An update to the Amberley Society from the Friends of the Wildbrooks to their meeting on 10th November 2026

By Jim Glover

FoW We are a very small informal group of local residents, just 5 of us, with some knowledge, and a love and concern for the Amberley Wildbrooks. And we are seek to work together with decision makers, landowners, local people and wildlife conservationists to help restore the Wildbrooks back to favourable condition.

Our Relationship with the Amberley Society is very important to us

We met with Ian and Jeff, earlier this year to discuss how we would work together with The Amberley Society to keep you informed about our activities and we agreed we would provide you with regular updates and give verbal reports at meetings like this.

Statutory Agencies

From the outset we recognised the importance of the two government agencies who are responsible for the Wildbrooks.

Natural England are responsible for Designating, Monitoring and Protecting SSSIs.

Environment Agency has a legal duty to take reasonable steps to conserve and enhance the special features of the SSSI's during it operations.

Over the last two years, we identified and met with two key individuals in both organisations and discovered much more about what they are doing and the problems they faced. NE have produced a number of papers in the last two years which identify and assess the very poor condition of the Amberley Wildbrooks SSSI. We, the FoW produced a critique in the form of a written response to these papers and gave it to both NE and The National Park Authority. Unfortunately, both of these helpful officers in NE and EA have now moved on and neither are being replaced which really confirms our concern that neither agency are really responding adequately to the serious problems which are facing the Wildbrooks and we believe this is primarily due to the lack of Government interest and funding.

SDNPA

Shortly after his appointment, FoW invited **Sion McGeever, The new Chief Executive** of the **South Downs National Park Authority** to come and see the problems that we identified on the Wildbrooks. The good news is that he came last May and met us on site. We were very pleased to discover that Sion was a bird watcher with good ecological understanding. We showed him around and explained our concerns and he was very receptive and offered helpful suggestions, putting us in touch with key members of his team and indicated possible future funding that might help to address some of our concerns.

Water Supply and quality concerns

Quite by chance we bumped into Don Ross out on the wildbrooks when Oriole was showing us around this summer. Don is an Independant consultant and **lead Author** of the **Habitat Regulations Assessment report** commissioned by Southern Water. We met up with him again later at Pulborough Brooks and he explained the outcome of his work which is really fascinating and highly significant. He explained a great deal that we did not know nor understand about the Hydrology of the Brooks and so we then invited him to give a presentation to us together with representatives from the three major landowners RSPB, SWT and Nyetimber, Who together own three quarters of the Wildbrooks. His report was primarily aimed at addressing concerns about Water Neutrality and the possible adverse impact of local water abstraction upon the Arun Valley SPA and SAC. His report identified that abstraction from Hardham was not draining water from the Wildbrooks. The ridge which you can see running along the northern margin of the Wildbrooks is a Geological anticline which effectively isolates the brooks from ground water flow to the north.

Indeed, the good news was that there is an artesian effect on the Wildbrooks where water from the Folkestone beds below the brooks is upwelling through the peat and sand providing a clean and very useful water supply to the Brooks. This is excellent news because it means that with careful management there is an adequate supply of water which could be retained during the winter and kept into the spring for the benefit of breeding birds and ditch flora, as well as maintaining wet field margins to retain livestock. This means that keeping the Wildbrooks wet in the future will not depend upon the River Arun water which is too polluted to be of use.

More good news is that Southern Water will continuing to fund his study of the Wildbrooks Hydrology so that now for the first time we can begin to understand the complex flows on and around the brooks.

Our Meeting with Don, together with Nyetimber, SWT and RSPB. Proved very useful and we have agreed to meet with them all on a regular basis and also to seek to meet with other landowners with a view to understanding their concerns and sharing ideas and working together for the benefit of the Wildbrooks.

Botany

FoW invited the amazing **Frances Abrahams**, our local Botanist who has a very long and detailed knowledge of the Wildbrooks and some strongly held and valuable views about its management. Despite bad weather, we walked around the brooks together with representatives from the SWT, RSPB and Nyetimber and we all benifited greatly from her knowledge

The “Snail man” **Dr Martin Willing**

During our site visit which Oriole organised, we also happened upon Dr Martin Willing who was monitoring the main site for the rare snail Anisus Vorticulus The Little Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail. He had only just started his survey but already he was able to confirm they were still there and he was pretty sure they were in good numbers.

Recent Habitat Management

If you have been watching the Wildbrooks during the summer you will have seen a lot of management work in progress which Oriole has just been explaining. We are really delighted to see this, and already you can see that their management is retaining ideal winter water levels. The key to this management has been the RSPB’s careful study and monitoring of the Brooks over the last few years as well as close working relationship with the Statutory Agencies , the National Park and many others including the wildlife specialist such as Martin and Frances.

When we met recently with the RSPB, SWT and Nyetimber ,it was very encouraging to learn that these other two major landowners are also in the process of **studying and monitoring their land** so that that they can identify what management they need to undertake to make appropriate improvements. We are very encouraged to see all this progress in action and we think we should all be very grateful to have such responsible neighbours who are caring for the Wildbrooks. One of our next steps will be to start meeting with **other landowners** to ask them about their concerns, to keep them informed and to see if we can help them to improve their land.

Stop press

Southern Water’s Ford Water (Effluent) Recycling Project.

Three of our group recently met with Southern Water at one of Southern Waters public “Pre-consultation Engagements” If you don’t know about this we would suggest that you should look it up. In essence Southern Water are looking to take action to ensure they do not have a water supply problem in the future due to drought. They are presenting their preferred option which is to take the Effluent from Littlehampton and Bognor Regis which is processed at the Treatment Works at Ford and instead of releasing it into the River, they plan to build a major and very expensive additional water treatments works and then lay a pipeline from Ford to the River Rother near Pulborough so that this constant supply of cleaned up water can be extracted again and distributed to us all.

The FoW do not intend to get too involved in the many issues which this raises but we will keep a watching brief. Our main concern is the water quality in the River Arun. Although we have learnt that the Wildbrooks has it’s own clean water supply, there is always the risk that Pollution and Silt will be brought in by high river levels overtopping

the Banks and damaging the Wildbrooks. Obviously the sooner the River can be cleaned up the better.

One of the “conservation issues” about this plan is the damage that the substantial Pipeline will cause. It should be noted that the pipeline will almost certainly be on the west side of the river. This is because both the water treatment works are on the west side and also because the Arun Valley SPA & SAC designated land which runs along the eastern side of the River would be a major deterrent.