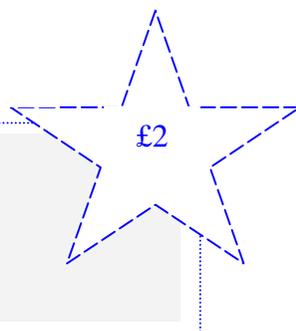


The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 18 – Winter 2008/09



A frosty morning on the 7th December 2008. A local fox enjoys the early morning sun in Pinehurst Meadow.
(Photo: Brian Hewitt)



The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Notes

With only a very few days of 2008 left to run, it is hard to recall that the last Newsletter came out before our Open Day in September, which by now seems an age ago. Given the weather we experienced throughout the summer, we could only be amazed at our luck when the day dawned sunny and bright. Once again the falconry displays were the highlight of the day, but woodland crafts, animal encounters for children, face painting and pony rides all proved very popular too. The Open Day gave us and other local groups an excellent opportunity to talk to visitors about our activities and aspirations. Our catering stall did good business despite hiccups with the generator and the feedback we received about the day has been very positive. I should like to thank Community Network South West for their financial support of the day, and also pay great tribute to my colleagues among the Friends who put long hours of their time into planning and publicising the event. I am grateful to the Ranger Service for their help, especially on the day, not least in winching out the three vehicles (including the marquee van) that managed to get bogged down on the wet grass at the end of the day. Three cheers for the Land Rover with a winch!

The past three months have seen the development of an informal woodland path through the woods to the north of the Rea which, while yet to be completed, is already proving popular with dog-walkers. We have also spent a good deal of time tidying up some huge fallen willows at the south end of Merecroft Pool. This clearance is very much the brainchild of David Hampson and will allow us to develop a reed bed to clean the water which flows in at that point and which – through local plumbing mis-connections – is bringing domestic foul water into the Pool. This project will also allow a very attractive vista along the length of the Pool that will not overlook the houses on Meadow Hill Road.

I am now a member of Northfield Constituency Strategic Partnership, and have been able through this to convene an inaugural meeting of a Northfield Environmental Forum. This seeks to set Constituency targets for the management of public open spaces within the Local Area Agreement, to ensure that all green spaces, however small, get a 'fair crack of the whip' in terms of financial and manpower support, and to act as a voice for local groups and individuals who have concerns about Northfield's environment. It was also a pleasure to attend the formal opening of Balaams Wood Local Nature Reserve by the Lord Mayor back in October. Many congratulations to Penny Moore and her colleagues on achieving LNR status; with Phil Evans serving on their Management Committee, I have no doubt that the Friends of Northfield's two LNRs will continue to develop links along the Rea corridor.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Bournville College ran a short Environmental Studies course on the Reserve in November and December, ably led by Nick Williams. This was aimed at anyone who wanted to learn more about managing land for people and wildlife, about identifying trees and fungi, and about recording ecological data. About half of the students were in fact members of our own 'Friends' group, but the course also attracted people from other organisations and gave them the opportunity to look around the LNR. As ever, people are amazed at the size of the Reserve and the range of habitats it includes. A permanent result of the course is a rustic hide at the far side of Pinehurst Meadow, built under Nick's guidance. Complete with two bench seats (*but no roof!*) the hide should allow some bird watching in a quiet part of the Reserve.

During the past 3 months I have continued to 'spread the word' about the LNR, speaking at a Community Lunch on the 3 Estates and taking children from the Masefield half-term play scheme on an autumn leaf hunt by the reservoir. Matt Barker, our Northfield Assistant Ranger, has been working in our local schools, and now we are hopeful of being able to develop an effective and mutually beneficial relationship with St Thomas Aquinas School. On behalf of us all I send congratulations to Lisa Worledge, a regular Green Gym volunteer, on her appointment as Local Biodiversity Action Plan Co-ordinator for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull; we look forward to the benefits her experience there may bring to our work. I also send best wishes to Jean Perring, who has undergone surgery but who hopes to be back working with us soon, and to Shirley Bakewell, who now seems to be walking pretty well with her new knee (*Ed – amazing considering Alan's culinary skills!*).

But I end my comments with the shocking news of 28 December, when vandals drove into the British Waterways meadow by smashing down the MEB gate with their Land Rover in order, I gather, to pick up stolen goods that they had hidden on the Nature Reserve. While the police were summoned, our neighbour Mrs Sandra Moss and members of her family tried to keep them penned in the meadow; for her pains Mrs Moss was very badly injured, receiving a number of broken bones, when the men ran her down as they stormed out of the meadow. While she was being stabilised in the ambulance there was a dramatic car chase that ended outside my house with the driver (complete with a tattoo on his backside) being handcuffed and taken away. The whole event was hugely distressing, and I send Mrs Moss our deepest sympathy on her injuries as well as our appreciation of her bravery and for the care shown for the meadows of Kings Norton.

May I wish you a very happy and peaceful New Year. The economic down turn will no doubt affect us all in one way or another, but I hope that a visit to the LNR, either to work as a volunteer or to relax, will assist in times of stress.

Amanda Cadman Chairman

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

That's no rat ... that's a water vole!

My first ever sighting of a water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) was along a canal in the centre of Birmingham (incidentally my first sighting of a kingfisher occurred on the same day not very far away). At this point I should confess my first thought was that the animal was a rat, not an uncommon mistake and perhaps not helped by the vernacular name 'water rat' (hence Kenneth Grahame's naming of Ratty, the water vole, in *Wind in the Willows*) or the fact that brown rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) are often found along water courses and are good swimmers. Fortunately my companions were able to put me straight and explain the key differences: water voles have small, flattened ears; short, rounded noses rather than long, pointed ones; and furry tails unlike those of the rats which are hairless.



Our largest native species of vole is found across Europe and parts of Asia, but despite this widespread distribution, the water vole is under threat. The UK population has declined severely in recent years due to habitat loss, water pollution, pest control and, perhaps most significantly, predation by American mink (*Mustela vison*), which have established populations after escaping/being released from fur farms. Other predators of water vole include herons, pike and cats.

It was only this year that the water vole received full protection under UK legislation, prior to April 2008 only their burrows and nests were protected, but now it is an offence to harm or kill the animals or remove them from the wild, giving water voles the same level of protection as the otter (*Lutra lutra*).

Although Kenneth Grahame depicted Ratty enjoying a picnic of cold meats, water voles are vegetarians, eating a range of plant material. Food caches, small piles of chopped vegetation, are often left at sites along banks. Their well-used runs can be hidden by vegetation but other evidence of their presence may be more visible, for example burrows along the water's edge or up on a bank, sometimes with nibbled 'lawns' of grass around the entrance.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

It is this sort of evidence that ecologists look for when trying to understand whether water voles are present in a particular area. The Kings Norton Nature Reserve offers

several areas of suitable habitat for water voles including well-vegetated banks, which provide cover and foraging, along some of the ponds and watercourses as well as suitable substrate for burrowing. There are indeed records for sightings of water voles on the Reserve and evidence of their presence has been found previously on some of the inlet streams and ponds near to Wychall Reservoir.



This evidence, from a survey in 2007, included a potential water vole latrine (a collection of droppings, which can be used to mark territories), a food cache and even a possible sighting. The animal made a distinctive 'plop' sound as it entered the water, a known alarm response to being disturbed. Unfortunately a survey undertaken in October 2008, specifically for water voles, did not find evidence of their presence around the Reservoir area but this does not mean they are not there. It is a favourite saying of ecologists that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence!

(Ed note: Mink present on the LNR. Several reports inc Working Party on 2nd December).

The next time you are out for a stroll near one of the many watercourses on the Reserve listen out for the 'plop' of a water vole entering the water or look out for signs they are around, and if you do see one please let us know.

If you would like to learn more about this elusive mammal the BBC has a good summary fact sheet at www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/268.shtml and the Wildlife Trust has a guide to help you tell the difference between water voles and brown rats at www.wildlifetrusts.org/index.php?section=environment:water:knowyourvole.

Do you have any questions about the wildlife that you have seen on the Kings Norton LNR? Please email kingsnortonlnr@aol.com if there is something you would like to see covered in a future edition of the newsletter.

Lisa Worledge.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Watch:

Observations reported on or about the LNR over the past three months. Please send your sightings to FKNNR@aol.com.

The very best way to appreciate the flora and fauna of a Local Nature Reserve is to take a gentle walk through it (at any time and in any weather) – there is always something to catch the eye if you are prepared to be patient. Take frequent rests, look upwards and listen – wildlife will come to you, there is no need to chase it! For instance, looking up in mid-August revealed some 30+ House Martins feeding in the sky above Wychall Lane, whilst in November at the same location several crows were seen chasing a Raven. Several people have also spotted the crows mobbing a young Buzzard, which visited all parts of the LNR throughout November & December, and a Chiffchaff was heard singing in the park on the 11th October! A Fox can be seen regularly at Wychall reservoir sunning itself on the Railway embankment. Our Tuesday working parties regularly encounter a flock of Long-tailed Tit and, occasionally, sightings of both Kingfisher and Heron as well as the sound of Water Rail are noted at Wychall reservoir.

A walk along the path alongside Pinehurst meadow into the BW meadow at the start of December produced the sight and sounds of Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Jay, Green Woodpecker, Treecreeper and Nuthatch whilst a Mistle Thrush, several Magpie and 4 Canada Geese mingled with the horses in the grazing fields.



Other reports of mammals this period included Shrews, Voles and Grey Squirrels, many of who were forced to find high and dry ground when the Reservoir flooded at the end of September. In fact, high water levels brought in many waterfowl to feed on the seeds and insects flushed out of the Reservoir area by the rising tide! These included over 50 Mallard.

Left: one wet Bank Vole - flushed out by high water near the cycle route.

Photo: Richard Cutler

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

The autumn period with cold weather and leaf fall has enabled many more sightings of mammals and birds to be reported on or about the Local Nature Reserve. Dog walkers have reported several Muntjac Deer and many sightings of Red Fox (See the web site for further activity in Pinehurst meadow as well as the photograph on the front of this newsletter). Pheasants were reported in Wychall meadows next to the cycle path in November but this has not been confirmed. Unfortunately there have also been many reports of Mink, which may well explain why a 2008 survey at Wychall reservoir revealed no evidence of Water Vole. One cheeky individual was seen skating on the ice in a reedbed on the 2nd December. *Ed note - Should we have a policy on Mink eradication?*

A Pochard was present on Wychall Reservoir on the 30th November (the first recorded since we became an LNR) and this bird was probably part of a winter influx of migrants to the UK. Other birds present on the same day included 12 Teal, 2 Little Grebe, 1 Water Rail, 2 Heron, 42 Mallard and 14 Moorhen and to cap it all 2 Cormorants flew over!

It is now apparent that we do not have comprehensive survey data on many subjects and species across the LNR, Trees, fungi, water invertebrates and insects are just a few. If anyone wishes to undertake survey activity in 2009 then the necessary training can be matched to an individual's requirements. Please let us know if you are interested. On the Butterfly front the weather has not been ideal but an additional species to the 12 reported last time is the Comma, *Polygonia c-album*, which was present in the BW meadow during working party activity on the 21st October. Keep on looking.

Help the 'Friends' to stay in touch with you:

Have you emailed us yet? Please send us one 'hello' message, so that we can maintain up to date address lists & email data. Recent mail outs have been returned to us from too many email addresses – obviously our records need updating but only you, the members, can help us.

Please join our "Green Gym" working parties:

Every Tuesday, as much time as you can spare between 10.30 and 13.30. One hour (or more) of your time makes a real difference. Please let us know in advance on kingsnortonlnr@aol.com or by ringing a committee member.

Next dates: Every Tuesday in January, February and March 2009.

Please visit our web site at www.fknr.org.uk. Do visit it and let us know what you think or ring Peter on 0121 4333486.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Local Nature Reserve Open Day – 2008 Snapshots



The Animal Lady, Rachel Caldicott, with the Snake (above) and on the right a Kestrel from the falconry display.

Photos: Phil Evans



Open Day:
13 September
2008

The Beekeeper
and display.
This provoked
a great deal of
interest.

More photos
will appear in
future

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Wychall Reservoir – Flooding Focus:

Wychall reservoir forms a substantial part of our Local Nature Reserve and as most of the membership realise it also forms part of the City's flood defence system for the River Rea corridor. This is a situation, which we support and whilst overall responsibility rests with the Environment Agency (*the City and its contractors now only assist when so requested*) our own efforts to keep trees and litter in order do help to protect the main function of the site. However, this should provide opportunities and we wish to see the Wychall dam area progress as a wildflower meadow and most of the rest of the site develop into a comprehensive range of wetland habitats. This will be an aspiration in the next Management Plan for the LNR (see page 13).



On a more mundane level the site has fulfilled its main purpose on five occasions in the past three months the most extreme being on the 26 September (see above and right).



Unfortunately, in November a severe blockage in the River Rea by Lakehouse Grove caused water to back-up and enter the Reservoir even more frequently and this resulted in a good amount of rubbish being washed through the site to collect at the out flow points. This was sorted out after the 'Friends' made representations to the City on the 10th December.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Committee Focus:

Dr Peter Cage

In May 2008 Peter was re-elected as a member of the FKNNR Committee. A quiet man about the LNR - but finally he has been persuaded to tell us a bit more about himself and some of it will surprise even those who now work with him.

Peter was raised in Berkshire starting his career with a craft apprenticeship, at the age of 16, in the engineering division of British European Airways. He went on to take a degree sponsored by BEA and finally a PhD. During this time he became interested in ecology issues and the Limits to Growth (which has become so very important with the advent of Global Warming).



Having started postdoctoral work with computer-controlled experiments at the Zoology department of Oxford University, Peter decided the real world was more interesting than academia. He joined the computer section of the Forensic Science Service where he remained for over twenty years until taking early retirement. He enjoyed the privilege of working closely with dedicated scientists in that organisation where his responsibilities during this time included software development for the National DNA Database, IT Security and the Data Protection Act. (*Ed – Ask him for an honest opinion on the science displayed in TV series such as ‘Waking the Dead’!!*)

The family moved to Birmingham in 1993 when the IT group was relocated and they were pleased to find how green and friendly the City really is. Peter joined FKNNR in 2005 after his retirement mainly to get exercise and was surprised how much he enjoyed the company and the exercise in the “Green Gym” since when he has become an expert in the use of the scythe and the bow saw. Now, he is learning the ecology and conservation issues relevant to the reserve. His engineering skills have been put to good use in the maintenance and use of tools and particularly in tree felling. Peter is also responsible for the FKNNR Web Site.

Ed - Keep up the good work.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Working Party Progress

Our routine work programmes over the past three months, as required by the existing Management Plan, have kept the regular volunteers extremely busy. tree management, dead hedging, bulb and primrose planting, grass scything, keeping paths open and the inevitable litter picking are tasks which have kept the “Green Gym” regulars as busy as ever. We have received many favourable comments on the results of our labours.

Clearance work in the woodland along the north bank of the river Rea in Wychall Lane has been undertaken as the first stage in the construction of a woodland walk. Much remains to be done but the area already looks a lot better now that some of the ivy and non-native poplars have been brought under management control. Some selective planting of trees and plants will be undertaken in January and February. Thanks go to the ‘Birmingham & Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers’ for assisting with this and other clearance activities. Further work has been undertaken in Sheila’s Meadow and in Pinehurst Meadow. The entrance near the Camp pub has been tidied up and notice boards were installed in four locations across the LNR at the end of October. The clean up towards the Camp produced very many black bags of litter (*and several catalytic converters/exhaust systems!*) and it remains a cause for concern that general anti-social behaviour such as litter, illegal dumping and graffiti still occur across our Reserve.

The second major job for the winter period has been the clearance of scrub at the end of Merecroft Pool that followed on from some essential tree work undertaken by City contractors for H&S reasons. This task is being lead by David Hampson with the objective of creating a proper viewing area for the Pool and to plant a Norfolk reedbed to clean up some seriously ‘grey’ water entering the Pool via the storm water drainage system. Funds are being sought for the hire of a JCB plus operative for an extended day’s activity in the very near future.

At the recent meeting of the City Management Committee it was reported that during September, October and November a total of approximately 350 volunteer hours had been spent on working party activities. So plenty of recent effort to keep on top of the necessary work but not as many hours as we really need. We do require new volunteers and we know that some recent recruits have been more than satisfied with the results that can be achieved by so few in such a short space of time. More is required on the Nature Reserve so please come and join us – an hour of your time will make a real difference.

Phil Evans

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



CNSW awards night – attended on our behalf by Graham Layton – and the ‘Friends’ are presented with a certificate in recognition of all our efforts to increase the membership base and community involvement through our recent Open Day.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

The Chairman's Piece continued - LNR Management Plan

The ‘Friends’ work to manage and develop the Nature Reserve under the terms of a five-year Management Plan agreed by all stakeholders. The current Plan runs out in March 2009 and members of the Friends are working with the Ranger Service to set out a further Plan that will run from 2009 to 2014. This will include the management of the area between Popes Lane and Wychall Road, which we seek to have formally designated as part of the LNR. The Friends’ Committee has assessed the successes or otherwise of the original Plan and a wider meeting was held just before Christmas involving the Friends’ Committee, Management Committee, representatives of the City Council (elected Members from both Kings Norton and Northfield Wards, City Drainage Engineers and the Ranger Service) to assess strengths and weaknesses and to set out our aspirations. The meeting was facilitated for us by Peter Smith, sent by the Digbeth Trust under the auspices of CNSW. The new Management Plan needs to set out key priorities, develop SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time and resource constrained) and set out a work plan for the period. The next stage now is to draw up a draft Plan for public consultation, which is where we ask you to play your part in helping us to finalise a Management Plan which will most effectively achieve our aims for the Nature Reserve for benefit the people and wildlife of Kings Norton and, upstream, in Northfield.

Once the draft is available for consultation it will be displayed on our web site and in public locations such as the Library. We will also be able to draw public attention to the Plan through use of the four splendid notice boards that have been made for us by the Lickey Hills Rangers. We have long felt the need of some notice boards and are most grateful now to have this facility.

Amanda Cadman Chairman



June's mouse.

A visitor to a bird feeder on Wychall Lane.

May peace now be granted to all those involved in this mammoth production!

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

FKNNR Diary Dates

Date	Location	Details
6 January	River Rea Wychall Lane	Green Gym: Clearance work
13 January	River Rea Wychall Lane	Green Gym: Tree/bulb planting
20 January	River Rea – North Bank	Clearance/coppicing
27 January	River Rea – North Bank	Clearance/path/planting – Woodland Trust day
3 February	WychallReservoir	Clearance & planting
10 February	WychallReservoir	Clearance & planting
Saturday 14th	River Rea Corridor	Clean up/Litter pick
Sunday 15th	Burmans Drive	Tidy up & dead hedge
17 February	Pinehurst Meadow	Grass cut/Bramble removal
24 February	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up & dead hedge
3 March	Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up & dead hedge
10 March	BW Meadow	Grass cut/Bramble removal
17 March	BW Meadow	Tidy up & dead hedge
24 March	Merecroft Pool	Reed planting
31 March	Merecroft Pool	Reed planting
7 April	Merecroft/Old orchard area	Wild flower planting

For working party days - please meet on site and wear stout footwear and old clothes. The appropriate equipment & materials will be provided. Please spare one or more hours of your time to assist us in progressing the Management Plan.

*Tuesday Working Parties (The 'Green Gym') – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs
All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.*

**Support our weekend working party on
14/15 February 2009**

Subscriptions

There are still a few outstanding membership renewals from June 2008. Please send a cheque £7 to (+ donation? or ask for a standing order form from) the Treasurer if you wish to continue your membership. Please gift aid your subscriptions if you pay tax – this will provide additional resources for the 'Friends'. We do appreciate all financial support that helps protect and enhance Kings Norton LNR.

Tools wanted: If you have any unwanted garden or workshop tools, spanners, screwdrivers, files etc then please let one of the Committee know (or phone 0121 6286769). We will collect.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Mutual Assistance – Help the neighbours!

There are other groups within the Northfield Constituency who share our aims and objectives for the improvement of the local environment for both people and wildlife. Amanda has outlined some recent initiatives in her 'Chairman's piece' for this Newsletter but we have also assisted these groups in some of their practical activities and hope that our membership will support some of the events listed below. We know that these groups will also assist us.

THE FIELDS MILLENNIUM GREEN

Longdales Road – opposite new KN Cemetery

Calendar of Volunteering Action weekends for Spring 2009.

Tools and gloves provided, but please wear old clothes and strong waterproof footwear!

Dates.	Times.	Activity.
Sat Jan 17 th	10 – 1pm	Pruning/ thinning
Sun Jan 18 th	1 – 4pm	Pruning/thinning
Sat Feb 21 st	10 – 1pm	Coppicing/ thinning
Sun Feb 22 nd	1 - 4pm	Den-building – families
Sat Mar 14 th	10 – 1pm	Thinning
Sun Mar 15 th	1 – 4pm	Grass-cutting etc around spring bulbs

THE RIVER REA CONSERVATION GROUP

Fri 23 January	Annual Dinner 19.30 hrs at the Oak Tree, Lickey Rd/Groveley Rd roundabout Meals 2 for 1.
Sat 7 February	Walk: West Heath to Merecroft. 3.25 miles. 10.30 KN Green
Fri 13 February	Talk: Local History by Ted Rudge
Sat 7 March	Walk: Birmingham's early reservoirs. 4 miles. KN Green 11.00.
Fri 13 March	Talk: Inner City History by Richard Albutt (Birmingham Local studies Department).
Fri 10 April	Talk/slides: Venezuela fauna 2008 by Phil Evans
Fri 8 May	Talk: Changing Face of Rea Valley by Cyril Ashmore
Sat 16 May	Walk: About Belbroughton. 4.5 miles. KN Green 11.00.
Fri 12 June	Talk/Films: Birmingham Archive films with Paul Edmunds
Sun 20 September	Annual walk: Hawkesley and the Barge Horse walk. 6 miles. KN Green 11.30.
Fri 9 October	AGM: Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge.
For further details or transport ring: Cyril Ashmore 477 4764 or Geoff Ray 445 5126. All talks at 19.30 hrs at Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge.	

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



The cycle path beside Wychall Reservoir on the 26 September 2008.

Floods and a full Reservoir contribute to an impassable cycle route.

The River Rea was overflowing its banks and the water was running from right to left at this location. Compare the seat with the photo in the last Newsletter!.

**The FKNNR, 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton, B38 8TB
Honorary Officers, Committee Members and Advisors
(* Denotes Trustee of the Charity No 1122293)**

Chairman	Amanda Cadman*	0121 624 3865
Secretary	Graham Layton*	0121 458 4712
Vice Chairman	David Human*	0121 458 1300
Treasurer	Phil Evans*	0121 628 6769
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley	0121 244 7483
Education	Matthew Osland-Barker	0121 447 7106
Newsletter Editors	Amanda Cadman & Phil Evans	0121 624 3865
Northfield District Ranger	Matthew Osland-Barker	0121 447 7106

Committee Members

Jon Anson, Suzanne Ashley, Alan Bakewell*,
Brian Hewitt, Peter Cage, David Hampson,
Jenny Bodycote, Nicola Human.

<i>Environmental Agency Hotline</i>	<i>0800 807060</i>
<i>West Midlands Police</i>	<i>0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363</i>
<i>Community Police</i>	<i>07769 882113</i>
<i>Anti-social behaviour Hotline</i>	<i>0121 303 1111</i>
<i>Street Champions</i>	<i>0800 0730528</i>

Correspondence by email preferred: Kingsnortonlnr@aol.com

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Registered Charity No. 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk