

Fen Report to the Parish AGM on May 7th 2010

We have, in many ways, had an eventful year down on the fen. Perhaps the most noticeable occurrence was our unplanned, high speed reed clearance project. I returned from holiday to be greeted by a garbled message from our Parish Chairman saying that they had burned the fen – about twenty acres of it! Luckily no-one was hurt, and no noticeable damage has been done to anything but the reed, although I think Frank and Allan were shaken, not stirred.

We have had discussions with our experts at Natural England and Norfolk Wildlife Trust about the fire. For what appeared to us on that Sunday morning as a possible disaster, the feedback from these people, and other experts, is that this will not have harmed the fen, and will, in fact, improve the reed beds. A number of people have visited the site and are confident that we have caused no permanent damage. Indeed, the old method of reed clearance was burning. They have, however, suggested that we don't make a habit of this. Middle Fen is now greening up, and will, I think, look a picture in two or three months time. Perhaps we should rename it Phoenix Fen.

And now to the slightly less noticeable achievements. A large amount of scrub clearance has been carried out during the year by our specialist contractor, Lee Roberts, and an area of reed was cut last autumn on Middle Fen. With the efforts of local folk, we were able to clear and dispose of about 60% of it. The remaining 40% of the reed has been cleared by the Community Payback Scheme – that is, people who have been given community service by the courts. This is the first time that we have tried working with this organisation, and are hoping to continue this in the future, as they always have people 'doing their time' and we have suitable work for them. Both parties felt this had been a successful venture, and the cost to Boughton is minimal – less than £30 per week for the hire of a toilet. Norfolk Wildlife Trust has helped with some further scrub clearance, to the value of £500 on Lower Fen, which is a County Wildlife Site, and not part of the SSSI. We thank them for their help. They would like to see Lower Fen grazed, as well as the proposed area on Highland Fen, and will possibly assist us with this item. In fact, they have given us a great deal of help with the technicalities of our fencing application, which is now being revised to take in both Highland and Lower Fen grazing areas. We have continued with working parties on Highland Fen to clear up debris and finish a walk through a wooded area.

As well as the village regulars, we were assisted by the Wereham Wildlife Woodland Group, who are hoping to have their own woodland, but have no land at present but have lots of pent-up energy that they have used to help us. Financially, we have used money available to us to carry out work on the fen, but have retained enough to launch into next year's work. It has been nice to see people sitting on the seat near Otter Bridge, at the bottom of the Oxborough Hill, enjoying the surroundings. In fact if it keeps getting so much use, we may have to replace it due to wear and tear. Whilst on the subject of seats, a new seat has been placed along the river bank on Lower Fen, under the trees, just around the bend – well worth spending a few minutes there in such a tranquil spot. The effort to improve the fen has been constantly ongoing this year, and I believe that we are really beginning to see a difference. I am not going to attempt to thank people individually for their help, as so many people have been involved, in many different ways.

They have been people from Boughton, Wereham, agencies such as Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England, and last but not least, the other members of the Boughton Fen committee. Without all this willing assistance we would get nowhere, and I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has participated in some way.

Mark Pogmore 07.05.2010