carried out about 15 years ago by volunteers from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) in which she had been involved (Shirley Meek had organised this in conjunction with Dan Lewis, then SCC Arboriculturalist), CV referred to the work done by Parks Department about 4 years ago on the Round walk footpath at the top of the woods parallel to Brincliffe Edge Road, CB recalled times when fields were more open at the eastern end of the woods.

**Potential conflicting interests** – we spent some time on the different needs of different user groups (those interested in wildlife, dog walkers, families, school groups, kids) and how these could potentially lead to different views on how best to manage the woods in the best interests of biodiversity and wildlife **and** local people).

There were strong feelings about the importance of engaging young people with nature through woodland visits, maybe in school, Scout or Guide groups.

We tended to agree that different areas of the woods could serve different functions e.g. the former allotments lower down the slope should be left to go wild and be more of a wildlife haven while the more open areas near the top of the slope where the main paths were could be more managed in that they would be kept litter free, dog mess free, with selective thinning and planting, careful wildflower introductions etc.

**The history of the woods** – a file of information had been gathered by Dan King (DK - who has now left the area) and MT tabled this. We discussed the work of the NENG history group and the continuing work on Edge End farm and its garden on Archer Lane. HT also has information on the history of Nether Edge. MT referred to the Fairbanks maps held in the Sheffield City Archives which are the oldest hand-drawn maps of the area.

**5. We agreed:**

**5.1 On the history of the woods:**

The file gathered by DK is now with ME.

CB, HT and KP expressed an interest in being involved with ME in exploration of the history of the woods (the City Archives are an important source of information and KP has an Archives card already). We agreed the value of linking with the NENG History group. CV referred to their plans for further guided walks, leaflets and even a local history book.

ME leading on this aspect?

**5.2 On amenity issues:**

Issues here include the need for well-sited litter bins and ES suggested re-siting one of the bins in Chelsea Park over the road onto the woods side of Brincliffe Edge. Maybe notices are also needed as SCC policy is now not to have separate bins for general waste and for dog poo, but to have general bins – something which may not be clear to all dog walkers. CV stressed that SCC being under such financial pressures are unlikely to install more bins due to the on-going cost of emptying them so approaches based on dissuading anti-social behaviour (e.g. reminder notices) might be needed.

ES mentioned other amenity matters such as clear signing, notice boards, benches, improved steps in places, acknowledging that most of these would need SCC approval and in some cases SCC to do the work (***note*** *- we did not discuss fund-raising though this is bound to come up in later discussions*).

Litter picking is something we could organise with SCC support if needed.

ES to come up with specific suggestions on how to take this aspect forwards?

**5.3 Biodiversity and woodland management:**

All agreed SCC Woodlands team are very supportive. Nathan McWhinnie (NMcW) would be very willing to come to a meeting, but we had thought it best to sort out our priorities and our views on the way forwards before inviting him or colleagues.

RPwill check the SCC Woodlands and Parks teams’ structures and circulate this to everyone.

We all are aware that nothing can be done of a practical nature in the woods without SCC approval – but equally they (via woodland staff or the Rangers) could be an important resource to do things or offer help and equipment.

We need a good map of the woods with paths and specific areas marked on it. RP said NMcW had sent NR large scale maps of the woods which they use. (***Note after the meeting –*** *RP has circulated initial versions with hand drawn detail as well as GPS points*). HT suggested the use of transparent layers to depict different types of information on the same map, which will be useful as we collect more data. From this basis we might build more detailed mapping of those areas of the woods on which we want to focus.

**The first step would be another walk. This will be at 3pm on Sunday 11 August.** This walk would help us to decide which area of the woods to focus on first for planting and management.

Having decided on an initial area on which to focus there would be a number of stages – (a) contact SCC and invite NMcW or colleagues to a meeting, probably in September, to discuss plans (but see the note highlighted in the last paragraph of this section), (b) draw up a list of things to be done which can be put to SCC staff. This would include growing plants for transplanting (MT can get seeds at beneficial prices through University sources, SP would be interested to be involved in selection and in growing from seed for transplanting), and later (c) the practical work.

**HT proposed this as ideal for a community task force and he would be happy to be involved in organising this.**

As well as specific areas on which we might focus there are other things important for the biodiversity of the woods. SP pointed out that the density of the young sycamore and ash adjacent to the wall by Brincliffe Edge Road is creating dense shade which blocks light for other plants, as well as potentially causing problems for the wall. Cutting back is needed. MT and CB noted the need to get rid of much of the flush of this year’s sycamore seedlings.

We noted NMcW and colleagues will be doing some felling and pruning of beech trees at the upper end of the woods in the autumn. **We should aim to produce our first document outlining aims and objectives (in the short and long term) for council officers to see before the work by NMcW et al. commences in the autumn.**

**6 Coordination and communication**

CV is keen that we communicate to NENG members what is going on, noting the next issue of Edge (September 2013, John Clifford is the editor) has a copy date of 10 August). A summary of where we are at could be produced for then (RP and SP could do this if OK by others). Also information could be forwarded to Laura Fitzgerald (LF) for NENG’s website and consideration could be given to having a notice board at the next farmers’ market (22 September) to encourage sign up for a woods task force.

Coordination by e-mail between individual s / groups using an e-mail group (*can a group such as woods @netheredge.org.uk be set up?*) would seem most efficient. LF might be able to advise.

RP 18/07/13 ( with amendments, to 8/8/13)