

AUTUMN 2016  
**NEWSLETTER**  
 No. 5

**FRIENDS OF  
 BARNWELL  
 COUNTRY PARK**



Leaves are turning – autumn is definitely waking up.

In this issue, we are looking forwards even though we look back fondly at this Summer's Music in the Park. You can get a feel for how the event worked by going on to our web site. Next year will be even more fun with five brass bands, culminating again in a massed band performance of all five bands as well as a piece of music specially composed for the event – by a budding local composer.

We have been very industrious since the Summer Issue and we'll reflect on this in this one.

Matt is busy getting the Park ship-shape for the onset of winter. The North Lake Path is now fully funded and work will start on it around the end of this month.

Another really positive development for the Park has occurred since our last issue. We are delighted to welcome a new colleague of Matt's, Georgina Flower and you'll find an interview with her below. It makes for interesting reading.

## Committee Members

Mary James – Chair  
 Mark Felton – Secretary  
 Edward James – Treasurer  
 Simon Mutsaars – Fundraising Officer  
 Becca Lowndes – Design Officer  
 Nick Bould – Barnwell Parish Council Rep  
 Neville Oakes – Oundle Town Council Rep  
 Mollie Bickerstaff – Publicity Officer and Key Project Co-ordinator  
 Justin Jeffrey – Webmaster  
 Angela Holmes, Claire Faulkner – Committee Members

### WELCOME

We would like to welcome our new Friends to this growing organisation. We are now nearly up to 300 members. This is important as greater numbers give us more 'clout' when we apply for funding or want to get ourselves heard.

### BREXIT

It's happened. What's more, at the time of writing what the pundits were busy saying wouldn't happen has. But guess what? Our wonderful Park, its nature and restorative beauty continue to mend our spirits one way or t'other [ed. I think that this has the feeling of a permanent theme....].

### UPDATES

We need to report to you on our work with:

- North Lake Path,
- parking issues (see Editorial),
- the land acquisition – what's next
- preparation of plans for the Park – the Friends' viewpoint
- work on the Visitor Centre and Signage

In keeping with our previous issues, we will finish this section by repeating a most important part of your role as a Friend:

**Please Tell Us What You'd Like to See Happen with the Park.**

### Frequency and Length of FoBCP Newsletters:

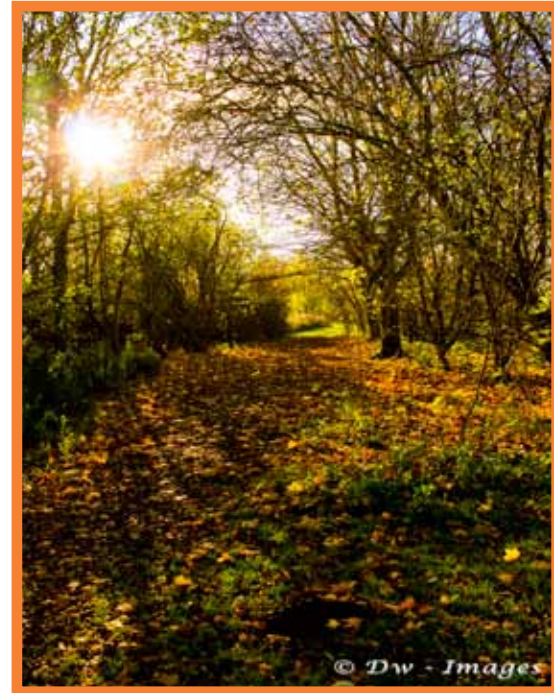
It is intended to have 4 main publications in line with the Park's seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. There will be no fixed length for each Newsletter.

We may occasionally issue Newsletter Bulletins if there is an important issue to cover.

### Contributions:

Will Always Be Welcome: If you feel like contributing to this Newsletter, please send a note to our Secretary via: [secretary@barnwellcountryparkfriends.org.uk](mailto:secretary@barnwellcountryparkfriends.org.uk) or talk to the Rangers. Tel.: 01832 273435

**Photography:** with thanks to David Wall for the photos in this Quarter's newsletter



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The FoBCP Committee is made up of those of us who are dedicated to ensuring BCP's long-term future as well as increasing the opportunities it offers. We come up with lots of ideas, many of which will be shared with you in these Newsletters. However, no matter how enthusiastic we are, we cannot think of everything. There will be lots of ideas out there. Please let us know what you think.

Please talk to your friends. Chat to those who share the Park with you. By working together, we will make this Park a beacon for others to follow. Pride in our Park will lead to our aims succeeding!

# WHAT'S UP AT BCP?

## "IMPROVING ACCESS FOR ALL"

North Lake Path project is now funded and work will commence following the end of the half-term school holidays. This has been a most gratifying experience. We've had strong support from individual donors as well as local businesses. As we have mentioned before, the plan is to have a board built which will list all the donors. The board will be designed to last for ten years or so. It will be the first recognition of the collective contribution of our community to the Park so it should be celebrated. We will organise a grand opening and let you all know when it is. We now have confirmation that the First for Wellbeing team intend to use this project to make general improvements to the Park's path network which will entail the scraping back of the verges when grass has grown over the paths, making all paths a minimum of 1.2m wide. This should be all sorted before the New Year and will be a huge improvement as the wet weather sets in.



## Events

We are aiming for three main events for the coming year:

Cider and Sausages in June

Music in the Park in July

Made in Northamptonshire in September

We would like also to be welcoming some local performing artists but until arrangements have been firmed up we can't say more.

## Prize Draw

We will continue to run an annual Friends' Prize Draw with two winners. We are very grateful to Chris Haines and Matt Harrel for making this draw possible, and to First for Wellbeing for sponsoring the event. This is a gift from NCC Parks to us and it certainly helps to drive up members.

## Wednesday Volunteer Group (WVG)

The WVG continues to do make a critical difference to Matt's (and now) Georgie's work in the Park. We're coming into the quieter season for the WVG team but, for those of you who love to be active outdoors caring for the Park, are always welcome to join in; please contact Matt or Georgie at the Park for details as to how to join. The more the merrier.

## Land Acquisition Project "The Island"

This is disappointing news. We all put a great deal of effort into showing how important we viewed the acquisition of additional land to be. Our presentation to HRH Duke of Gloucester's team was comprehensive with a few inevitable exceptions. We received a letter back from the Trustees who outlined that they had investigated the options of making the land available to the Park but it transpires that they could not find a solution. Put simply, their problem was that they are running an economic farming operation which is bounded by other land owning interests. Reduction in the size of operation by 40 acres would put into question the economic feasibility of the farming operation around Barnwell and they could not find any land available on adjoining estates which could be purchased. Consequently, if we had raised the money to purchase the land, the Gloucester Estates would have an

expensive capital gain with no option to reinvest in local farming land. The letter from the Trustees forms part of the Chairman's report to the AGM and can be found on the Friends' web site.

### WHAT NEXT THEN?

So, this does leave us with a question "?" mark. If the land acquisition project had been given the approval of Gloucester Estates Trustees, the first step would have been to produce a feasibility study covering the enlarged Park. Such a study would have naturally investigated every aspect of the Park in terms of the purpose it services the surrounding community. As a backstop, the Committee had already agreed that it should be part of our remit to create a plan for the future: either as an enlarged park or as we exist today.

Following our most recent AGM, it was agreed that we would now set up a committee which will look at the future

of the Park from the Friends' perspective. Inevitably, whatever we do in this respect will include the Park's Management but we feel that from the outset, we should create our own plan which can be used as an expression of a set of priorities from the perspective of the users of the Park rather than the Management.

We will be sending out a Survey to the Friends which will be the starting point for a Strategic Plan we shall prepare over the coming months. The purpose of the Plan is to establish a set of priorities for the Friends in terms of what we focus our energies on. As the Friends are the primary interest group of users of the Park, your views will be of key importance as we determine how we should involve ourselves in the years to come.

## EDITORIAL

### Comings and Goings:

We have the arrival of Georgina Flower as our new Ranger who has replaced Nicola. This is wonderful news and you can read an interview with her below.

Very sadly, a long standing stalwart of the Friends passed away during this period. Peter Flatley ran the website for years and was undoubtedly one of our most prolific photographers. He will be hugely missed by us. We are currently in discussions with Matt and Peter's family as to how we can remember him and preserve his attachment to the Park.

Philippa Croucher has resigned from the Committee. We are very sorry to see her go. Her experience both as Senior Ranger (before Matt) and breadth of knowledge of the Park system was a significant asset. Unfortunately, the demands of her job at Natural England are such that she cannot spare more time. We wish her luck.

Tim Hunt has decided that he cannot continue to be a member of the Committee. We very much appreciate his commitment to the Friends and hope he'll still pen us the occasional report on how the Park's lakes are fishing.

### New ideas and thoughts

Please let us know if you can think of anything you would like to see either improved included for debate or initiatives and ideas.

### Membership Numbers

Our membership is moving towards 300, which is wonderful. We would like to aim for an additional 100 members over the course of this year with the ultimate aim of reaching 500 by the end of 2018. Quite ambitious but achievable.

There is no specific "issue" that this editor has to air as this Newsletter is prepared. For those conscientious souls who are good enough to read our Newsletter, this must be a relief.

Referring back to the last editorial (Issue No. 4), we continue to debate the division of the car park into those who wish to use the car park for a very short period, e.g., a short 30 min. run or a quick get together with friends, and those who wish to make an afternoon or even day of it at the Park. We are in dialogue with Matt about this. It will take time but it would be fair to say that we make gradual progress and Matt has a sympathetic ear.

The disappointing news about our being unable to have a crack at purchasing the land from Gloucester Estates shouldn't be viewed as a setback. It is a new and exciting challenge for us all.

The Park has served us for the last 40 or so years and has developed with time and the care of Northants CC Parks Dept. They have done a great job fostering small developments as the Park has gradually matured into a public space which attracts people from a broad catchment area. We have mentioned that people regularly travel from as far away as Peterborough and Kettering to visit our Park. Having spoken to some of the visitors on the 20 Million Steps event, it is apparent that Barnwell is a very special park that engenders real affection.

Whatever we propose in our plan must not go so far as to diminish the Park's appeal. Equally, we have already raised the issue of how the Park is funded, and the risks associated with a change in private vehicle usage.

As Friends, we will now work together to create a Plan for the future of the Park from our perspective. Although there may be divergence of viewpoint between what the Park's Management consider a set of priorities and those we come up with, it is more likely that there will be broad agreement. We may easily have a different bias as to what we perceive as being priorities.

During the AGM meeting, it was apparent that there was caution about how and by what means we continue to increase the number of attractions the Park has to offer.

The prime area of debate was concern about how we users impose ourselves on what is essentially a natural environment. It is important to note that the Park sits in farmland and, although farming practices are becoming much more responsible, the Park is a haven of biological stability where only rarely are any forms of herbicides used and no insecticides. Its rural setting makes it an essential natural haven which is capable of restoring biodiversity in the event of ill-judged farming techniques.

We have to ask ourselves to what extent we modify or impose greater human development on a relatively small fixed acreage.

What we do hope to foster going forwards is a much greater level of co-operation between ourselves and other voluntary organisations. Nearly all other voluntary organisations in our catchment can gain from an association with the Park. We hope to host a series of "voluntary organisation" gatherings at the Park next year. In the same vein, we would like to initiate gatherings of the Friends at the Park to meet and get to know each other. The method we are considering is to have a BBQ specifically for the Friends when the weather merits such activities in 2017. Equally, if any of us like the idea of mulled wine and mince pies at the Visitor Centre, then this could also be considered?

The disappointment of not being able to attempt to raise funds to acquire the additional land from Gloucester Estates for the Park is palpable but the prospects for the future are exciting. We have what is still a relatively young park with lots of potential to strengthen our sense of Community through recreational leisure and, indeed, educational awareness of our natural environment.

Do you have any views on this or any other topic relating to the Park? Do you consider the parking fees charged are fair? Do you think we should consider some broader system which encompasses visitors by foot from Oundle? Your thoughts and views will be valued and appreciated.

If you have a view that you would like to share with the editor or indeed with the Friends, please write to:

secretary@barnwellcountryparkfriends.org.uk



## REPORT on ACTIVITIES in the LAST QUARTER

We promised in our last Newsletter that we would feature an interview with the ultimate boss of our group of five parks, Chris Haines. However, the arrival of Georgie as Ranger pushed Chris into second place. Next issue we promise the interview with the person who makes the final decisions. There'll continue to be plenty to discuss with him at that time.

### Music in the Park

We had a good gathering in July with four brass bands performing individually and as a Massed Brass band. We had enthusiastic comments on the day and we are pleased that all four bands plus another will perform on July 16th next year (a Sunday again).

See the highlights from this year here <http://www.douglasbutler.org/ss/barnwell/index.html> (with thanks to Douglas Butler)

### AGM

We held our AGM on Sept. 21st at the Visitor Centre. The full Minutes and report from the Chair can be found on the website. We were very fortunate to have members from the Rotary Club and from Oundle Museum present.

Subject to final agreements between the Rotary Club and Matt, the Rotary are contributing their time, energy and money to planting 105 trees. The Rotary are known for their outstanding financial and voluntary work. They also wished to offer to plant 5000 crocus bulbs! Unfortunately, they are not native plants so could not be included in any planting scheme at the Park. The croci planting exercise is in aid of Polio Eradication which is part of the Club's International programme. We are very grateful to Jo Elwood, Gary Paul and their team for thinking of us and the Park. We hope they and Oundle Museum will become permanent features on our



Committee. We have mutually agreed with Keith Smith and Barbara Ding from the Museum that we will aim to work together in the future. The plan is to have an outreach exhibit featuring Oundle Museum exhibits at the Visitor Centre which will be designed into the new look Visitor Centre.

We discussed the disappointing news that The Island will not be made available for sale. It was agreed that we will create a "Friends" Plan for the Park which will take into consideration individual thoughts as well as those of local parish and town councils and voluntary organisations which either directly or indirectly benefit or impact upon our Park.

### Visitor Centre & New Toys

Very fortunately for the Park, a small part of the money that First for Wellbeing is using for funding the clean-up of the path network is going to be used to refurbish the Visitor Centre. There will be a comfy reading area and new displays; more details in due course.

Chris Haines' team have been lucky

enough to obtain a share of a Section 106 cash contribution to the Parks. Barnwell's benefit has been the paths but, joy of joys, Matt is going to get a tractor. We suspect there'll be no getting him off it. Any excuse to roll it out. Let's hope it's red. Mind you, elvish green would be fun as well.



### First for Wellbeing

The First for Wellbeing transition is well underway. Very sensibly, the approach of the overall Management to this transition is to take things slowly to start with and to bed down the organisation before taking any major steps forward in terms of Park policy and management. This suits us given the initiative we have to prepare the Friends' plan of how we see our Park.

## Wildlife & Nature Notes from the Rangers

We have had a busy summer with machinery breaking down and the summer trails. I'd like to give a big thank you to all the volunteers that have helped over the summer with park maintenance, daily duties and helping with events.

We have the Rex at the park at the moment having borrowed it from the Friends of Sywell CP to do our annual hay raking. We have cut back the area next to the nature classroom with the aim hopefully to have a colourful Wildflower Meadow there next spring/summer with a mown maze. We will start on West Meadow over the next few Wednesdays.

We have also been cutting down the reeds at Lowlands with help from Oundle School and the Wednesday Volunteer Group. We have been eco-plugging the self-set trees to prevent them coming back and damaging any machinery we use next time to cut it down.

The Nature Tots have created a new Mini-beast Hibernaculum over at the Silver Birch Avenue behind Mill Lake. We will be adding more bits and pieces to attract other mini beasts like bee homes, small sheets of tin to help snakes warm up.

The ethos behind First for Wellbeing is indisputably apposite. It is appropriate for countryside parks in general. It is a Community Interest Company (CIC) – a social enterprise created to enhance the life values of our local community.

For funding, administrative and policy purposes, it is a joint venture between three groups: Northamptonshire County Council, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Northampton. This is indisputably a clever initiative which draws together the health benefits

We will be taking delivery of 200m of stock fencing to finish off the boundary around the Lowlands Refuge. This will be erected with help from Park Volunteers and Moulton College students

Kingfisher sightings around the Park have risen after the summer holidays; good places are the Backwater, little lake behind the Kingfisher Café and round by West Meadow.

A number of Otter sightings have been seen on the Lakes.

We have two Red Kites looking for suitable locations to have a nest. We have

seen them a few times with twigs in their beaks. We will continue to keep everyone updated on this positive development.

Other sightings:

Nuthatch,

Robin,

Great Tit,

Goldfinch,

Little Egret,

Grass Snakes,

Green Woodpecker,

Daubenton's Bats



associated with recreational exercise with educational understanding, and facilities for all ages with the essential community assets of local countryside parks. Given the nature of the organisation and the established interests of all three organisations standing behind the CIC, it is hardly surprising that a practical “bedding in” period has been agreed upon. We enthusiastically wish First for Wellbeing success, and hope that many long-term benefits will percolate out of the good intentions of those who initiated this melding of the State at a local level.

Having discussed the background to First for Wellbeing, Georgie's interview couldn't be more appropriate if you read this section and see how her experience to date has developed.

Read on!



## Around the Park with our new Ranger: Georgina Flower

Some of you will know that Matt has been struggling over the last few months essentially working the Park on his own. Chris Haines (the boss) has stepped into help but that's probably a mixed blessing (sorry, Chris, but a dig at the boss is essential). Chris and Matt interviewed a really good selection of people for the job of Ranger and Georgie came up on top.

Georgie is still very much getting to grips with the Park, the personnel in First for Wellbeing and the other Parks in our group. Due to the fact that the Park was so short staffed, she's hit the ground running and is having to take stock of the new job whilst undertaking a full job load as a park ranger. She says that she hasn't really had a chance to go to see the other four Parks in the group but hopes to find time to do that over the winter months. She feels it is important to get to know her colleagues well but also to have an understanding of what the other Parks offer. This makes sense.

Georgie graduated from Harper Adams with a degree in Countryside and Environmental Management. She had a year's placement work at Coombe Country Park which is outside Coventry. It is a very different park to Barnwell with

500 acres of park land with a long-term established parkland habitat. It also has a mock medieval banqueting hall which rather dwarfs our Kingfisher Café. She worked in all areas of park management whilst at Coombe. She found herself in the interesting situation of straddling the recreation/leisure with educational activities as a separate function. She had what she feels was a relatively unique insight into the interaction between the two areas of park management finding that the one function abutted the other rather than firmly meshing together with a single purpose.

What she's looking forward to at our much smaller Park is getting stuck into every aspect of the Park. By contrast, Coombe was a large operation with direct Council funding on a scale that Barnwell would never enjoy. At Barnwell, she recognises that she will have to be prepared to undertake any and every job that needs to be done in order to deliver a mix of facilities and activities for the users of the Park. She says she likes this. She gets bored by constantly working at only one thing. Barnwell will give her a taste and skill in all aspects of Country Park management. She is relishing the opportunities. Georgie was kind enough



to say that she thought that the Friends made a positive contribution to the wellbeing of the Park and that she hoped she could help to encourage and foster greater engagement between the Friends and Management team. She has our full support!

Georgie's immediate job as a Ranger is to help to maintain the upkeep of the Park. However, she is also looking forward to a relatively immediate project which is to give the Visitor Centre a facelift. We discussed her interest in developing engagement with the local community in terms of how the Visitor Centre could be used. This is a running theme with the Friends and we are very heartened to know that both Matt and Georgie will be looking to work in a co-ordinated manner with the Parks' education team, Amber and Helen.

She is very pleased that we are now close to the start of the North Lake Path project. She sees the introduction of a new hard all-weather surface round this side of the Park as an opportunity to

Georgie showing Matt the benefits of a strimmer over a trad. scythe



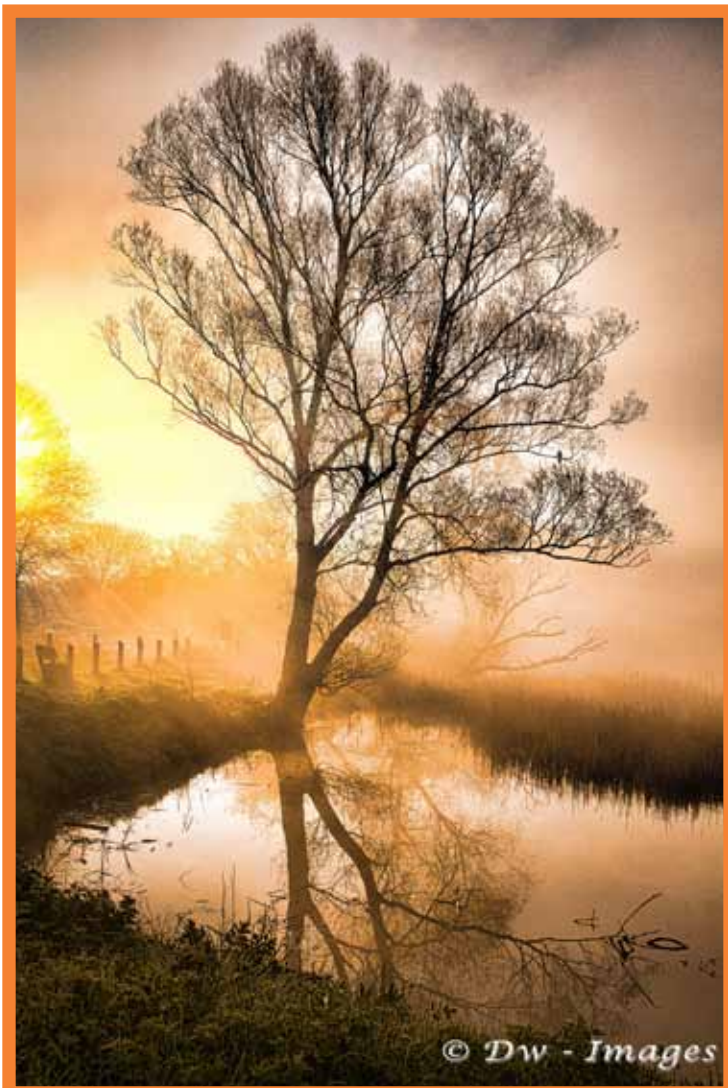
extend the adventure trails around the Park for the holidays.

Another project we discussed, which will be of general as well as educational interest, is being organised by the River Nene Regional Park. RNRP have secured funding for ecological improvement measures within the Nene catchment. They have been surveying various stretches of the river to assess their potential for improvement. Georgie took the consultant and project officer to survey our bit of the river. She said they seemed pretty confident that the back water surrounding the park and, or, the stretch of river on the

other side of the island, have good potential for improvement due to the ecological benefit and public exposure [for anyone interested, please follow this link:

<http://www.riverneneregionalpark.org/#>].

In conclusion, Georgie's very keen to engage with users of the Park and encourage new ideas which can be developed over the coming years in order to enhance what the Park has to offer. She is very conscious of striking the right balance between our Park as a natural environment and a place for recreational and leisure activities.



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## WHAT'S COMING UP? Future Events

Further plug: **MUSIC IN THE PARK** on Sunday, July 16th 2017. Please come and support this fun event. There will be music performed by five local brass bands, BBQ, Digfield Ales and harnessed bungee jumping.

### Christmas Market:

Come and support us at the Oundle Christmas Market on Saturday 3rd Dec from midday.

### Other Park Based

#### Events:

Rather than listing these here, we now have a Publicity Officer (welcome Mollie) who will be regularly co-ordinating activities between the Rangers and events we organise. Please make use of the facility. Also, Matt and Georgie run a Facebook account which lists what's happening at the Park.

### Any Event to Suit the Park?

We hope that some of you might have an idea for attracting people to the Park. We'd love to hear from you with other initiatives.

### CONTRIBUTING ARTICLES:

We do not have an article this quarter from an outside contributor but we are preparing for what should be some thought-provoking articles in our upcoming issues.



# BARNWELL COUNTRY PARK PHOTO COMPETITION



Martin Stansfield



Portia Graves



Sandy Miles

We were overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of pictures which were entered into our first Photography Competition. Subjects ranged from famous view of the Park landscapes, to families enjoying the outdoors. There were exceptional wildlife portraits and snaps which made us smile. The intention was to produce three postcards from the winning entries, but it was too hard to choose so we have four winners!

The judges felt these entries most successful captured the unique feel of Barnwell Country Park, were well composed and will hopefully be popular sellers! Look out for the postcards available on our Christmas Market stall (Saturday 3rd December), at the Park and possibly in a stationery shop near you...



Sarah Morris