

Holyford Woodland Trust Chairman's Report 2017

My 2016 report sounded quite an optimistic tone on various fronts, referencing EDDC reservoir acquisition, new community engagement and fundraising initiatives. Whilst there have been some positive developments these past 12 months, there have been some significant frustrations.

I'd like to start with the good news.

We have at last secured an updated 5-year Management Plan with the EDDC Countryside Team which now covers the period 2016-2021. It is a very useful document, to be read in conjunction with the Action Plan, which is certainly ambitious in its objectives.

I'd like to thank the EDDC Countryside Team for all their efforts in managing the woods, in partnership with the Trust. There are various work parties that are organised by EDDC throughout the year with volunteers, including groups from the local Axe Vale and District Conservation Society.

Our thanks go to all who do so much to make the woods such an enjoyable place to visit. One of the challenges for the Trust going forward is certainly to help source more volunteer groups and individuals to help undertake future work, and for the trustees to potentially get more involved too. Dates for work parties this autumn include Wednesday 15th November and Wednesday 13th December.

In the last twelve months, work led by the Countryside Team has included further felling of conifer trees to enhance biodiversity, glade clearance and the installation of a number of rustic seats, and the erection of way markers to highlight the northern permitted path. A new dormouse box scheme has been installed in an area called the Hangings, and at the bottom end of Seaton Down Coppice. Levelling of the main track from the Holyford Lane entrance gate to the top reservoir has been completed, to improve access for maintenance vehicles. A new causeway below the reservoir footbridge has also been constructed out of reclaimed concrete railways sleepers, again to aid vehicular access.

The Trust has completed some fencing work repairs and tree cutting to the north of the woods where it borders agricultural land. The Trust will also be assisting with a financial contribution for some specialist tree felling work at very high levels (where the Countryside Team can't get to), and paying for path clearance work in the Hangings, the glade and turning circle areas this autumn.

Bluebell Day was another great success, in terms of total numbers attending the event, and in generating a healthy fundraising profit. It was held on the Bank Holiday Monday. Sadly, adverse weather conditions led to the cancelling of the Dawn Chorus walk, but it cleared up in time for the main event, which this year was held in the paddock by kind permission of Andrew and Marion Lamb. Profits were helped enormously by using the Colyton Grammar School minibuses once more for the shuttle runs, and Tim Dyer's generous offer to drive the vehicle the entire day. Bluebell Day is very much for the local community, and is made a

success by the community. I'd like to thank all those who were involved on the day, and in its planning, particularly Margaret and Albert Nicholson who with their friends undertook the catering task once more, and did a wonderful job.

I was particularly pleased that the Trust appointed four new trustees (Katie Jones, Matthew Heard, Rob Beard and Tim Dyer) in April 2017, to help with conservation aspects of Holyford Woods and to promote greater public participation and enjoyment.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all previous trustees who have given their time, experience and knowledge to assist in the Trust's aims since 2002. In the last couple of years Jean Kreiseler and Donald Campbell both resigned, and in January 2017, Bernard Vanier felt he could no longer continue in the role.

A year ago, I was under the impression that at EDDC Cabinet level, the reservoir acquisition proposal had broadly been accepted, and that legal transfer should progress once a couple of further structural and topographical surveys had been completed.

Sadly, after further extensive survey work early in 2017, it was confirmed in July, such a plan had been shelved completely. Health and Safety risks to people, difficulty gauging the structural state of the dam wall at lower level, and significant maintenance costs ongoing, were cited as the primary reasons for EDDC refusal. The process has dragged on for many years, incurred considerable expense (EDDC and external consultants), and the reasons cited for refusal in the end, didn't require the survey work. This is extremely disappointing news, and rather a waste of public money.

The Trust has failed to produce any new leaflets or interpretation boards for the woods. The intention was always to seek additional match funding from the EDAONB Sustainable Development Fund to assist with this, but an application hasn't yet been made. Contact with illustrators and designers has progressed however, and an initial draft version of a leaflet been produced.

The number of 'Friends' of Holyford Woods is broadly comparable with 2016, when the scheme was resurrected.

Mike Elsey, Chair of the Holyford Woodland Trust

10th September 2017