

REIGATE HEATH NEWS

Friends of Reigate Heath Newsletter Winter 2007 Issue 4

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Happy New Year! Since our last newsletter, much has been going on behind the scenes on the Heath.

The new Management Plan 2006-2010 has now come into force and the Reigate Heath Management Steering Group, led by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, have to monitor its progress and overall implementation. For a small group of people, predominately volunteers, this represents a challenge of time and resources. What is becoming evident to the Friends is how nature conservation within the Borough is seriously under-resourced and thus under-valued particularly with regard to funds allocated to Reigate Heath. For a 'flagship' Local Nature Reserve visited by a vast variety of users, this is a sad state of affairs.

This means that for any progress to be made towards maintaining and enhancing the site as a SSSI for its heathland and wetland areas, it is almost totally reliant on conservation work carried out by the Reigate Area Conservation Volunteers, and Reigate Heath Golf Club. The RACV numbers have been dwindling on the Heath due to lack of local support and problems of dog fouling. This is a serious issue of which all Friends must be aware. If you think you can help, please do so. If the Friends can build sufficient funds, it will also be an effective force in boosting conservation action plans within the Management plan.

Susan Medcalf, Secretary

Change on the Heath

The Friends are pleased to announce that Reigate Heath will host a **Surrey Heathland Project** exhibition showing how Surrey's heathland landscape has changed, along with the lives of the people who have lived and worked on it. It will take place in the cricket pavilion from 25 June – 8 July 2007. We will need to boost this with local material so please do check out your own archives for any Heath-related photos, items or stories.

If you think you can help in any way prior to or during the exhibition, please let us know. We will need it!

Artists at the ready! To coincide with the Surrey Heathland Project exhibition, the Friends are planning to hold a competition for paintings inspired by heathland. Spread the word! More details in the next newsletter or contact us.

New Year Resolution? The REIGATE AREA CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS urgently need more local help on Reigate Heath. Please watch the Flanchford Road noticeboard for details of task days. Everyone is welcome aged 7 & up! All kinds of jobs to fit all levels of skills and fitness. Full training & safety briefing provided. No excuses!

Water, water.....

By Bert Smith, Campaign Against Mineral Extraction & Landfill

Last year during the hosepipe ban, Reigate Heath Golf Club had to ship in daily c.5500 gallons of water purchased from Hanson's Park Pit in order to maintain its greens. In October, I was invited by the golf club to attend discussions with the Environment Agency (EA) regarding the golf club sinking a well on club ground with a view to abstracting their own water supply; this would allow the greens to be watered during drought conditions. The EA's immediate response was negative but a more sympathetic view would be taken if the use of this well could also benefit the environment of the Heath itself.

After careful consideration, a proposal was put forward that any surplus water from the well could be piped using existing pipework into the currently dry Bonny's Pond which in turn could outflow via the pond's overflow into the eastern alder carr area, which is suffering severely due to the much depleted water-table. The Golf Club would pay for the well installation. The water demand would be 125 cubic metres/day (compare with the local mineral operator's water abstraction licence of 7,200 cubic m/day pumped out to North Sea via Shag Brook & River Mole).

Coincidental with this application, the EA issued a draft Water Level Management Plan for Reigate Heath 2006 in which it was suggested that £700,000 would be required to re-wet the eastern alder carr and marshy meadows yet with no supporting explanation of method. The proposals made above would only require 1 to 2% of that figure. We await the EA's comments on the next step. The draft WLMP was sufficiently disturbing in its lack of detail, finality and clarity to cause me not to comment in this newsletter. However, the Reigate Heath Steering Group has sent in detailed criticisms of the Plan which the EA are currently considering. Watch this space.

The **Reigate Society** are holding a talk on "Heather and heathlands" by Chris Howkins
18th January 2007 at 8.15pm, St Matthew's CofE Primary School, Linkfield Lane, Redhill
ALL WELCOME!

A Job for all Dog Walkers!

Cllr. Mrs Brunt, Chairman of RHM Steering Group

More than 250,000 tonnes of dog faeces are deposited in the country each year. Unfortunately in common with many areas of the country, Reigate Heath has its fair share of irresponsible dog owners who do not clean up after their dogs have fouled. This is highly detrimental to the biodiversity value of the Heath as well as unpleasant and a health hazard. With an increasing number of people exercising their dogs on Reigate Heath, this is fast becoming a very serious issue.

To help alleviate this problem, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council have placed three dog bins on the Heath - two in the Flanchford Road car park and one near the cricket pavilion. It has also adopted the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 in which failure to clean up after your dog is an offence in virtually all public areas in the Borough i.e. anywhere outside your own garden or yard.

For the well-being of the Heath and all other users, please act responsibly!

Tree felling & Heathland Conservation

Ian Wright, RBBC Countryside Officer

A user of Reigate Heath recently expressed to me extreme dissatisfaction on how the Heath is managed. He was especially upset about the removal of trees. I found myself once again having to explain that heathland is now a rare & disappearing habitat and without proper management it will disappear completely, along with all the interesting and specialised species that live there.

This argument is a very relevant one, especially as heathland has been highlighted as a habitat that must be conserved under the **UK Biodiversity Action Plan**, and that this Heath is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

No management decision is taken lightly and the importance of every tree is considered when we are working out the way forward.

After we had parted, it also occurred to me that because tree felling has been so important in enhancing heathland habitats on Reigate Heath thus securing its SSSI protection, it is a major contributory factor that further adjacent mineral extraction has so far been avoided.

If you would like to report anything to the Council please don't hesitate to ring the Helpline on (01737) 276000.

Reigate Heath Management Steering Group Update *by Ian Wright*

Since the last newsletter, we've been planning work for the winter months which involves careful discussions between many people. Subjects range from continuing the restoration of the heathland areas, assisting the Environment Agency on planning the management of the Heath's water table, to considering how best to manage cycling in the Reigate Heath area, which as the last newsletter said, is causing potentially serious erosion to the site if left unchecked. Work plans are always submitted to English Nature (now amalgamated within **Natural England**) for approval as part of the Heath's Management Plan 2006-2010.

Reigate Heath is an Area of Greater Landscape Value. Funds permitting, we will be carrying out an appraisal of its landscape views - looking to enhance the good ones, to improve those that are bad and incorporating this within the wider work plans.

Signs on the Heath will also be reviewed with the object of getting various messages across with the minimal amount of 'sign clutter'. Even though Reigate Heath is so near to a centre of population, it is a nature reserve and remains more a part of the countryside rather than a parkland extension of the town.

Wildlife observations: *The Friends are happy to receive any plant and animal records to add to the Reigate Heath species database. We would particularly like to hear from any birdwatchers interested in helping set up & support a Common/Breeding Bird Census, or from anyone who records butterfly, moths or bats. Please help us if you can.*

STOP PRESS: forthcoming RACV task dates are 7 Jan, 21 Jan, 25 Feb, 18 Mar & 1 April 2007

Please return to: Friends of Reigate Heath, c/o Heath Farm Reigate, RH2 8QP or FoReigateheath@aol.com

Name..... Phone number.....

Address.....

Email.....

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| Are you interested in: | -helping with the Surrey Heathland Project exhibition?.... | Yes/No |
| | -the painting competition? | Yes/No |
| | -helping on RACV work days?..... | Yes/No |
| | -making a donation? (cheques payable to 'Friends of Reigate Heath') | Amount..... |

Comments:

