

Friends of the River Frome



Newsletter April 2014

www.fromeriverfriends.org.uk

Greetings to all!

I make no apologies for including in this newsletter the (rather lengthy...) summary of our activities over the past year that I gave at our recent AGM. It's not until you pause in the midst of the on-going, day-to-day rush and look back over time that you come to appreciate what has actually been achieved. And so it was with some surprise and great pleasure to see just what an amazing amount has been achieved by this group's volunteers. Please read the summary below and bask in the warm glow of achievement that you have made possible. Thank you all for your support with money, time or just good wishes in ensuring that our River Frome continues to be a wonderful jewel in the town's crown.

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Come to the Mayor's Garden Party!

We are one of the mayor's charities this year so bring your friends and family, have a great time meeting friends old and new, enjoying refreshments, fun stalls and all the while raising money for River Friends, FROGS, and Open Storytellers.

Saturday 3rd May 2-5pm

33 Vicarage Street, Frome, next to Dore & Rees auction house.
Entrance to the garden is on Blindhouse Lane which runs from the bottom of Vicarage Street to the back of St John's School.



Litter picks

On 1 March several young dads and their small children did a litter sweep of our Frome River and Paths Walk available in the library. Ten somewhat older persons worked along the river from the Cheese and Grain. Between us we made a huge pile of black bags to be taken away. Another pick is planned to smarten up the river banks for our visitors before the Festival Food Feast – **4-5pm on 5th July at the Cheese and Grain.**

Balsam Bashes

An adventure challenge is our need to attack Himalayan balsam while it is flowering. This is best done in the second half of July and in August. It offers a summer of healthy exercise! We will launch with a Festival event on **10th July** when we will need as many experienced bashers as possible to guide new helpers.

Membership renewal

Renewal reminders should have recently thudded on to your email or actual door mat. Please do renew or join and ensure we can cover our basic costs, particularly the liability insurance which rises exponentially every year. £10 a year is a very modest amount for that warm glow of satisfaction...☺. Many thanks.

Festival Town Walks

Dorothy-Anne will be leading some Mendip Health Walks along the river. Meet outside the library at 10.15am on 4 or 9 July for an interesting and friendly one hour. A leaflet about these and many other walks can be picked up in the Library.

River Meandering on FromeFM

<http://frome.fm/programmes/talk/meandering/> will give you a chance to hear the environmental expert, Sue Everett walking upstream along the river with Dorothy-Anne. It will go out live on FromeFM 96.6 at 4pm on 12th April.

F.R.O.G.S. Wildlife Walks

Between April and October, our excellent local group Frome Recreation and Open Grounds Supporters (one we have strong shared links with) are organising a number of guided wildlife walks lead by local enthusiasts/naturalists. For more information visit www.fromefrogs.org.uk.

Annual General Meeting Summary of 2013 – Chairs report

It's been another very productive year for Friends of the River Frome (FoRF). We continue to have a high profile in the town as a group that gets things done.

We have continued to work with Frome Town Council (FTC) in furthering the implementation of projects outlined in the report "Frome River Strategy". This report was developed by FoRF on behalf of FTC and it was adopted by the council as their official strategy for the river to provide a focus, now and for the future, for the enhancement of the river corridor through town.

One of the projects suggested in the report was for creating a new river path along the south bank of the river from the town centre to Welshmill weir. The authors of the original report, Bob Sargent and Mike Bull, members of FoRF, have been developing detailed plans for FTC for this new path which will connect up with the existing path on the north side to create a pleasant circular walk along the river from the town centre. Hopefully building work will start this year.

Another idea outlined in our report was to create a broader public space by removing boundary fences between Rodden Meadow and the Millennium Green, and improving access to the river along the meadow. This work has now been started. FTC conducted a public consultation exercise about the meadow which has confirmed the desire to see improvements to paths and picnic spots.

In recognition of the group's efforts, our application to FTC for £300 to purchase more litter-pickers, waders, life jackets and litter bag supports was successful. We were also chosen by the town Mayor, Dickon Moore, as one of his chosen local charities and we shall benefit from the money he raises during his term of office.

With her passion for improving the river environment, Dorothy Anne Bryant led a project focussed on reducing the spread and incidence of Himalayan Balsam through the town and beyond. This was a major piece of organisation and much Himalayan Balsam was bashed over many stretches of the river on many occasions! Many volunteers came to help pull Himalayan Balsam during the year and this very pleasant (social) activity was enjoyed by all. She organises our 'famous' litter picks which continue to make a significant difference to look of the river banks. We also joined with other voluntary groups for Frome Town Council's town-wide litter initiatives.

We have made good connections with the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust, an organisation which aims, like ourselves, to improve the river environment and water quality across the Avon catchment area. They are very supportive of our pro-active stance and are keen to offer their expertise and experience to us for the River Frome. We will be discussing the need for improvements with a number of key organisations including the Environment Agency, Wessex Water and farming groups with the hope of agreeing and implementing work to improve these aims.

We continue to have good relations with other local environmental groups. During the year we attended events organised by F.R.O.G.S. in support of their nature and play area days. We were also supportive of the Rodden Meadow Stream group in their attempt to safeguard the green space along the stream. Although unsuccessful the protest raised the issue of other potentially vulnerable green spaces and the energy from that group formed into a new organisation "Save our Spaces" (SOS) who are working to identify and protect these areas. As a formally incorporated charity we were happy to front an application to FTC on behalf of this group for money to fund a short-term contract for someone to identify these spaces and develop strategies to protect them for future public use. The funding application was successful, an appointment made, and we continue to support this work through SOS.

A number of planning applications impacting on the river were made during the year and we are fortunate to have committee members who have professional experience of planning matters who have made every attempt to understand the implications and make formal comments to the planning authorities. The application for development at Saxonvale made little attempt to make best use of the river frontage for public space and we submitted detailed reasons for the application to be refused. The application for a new development of 450 houses at Southfield Farm (just south of Asda supermarket) was made and we commented on the need for adequate retention of river paths and provision for access across the river to connect with existing footpaths to Adderwell and the town centre. The application has been approved and we have assisted FTC in their discussions with the Southfield developers to further these aims through the use of Section 106 money which may be available for public amenity.

We purchased new display boards and created a new publicity leaflet to 'freshen-up' and support our continued promotion of the group to a wider audience. Through our activities during the year we were able to get a number of favourable articles in the local town and district-wide media publications.

Members of the committee attended a day seminar in Bristol organised by the Rivers Trust, an umbrella organisation for groups focused on improving the quality and habitat of our national rivers. Speakers included the EU commissioner for rivers who outlined the strategy and targets that member nations are expected to work towards, the UK government minister for water and many other organisations such as Wessex Water and Somerset Wildlife Trust. As we have seen in the devastation caused by flooding on the Somerset Levels and other areas in England it is imperative that we seek methods for flood prevention for the long term. The development and implementation of environmentally sound projects to slow and hold back water in rivers upstream through the use of natural river flood plains and barriers, alongside the usual built urban schemes, are vital for the future safety of people and protection of the environment.

First Aid training was organised for us by Clive Crews and four of our members now have good skills which has improved our ability to respond to, and minimise potential health hazards encountered by our volunteers.

The committee has worked to simplify our membership process and from this year we will send our membership renewal reminder just once to cover a year 1st April to 31st March. This makes the work much less onerous and more efficient for the committee so we hope to improve the number of paid-up members. We trust that existing members will accept any slightly shorter length of their membership that this change may cause for this first year only.

The group is incredibly fortunate to have committee members who bring a range of personal and professional skills to further the aims of Friends of the River Frome. Their enthusiasm and efforts ensure that the group continues to make a real difference to the river and its environment. As Chair of the group I feel privileged to be part of such a fantastic team of volunteers and with the continued support of all our members we are confident the group will successfully continue to further its stated aim of "Ensuring the river corridor is respected, protected, enhanced and enjoyed by all".

