

Coleorton and New Lount Volunteer Group



REVIEW OF 2017

This is now the 7th year the group has been in existence and we have made fantastic progress over that period of time. 2017 has been a really great year when, with the help from other organisations, we have been able to achieve the greatest ever number of volunteer hours.



We have been ably assisted by the Rangers; Dave has been making good progress with his time management, and we are grateful for all the help the rangers contribute to the group.

Coleorton Parish Council has also been very supportive of the group and the work we have been carrying out at Coleorton Wood.

So let us look at what has been achieved across the two sites in 2017

NEW LOUNT NATURE RESERVE.

Most of our habitat management at New Lount has focused on the thinning of the woodland areas around the top of the pit bank and we have almost completed this enormous task.



We have created a large number of windrows, had numerable fires, with the assistance of “Mick the Flame”, and created many stacks of cut timber. We have also been very active with the strimmers and brushcutters clearing both the open grassland areas as well as the edges to pathways throughout the site. This work is now showing benefits with a much greater number of plant species in the open grassland areas, particularly the growth of orchids.



We have again spent time during the summer removing Ragwort from the open grassland areas at the top of the pit bank. This work is proving successful with a much decreased quantity each year.

Another big event in 2017 has been the installation of the sand martin wall, which has been manufactured by the Wednesday workshop group. Unfortunately we were unable to get this fully installed until May which means the sand martins had already found accommodation for this year's season



This project has created a lot of interest from other local organizations, who are looking at installing their own sand martin banks. We have our fingers crossed that the wall will attract sand martins in 2018.

The other large project in 2017 was the installation of the New Lount Colliery Heritage Trail with Newbold Heritage Group. The volunteer group has spent time clearing the old colliery features that are included in the trail, and has also carried out the on-site installation of the seven interpretation boards.



The Colliery Heritage Trail was opened in May with large numbers attending, together with most of the local dignitaries. This trail has created additional interest in the site and we anticipate an increase in the number of visitors.



Throughout the year the group has been carrying out a great deal of site maintenance work. This has included repairing broken fences; maintaining the two picnic areas and clearing pathways of fallen trees and other obstructions. We are part way through covering the top boardwalk with wire mesh to improve the situation of slippery boards when it is wet. We will be looking at the large boardwalk to improve the situation there as well.

We have also worked with two local organisations throughout the year, namely staff from Loughborough University early on in the year, and staff from Ashfield Healthcare, Ashby in November. This is part of encouraging local businesses to get involved with the group as part of their Community Volunteering Schemes.

The feedback which we are receiving from visitors to the site is all very positive – “you are doing a wonderful job”, “the whole site is much improved”, etc. This feedback makes doing the work that much more rewarding.

COLEORTON WOOD

The Group has been working to the work schedule as required by the management plan, which has included the coppicing and clearing of the shrub areas that surround each of the planted areas of woodland. We have completed both of the areas required over the two calendar years. During the year the group purchased a Stihl Clearing Saw, which attaches to the Stihl strimmer, and has significantly speeded up the clearing of some of the smaller shrubs in these areas.



We have had to spend a lot of time throughout the year clearing and making safe fallen trees and trees that have become “hung-up”. Storm “Doris” subsequently created a large number of fallen trees, mainly in the Post Office Field, and there were other “casualties” throughout the year. This work requires skills and a very cautious approach and the group has now become very skilled in making these trees safe. We have also spent time strimming the path edges, which we do on a rotational programme; leaving some areas to develop seeds before they are strimmed. We have also had to survey the site on a number of times to clear the paths of vegetation which was obstructing access around the site.

The pond has required quite a lot of attention over the year with a number of changes to the inflow & outflow in an effort to retain a reasonable level in the pond over the summer period; unfortunately we did not achieve this. We will be looking at how this situation can be improved. We have however been successful in maintaining a clear area in front of the pond.



We have been maintaining the picnic area and in particular the lower level which had additional strimming to control the non-grass plants. We also transferred wood chippings from New Lount Reserve to complete the areas underneath the picnic tables and the adjacent bench seat.

For the first time we had to remove an infestation of Ragwort on the Coleorton Wood site. We will need to keep a careful eye on the area affected.

The car park has also been maintained through the year and one work session focused on strimming and clearing the car park edges, significantly improving the area.



With the exception of the work required for hedge management we have completed the management plan which ended in 2017. We will be asking the Parish Council for a new management plan for the period 2018 – 2023.

WORKSHOP

The small workshop group has been particularly busy throughout the year with the first task to complete the manufacture of the sand martin wall. This interesting project has created interest around the local area with other groups looking to produce their own sand martin walls.



The group spent time finishing off wooden mushrooms that had been sold at the previous year's plant sale. These proved to be an excellent way of generating funds, but they also proved difficult to fit in with all the other work.



LCC asked the group to manufacture some bench seats and rest benches for the proposed development of Snibston Country Park. The group has now manufactured six rest benches utilising large Larch logs obtained from Coleorton Wood and has also completed the six bench seats requested.

Christmas saw the manufacture of reindeer, again utilising wood from New Lount Reserve. These were particularly successful and generated a level of demand that could not be achieved. We will look at producing these for Christmas 2018.



The group has also recently purchased a milling attachment for the group's Stihl chainsaws, which will allow us to produce posts and planks of wood from timber that has been cut across the two sites. This has been purchased with the assistance of both The National Forest and Coleorton Parish Council.

Coleorton Parish Council has asked the group to manufacture a memorial bench seat for Coleorton War Memorial and this will be a major project for 2018.



SOCIAL & FUNDRAISING.

The major fundraising event for the year was the two plant sales held at both sites during the month of May. Despite the fact that we were not favoured with good weather for both these sales they were both very successful with over £900 being raised and both being well supported by local residents.



Plants were grown by members of the group and also donated from local businesses. As well as selling plants on the day some were also successfully sold outside member's houses, thus contributing additional income.

In November the group had a joint social evening with Newbold Heritage group at a skittles evening, which was held at The Odd House, Snarestone and very well attended by both groups.

The group also had its annual Christmas dinner at Snibston canteen, our thanks to James and Vera for ensuring we were all well fed. Eating has been a strong feature throughout the year with the supply of food and drinks for the Saturday work sessions; this also give the volunteers an opportunity to socialise.



This is just a taste of the activities of the group throughout the year; a year which has been both busy and very successful. The two sites continue to receive very positive feedback on the changes that have, and are being made, which does give motivation to the volunteers. I am sure 2018 will be just as busy!

John Macdonald.