

2021
December

Friends of the Scrubs News

Updating you on activities and campaigns involving Friends of Wormwood Scrubs. Here is a chronological summary of news and discussions since Summer 2021.

September

Hedge-laying

The hedging between the rough meadow and the model aircraft field, laid by volunteers to mitigate the knock-on effects of HS2-related work in the northern section of the Scrubs, has been a contentious issue. On 19 September a team led by trustees of FOWWS created a discreet “secret” opening in the hedging which allows access and egress from the rough meadow without unduly encouraging people to use the meadow paths. It can be closed off with a rope during bird-nesting season with a sensitive and informative sign requesting non-use during those months. Here are FOWWs chair Stephen Waley-Cohen and trustee Emma Ranson enjoying their hedge-laying activities together



Meeting with LET

Three Trustees met 22 September on the Scrubs with senior officers from the LBHF Law Enforcement Team to discuss issues including the LET lack of visibility and slow response time. They are now in uniform, so much more visible. They expect that they will soon appoint an officer with specific responsibility for the Scrubs, and once we know who this is, we will share details.

They acknowledge that the time they can dedicate to the Scrubs may not be sufficient for such a large area. We covered many topics including: bicycling across the Scrubs; licensed dog walkers with more than four dogs each (see below), and in large groups together; unlicensed music events; illegal activity in the copses and woods, including camping (not the protest camps), drugs, sexual and anti-social behaviour; fireworks; drug dealing especially near Braybrook Street. We agreed to maintain contact and have similar meetings at least quarterly, in advance of which we will ask Friends to tell us of any issues they want us to raise. Friends are advised that while the email and phone number is monitored 24/7, response times, especially 'out of hours' may not be immediate. Anything requiring immediate response remains best reported to the police on 999 or 101.

HS2 discussions: hoardings, paths, matting

LBHF agreed with HS2 that when HS2 erect their hoardings (planned for very soon) against the sewer site, they will clear a path adjacent to it for walking (and observing), so there will be a second east-west path as well as the main one between the meadow and HS2 site, which will help reduce the pressure on the main one (in the absence of the path at the foot of the embankment) and, hopefully, also reduce the muddiness. This should be done in accordance with standards for wildlife protection.

LBHF are acquiring some plastic matting to put down on the rather narrow route from the north-west corner of the airplane field to the main east-west path referred to above, again to reduce the muddiness. This should be done in accordance with standards for wildlife protection.

(For various reasons it was not possible to relocate the HS2 matting when it is removed from the Braybrook Street end.)

We also requested that bark chippings be laid on the path from Wood Lane, which was done.

Forest School

FOWWS asked for more information from LBHF about a proposed Forest School in the central copse and we hope to have news on this issue soon.

Dog licences

Some members were concerned that groups of dog walkers have been joining together creating packs of more than 20 dogs running together. FOWWS made a formal request on 27 September to the Park Manager, Heather Marsh, that the Council ensure that dog licences being issued to professional dog walkers emphasise that the maximum number of dogs allowed per walker is 4 and that no more than two dog walkers should walk together. Steve Hollingworth, Assistant Director of Leisure, Sport and Culture, confirmed that the licence conditions would be reviewed and that he would speak to the LET regarding enforcement.

HS2 and Compulsory Purchase Order

Below are the relevant sections from our report after discussions with HS2 in early September:

UTX works

The work here relates to the diversion of utilities from under Old Oak Common Lane to under the railway tracks. There will be an under track crossing (UTX) which will require 24/7 tunnelling for approximately 6 weeks.

The UTX site will be subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order. HS2's argument is that it needs to have control over the land to put in place easements for 13 utility companies. HS2 continues to work on getting easements in place but is unlikely that this will be done by October 2021 and the CPO will enable them to take control and put these easements in place. Once easements are in place and works completed HS2 will return the land to WSCT/LBHF. HS2 said it has no intention of retaining or repurposing the land in question.

Sewer diversion

If an agreement re easements is not reached with Thames Water by October 2021, HS2 will issue a Notice to Treat which in effect gives it the option to acquire the land within a three year period. The stated intention is to rescind the Notice to Treat once agreement is reached with Thames Water. HS2 said that there was a 75% probability that an agreement would be reached before October 2021 in which case it would not issue a Notice to Treat.

Update as of November 30, 2021

Progress has been made on the Stamford Brook sewer site with an easement now agreed with Thames Water so a Notice to Treat may not be necessary. The UTX site remains under discussion with HS2 yet to produce satisfactory contractual wording regarding its stated intention to return the land at no cost.

October

Tall Buildings around the Scrubs

FOWWS is supporting a campaign by the Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum to oppose excessively tall buildings close to the Scrubs on the western side. The OPDC is in favour of development which would destroy the open skies and sunset views to the west.

October meeting with HS2 Contractors

FOWWS trustee Smita Davé reported:

Emma, Faye and Smita met with Steve Hollingsworth and the BBVSJV crew - subcontractors undertaking necessary clearance works around hoarding, as well as Madeline Woodhead-Jardine and Natalie Swann, community engagement officers, and Matt in charge of ecology at BBVSJV. HS2 need to make a clearing along the existing Heras fence in order to put up the hoarding and the meeting was organised (by Faye) to see if we could have a new path along this boundary as an alternative to replace the path we lost along the embankment. We are pleased that LBHF and HS2 accepted our suggestion which will help reduce the pressure on the main central path. Some hoarding panels will have vision panels too as negotiated by Ben Novak. Briefly:

- matting from Braybrook Street could not be retained as it was rented and had to be returned! But they will supply and lay down sandy loam where there are deep ruts all along the path. [see below for update on this]
- ecology checks will be made before clearance along the Heras fence on Scrubs side and embankment side. Fence along embankment to be replaced by green metal fence.

-Madeline advised that the Heras fence at some points was not exactly where the boundary was agreed - we all traipsed along the length of the boundary with Steve H and two of the chaps from BBV marking up sections where it will move a little - some sections were just 25cm out, some 1m and one section a whole 2m to be gained by us! Photos taken by Faye and Emma with location points will be put up on the forum.

All will be clarified by Madeline on a map which we will then check/correlate with photos taken.

-Emma has requested they provide a green reptile plastic guard along the metal fencing by the embankment to stop lizards and reptiles coming through. Some thought to be given (by HS2) for foxes/voles etc which might slip through and a way to enable them to get out. Madeline said they will relocate any animals they find.

-We have agreed that where there are grasses, the path will be approx 1.2 to 1.5m from the hoarding; where there are thickets of brambles it will be 2m with HS2 maintaining the brambles should they grow rampant. All trees will remain - the path will go round in one or two cases. This path will be a good alternative route to take pressure off the central east to west path.

- where the path emerges out of the woods (where the campers were) the hardcore is about 1m outside the hoarding posts - we questioned this and they promised to look into it and will ensure it is dug out - a watch point for us.

- the hoarding here on the easternmost line will go right to the rail tracks. The path here will be usable by all as we emerge from the 'chestnut avenue'.

- there is a corner by former Chats Paddock area where the fence is about 1m from the boundary agreed previously with LBHF. We have requested that they maintain this current line as an alternative path by Scrubs users is already well established here. They may want to reclaim boundary here, but we said there is enough space for turning circles/equipment etc and there is hardcore already in place for their compound. The contractors will not miss this tiny bit of additional space as a tight corner does nothing for anyone. We, together with Steve Hollingworth have suggested a more of a diagonal hoarding here - Madeline will try to negotiate.

November

Our first Climate Carnival on the Scrubs!

On 7 November, marking the COP26 global environment summit in Glasgow, we held a day of events on the Scrubs.

Chairman Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen writes:

It was great to see so many Friends taking part in the activities organised to celebrate the pleasures of the Scrubs, and to help us learn more about the birds, and the ecology and biodiversity. There must have been 60 or more at the bird walk, the ecology talk and helping with the bulb planting.

Very many thanks to Barbara Crowther and Paul Thomas for organising and leading the bird walk, and to all those (especially Ben Novak) for making sure there were binoculars for all to see the birds; huge thanks to Tilly Collins for explaining so clearly how biodiversity and nature and humans inter-act with each other, and their mutual needs, and for leading a very interesting walk across to the central copse and into the meadow area and back, answering many questions, and providing many explanations as we went.

And also to Emma Ranson for providing helpful signage and other information, and for leading the team of native wildflower bulb planting on either side of the red brick path by Scrubs Lane. Let's hope for lovely flowers in the spring.

And to the Trustees who were there in support of many of the activities, and who had helped me in putting this programme together. (all the Trustees were there apart from the two who had longstanding personal commitments outside London).

City Mission Church

Friends of the Scrubs have responded to an appeal to oppose the eviction of the City Mission Church on the corner of Harrow Road and Scrubs Lane. Despite being designated an Asset of Community Value by Brent Council, the church, nursery, food bank and other services were given days to leave the premises. Thanks to local opposition including from Friends of the Scrubs, the landlords extended the time limit.

Hard-core and HS2

Also in November the FOWWS raised the following issues in discussions with Steve Hollingworth:

Hardcore

The method of laying the hard-core for the hoarding along the HS2 boundary of the sewer enclosure: Trustees were concerned that rain will wash the residue into the soil which will affect the future grass and ecology and there appears to be non-porous material, visibly protruding, laid beneath the hard-core at the western end but not elsewhere. We requested that the non-porous material should be along the entire length. This is confirmed to be the case.

The temporary track from Braybrook Street

Early November, we noted that the “temporary road” from Braybrook Street has been left in an awful state after the matting was removed as outlined to us by HS2 in October - an uneven mud pit with bits of clay piping sticking out etc. The dips that have been cut into the land were still too deep and have filled with water and mud. For anyone pushing an all-terrain pram, or for anyone slightly anxious about their own stability, this has made that area totally inaccessible. In response to our concerns a meeting on site with the HS2 community engagement officers has been organised for 26 November. Thanks to Trustee Faye Thomas for flagging up this issue.

HS2 Hoardings update

Despite residents making direct petition to HS2 not to install solid hoarding in place of the existing fencing along the western boundary of the Scrubs, this has started to be erected. HS2 did engage with the Friends and the local school (Old Oak Primary) to design a collection of images that would be printed and installed onto the hoarding. At the request of the Friends, this is in keeping with both our ‘more wild than tamed’ philosophy, and reflective of species that can be found on the Scrubs.

The Friends also petitioned HS2 to install viewing cut-outs within the hoarding, and HS2 have granted this request, with cut-outs at both adult and child eye-lines.

The hoardings have started to be installed, with the artwork planned to be in place for January.

Many thanks to Trustee Ben Novak for pushing this forward and liaising with HS2.

Paths update

30 November: Smita Davé writes: An update from Madeline Woodhead-Jardine is that the established narrow path at south east corner of the HS2 compound will be retained - this is the path where it transpired that HS2 could, if they wanted, extend their boundary according to Stephen Hollingworth and HS2, but we requested that they keep it as is rather than encroach further.

Upcoming dates

The Trustees met on 30 November and a report of this meeting will be published.

The Wormwood Scrubs Charitable Trust is meeting on 15 December. Details including information on how to observe the meeting is [on the LBHF website](#). The WSCT is comprised of three LBHF councillors and chaired by Councillor Alexandra Sanderson. Two Friends of the Scrubs Trustees – chair Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen and Miriam Shea - attend WSCT meetings but do not have votes.

Boxing Day Walk on the Scrubs

Weather permitting, Trustees will be meeting up for a refreshing post-Christmas on the model aircraft field on Sunday 26 December. All Friends are welcome to join us as we walk off our Christmas dinners!

Friends of the Scrubs

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