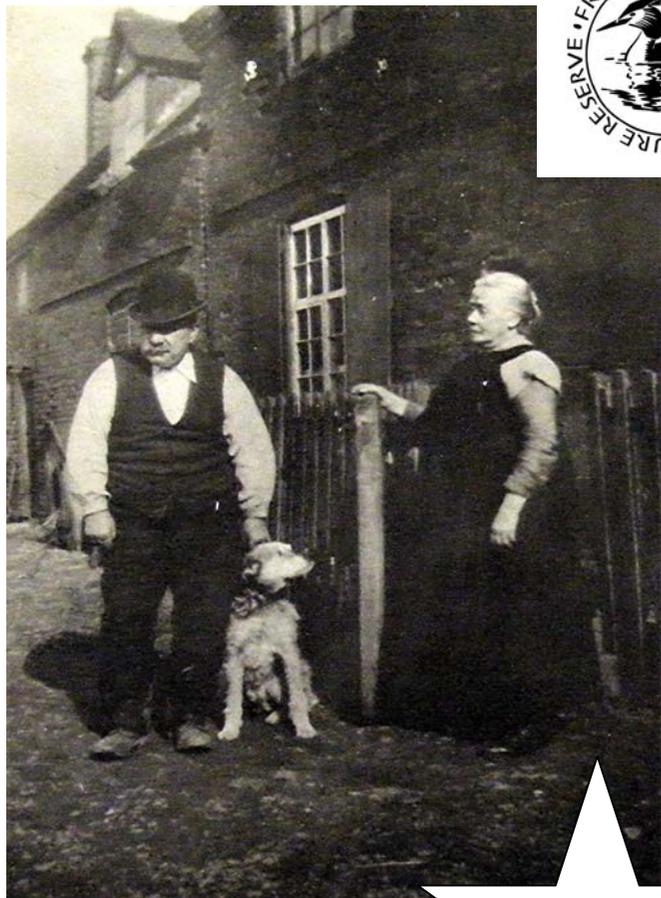


The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 20 - Summer 2009



Wychall Farm residents 1920's – See inside

£2 to
non-
members

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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Notes

While the past three months have seen a wide range of weather from extremely hot back in May to what seemed like weeks on end of rain during July and early August, miraculously we have had no flood events (yet!) this summer. A number of our Tuesday Work Outs have been distinctly soggy. Only one had to be cancelled altogether, but we have struggled to keep abreast of our work schedule. Birmingham Parks and Nurseries, our new grounds maintenance team, have just about managed to keep on top of the lush growth of grass, but are now looking for a favourable few days in which to carry out the annual 'conservation cut' on the meadows, where the cut vegetation needs to lie for a few days to shed seed before it is removed. This removal reduces the soil's fertility, in turn allowing more meadow flowers to flourish.

The new Management Plan for the Reserve 2009-2013 – including the area upstream between Popes Lane and Wychall Road – is now complete and out for public consultation. You can see a copy in the Library at Kings Norton or at Northfield, or look on our website (www.fknr.org.uk) – but please understand that this is a very large document, and takes time to download. Thanks are due to all who have been involved in developing the Plan, and in particular to Northfield Ranger Matthew Osland-Barker who has pulled it all together to give a clear and concise prescription for the management of the different areas of our Reserve. Please do take part in the consultation, sending your comments to matthew.barker@birmingham.gov.uk or phone 447 7106 by 17 September.

The Friends AGM on 20 May brought a reasonable turnout to the Tennis Club. Special thanks were paid to Alan Bakewell who stood down from the Committee at the AGM. It was Alan who set up the original group, the Friends of Wychall Reservoir in 2001, and he was the first Chairman of the Friends of Kings Norton LNR, steering us through the process of formal designation by English Nature – as it then was – as a Local Nature Reserve. We will miss Alan's central contribution to the work of the Committee, but he continues to support us practically, and is even now planning an event in December in collaboration with his Street Champions. Anne Price nobly volunteered to join the Committee.

Sadly, your Committee decided that the cost of organising an Open Day for 2009, both financial and in terms of volunteer time, was too great. Few additional members responded positively to my appeal for further support, and so we will put our energies now into planning and seeking sponsorship for the Open Day planned for 2010. The date is Saturday 4 September 2010: please put it in your diary straight away! Members who would like to assist in planning this event should contact me as soon as possible since work will have to start very soon now. Sponsors are also required.

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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

In the last Newsletter we flagged up the need for a detailed baseline survey of all flora and fauna within the Nature Reserve's woods, meadows and watercourses. Member Lisa Worledge (who is reading for an MSc in Biological Recording at the University of Birmingham) has very kindly used her persuasive powers to bring a number of experts in different fields to talk to us and to take us out for training sessions. A launch event was held at St Nicolas Place on 29 May, when we learned something of the mechanics of surveying and recording different flora and fauna, and about the field guides and other equipment that would be of most help to us. An appeal for a microscope to aid our work brought an extremely helpful response and some excellent pieces of kit. (*Ed – Thanks to Paul & Val*). A group subsequently went out with plant expert Mike Poulton on 12 June, the most beautiful early summer day, making a preliminary survey of Beaks Hill Triangle and the Pea fields (see the new Management Plan if you don't know where these are!). Sadly, although the days before and after 12 August were excellent days for seeing butterflies, the 12th itself, when expert Phil Gilbert was to have led our initial survey work, saw pouring rain and never a butterfly in sight.

Do please let her know via kingsnortonlnr@aol.com if you would like to be involved in survey work – the more detail we can record now for future comparison the better, so that we can ascertain whether our work on site is having the desired effect of increasing the range of wildlife on the Reserve.

The Friends took their display stand out on three successive early summer Saturdays: to the Open Day on the Fields Millennium Green on 27 June, to CoCoMAD on Cotteridge Park on 4 July and to the St Nicolas Festival on the Green on 11 July. Here we had the opportunity to talk to visitors and locals alike about our work and our aspirations, sending people away with leaflets, supplies of birdseed and a desire to visit the LNR. We will be contributing, in September, to a display being put on at the Lickey Hills Visitor Centre by the Northfield Constituency Environmental Forum of which our group is a member. Do come and find out about the wealth of Public Open Spaces within the constituency and what other friends groups, including along the Rea, are doing to look after and enhance their riches.

The Ranger Service ran a very well attended Bat Walk on the Reserve on the evening of 10 June, though sadly an earlier Minibeasts event here attracted no attendees at all. Please check the diary of events on our website (www.fknr.org.uk) to get a full list of what is coming up in the near future. We are, for example, starting a series of monthly-guided walks around the LNR, following a suggestion from a member. This will be a real opportunity to learn more about how the Reserve is managed and what can be seen here over the course of a year and to meet up with other Friends of the LNR. Do join us! And please bring your family, friends and neighbours along, and encourage them to join the Friends to increase our body of support.

Amanda Cadman Chairman

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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Watch: observations reported on or about the LNR over the past three months. Please send to Kingsnortonlnr@aol.com

These notes are written at the end of August as 2 Buzzards circle over Wychall lane being actively harassed by 15 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Both these species were scarce in the area only 5 years ago and we would like to believe that local environmental improvements have played a part in their reappearance. However, the wet weather over the past three months has dampened much of the activity across the Local Nature Reserve. These conditions appear to have suited few of the breeding bird populations, the exceptions appearing to be Blackbird and Song Thrush. Plenty of young Moorhen and Mallard have also been observed at Wychall reservoir.

The migration of birds to our LNR started as usual with the arrival of Chiffchaff in April, soon to be followed by Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Whitethroat. It is not clear if any of these apart from Chiffchaff actually bred on the LNR. Reports were also received of a Redstart and a Garden Warbler passing through both being firsts for our recent records. Many sightings of Heron, Sparrow hawk and Buzzard were also received. Other observations include the usual sightings of Canada Geese, Kingfishers, Gt Spotted & Green Woodpeckers, Chaffinches and Bullfinches. The latter species appear to be doing quite well locally. Some local birds have been noticed with rings on their legs – Any one know who and where?

There have been fewer reports of mammals this year but they do include Muntjac Deer, Foxes and Grey Squirrels. The occasional warm weather did bring out the butterflies and ten different species were recorded this year mainly on Tuesdays during "TWO" activities.

Speckled Wood Gatekeeper	<i>Lasiommata aegeria</i>	May - August	Widespread
Meadow Brown	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	June - August	Wychall Reservoir
Orange Tip	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	July	Pinehurst & BW
Peacock	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	May - August	Widespread but scarce
Common Blue	<i>Inachis io</i>	April - May	Wychall cycle path
Large White	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	June	Wychall & Sheila's Meadow
Small White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	July & August	Wychall Meadows cycle path
Brimstone	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	May - July	Widespread
Small Skipper	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	June	River Rea south bank
	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	July	BW Meadow

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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

A Day in the life of.....

June McCoy's 20-mile tractor drive around the leafy lanes of Norfolk on 5 July 2009.

A note from June:

First of all I want to thank all those who sponsored me for Cancer Research UK Breast Cancer Awareness. I raised the princely sum of £860.50.

I was one of 96 women dressed in pink on pink decorated tractors. I drove a 40-year-old Ford 2000, which was a real challenge because I hadn't driven a tractor since the late 1950s.



Ed: I dare not comment on this !!

I thoroughly enjoyed myself and intend to do it again next year. In the last years "The Pink Ladies Tractor Road Run" has raised over £117,000.

Another note from June:

Future meetings of the Rea Valley Conservation Group held at the Friend's Meeting House, Cotteridge at 19.30 hrs.

Date	Speaker	Topic
12.02.2010	John Tilt	Woodland Butterflies
12.03.2010	Phil Evans	Around the world in 80 weeks – Photos of the natural & human landscape taken on recent travels.
26.03.2010	Annual Dinner	A local location by popular demand.
14.05.2010	Ted Rudge	"Brum Roamin" Romany gypsies in the Midlands

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

The History of the LNR Site

As in previous years, we were invited to have an FKNNR stall at St Nicolas Church Open Day. As well as 'flying the flag' and 'raising our profile', one result was a chance meeting with Mrs V. Fletcher, who admired our display of photos of activities on the Reserve. She said she was very familiar with the area and had written a Dissertation about Kings Norton's industrial history, in 1973!

I was interested to hear she had later deposited it at Kings Norton Library for safe keeping, as reference material. I made an impromptu visit to the library, and the documents were unearthed from a cupboard for inspection – though now in a rather fragile state. We are grateful to Mrs Fletcher for giving us permission to copy and reproduce some of the material.

The dissertation is an extensive piece of work, comprising one A4 volume of about one hundred pages, with typed text, photos and hand-drawn illustrations, and another A2 folder with big maps and plans. Clearly a great deal of research was carried out, with careful references to exact locations, and the dissertation focuses particularly on changes in land use from the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.

Therefore the document is of great interest to the Nature Reserve, as it chronicles the development of the early mills that relied on the River Rea for waterpower, both for corn grinding and metalworking; also described is the building of Wychall reservoir to feed water to the Canal network, and the coming of the railways, which bisected the original farmland.

There is a description of early settlements near the River Rea including old moated farmhouses such as Wychall Farm, which was finally demolished in the early 50s. This is now the location of St Thomas Aquinas RC School, with which we are now working actively on conservation projects through liaison with our local ranger, Matt.



Here (& front cover) is a photo of occupants at Wychall Farm taken in about 1925.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

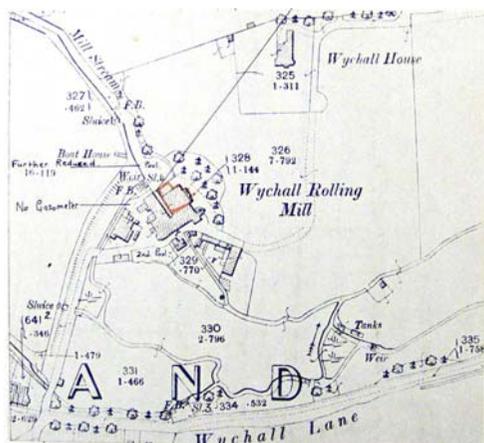
Another topic is Popes Lane Bridge, required to enable the farmer to access his land on the far side of the railway tracks. There are photos of some of the sluices and 'leats' which controlled the flow of water to the mills and into the canal system, many of which have decayed or are no longer accessible since the 1970s when the pictures were taken.

The Reservoir itself was constructed by about 1813 to help supply the Birmingham - Worcester Canal - which runs level towards the city with no need for a lock, and southwest through Washhill Tunnel till it reaches the first flight of locks at Tardebigge. This photo dates from 1970 and shows much less vegetation and a lot more water than at present!



Other pictures show work preparatory to the creation of the River Rea walkway (or cycle route as it became) and the creation of the new council estates.

Industrial changes took place as engineering firms moved out from the centre of Birmingham, and as milling altered its character, and motive power changed from water wheel to steam.



This 1904 map shows the Wychall Rolling Mill, later buried within Burman's, and now beneath more factory units.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

On an 1890 map Merecroft Pool is referred to as a Fishpond. The date and purpose of its construction is still not certain. (*Ed - Readers of this newsletter should refer to a previous issue number 11 for early photographs of the pool*).

The dissertation also includes a photo of a medieval boundary wall unearthed near Wychall Farm in 1950, marking the division between Northfield and Kings Norton. Some routes such as Meadow Hill Road and Wychall Lane were once merely farm tracks and are referred to on the early maps as a 'fore drove', a dialect word connected with herding of cattle.

Also described in detail are the progressive phases of building and consequent road development. Much of the area belonged to Bordesley Abbey until the Dissolution of the Monasteries; there were probably many common fields, and New House Farm (beside the present-day West Hill Road) may date from the Enclosures Act of 1774. There are traces of ridge-and-furrow farming in nearby Pinehurst Meadow. (*Ed - The origins of this are discussed in the first LNR Management Plan*).

This photo shows the view south across the railway and reservoir (hidden) - from the Overbury development.



The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Some isolated farms hung on till the 1930's or later, perhaps surviving on their ability to supply the growing city population with produce and milk. Larger Victorian houses sprang up along Middleton Hall Road and in more favoured areas; some of these were later demolished to make way for infillings with smaller houses, a process which continues to this day.

The requirement for more housing in the idealistic 1950's gave rise to the creation of Hawkesley, Overbury and Primrose estates, on much open land acquired by the City Council of the day. The golf course moved to Weatheroak, and housing development followed – with shops, schools and other amenities deemed appropriate to the needs of the residents.

Since the dissertation was written thirty-five years ago, things have come full circle, with dated estates being demolished and new types of housing in their place. But a continuing requirement is green space, and some degree of foresight seems to have prevailed in the city, by leaving the River Rea corridor for that purpose. It is still prone to flooding, and has been somewhat neglected; but the part which is currently in our care is being maintained as far as humanly possible for others to enjoy, by our small band of volunteers and supporters.

We hope to study Mrs Fletcher's work in more detail as time permits, to glean more details and form a clearer picture of the historical background to Kings Norton Nature Reserve. Meanwhile the library has agreed that the dissertation needs rebinding and putting into a more easily accessible form – so we will keep readers informed of progress.

Thanks again to Mrs Fletcher for permission to use her work.

Of course if other readers have any archive photos of our reserve in bygone times we would be most pleased to see them, whether scanned, emailed, or loaned for copying....

Brian Hewitt

Tools always 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

Surveying Our Wildlife

Well it has certainly been a soggy summer but there have been moments of sunshine too and everything on the Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve seems to be growing like mad! In our last newsletter we asked for volunteers to help with surveys to identify the plants and animals that are resident on the LNR. Thank you to everyone who got in touch and were prepared to offer us their time.

We are building up a database of all of the plant species on site (including species such as the Ladies Bedstraw pictured here) and EcoRecords (the Birmingham & Black Country biological records centre) are providing us with their data for the Nature Reserve so we will have some historic information, not just about plants but about



the other wildlife of the LNR too. We will add records as additional surveys are undertaken, slowly building up a complete picture of what is living on the Reserve. The aim is to make this information available to anyone who is interested via our website and hopefully that is something we will be able to work towards next year.

In terms of this summer, we didn't manage to organise as many events as was originally hoped. Weather was a contributing factor to this but also my organisational skills declined as the volume of work for my day job and course increased! However, I have promised to make amends and make sure we are on track again by the Spring. The good news is that this year's events are not quite over.

Mike Poulton (a Botanist who works with the Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust) has kindly agreed to lead a further plant session, those of you who attended Mike's first session will know just what an excellent teacher he is. Mike will be helping us identify the aquatic plants that are present on-site during September.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Continuing the watery theme, under the guidance of Mel Bickerton (an Ecologist at the University of Birmingham) we will be surveying for aquatic invertebrates. This will include the opportunity to make use of equipment at the University for those people who are interested in learning to start identifying these fascinating creatures (truly amazing when seen through a microscope, take a look at the dragonfly nymph pictured here and you can start to see where film makers get inspiration for their monsters). The date is to be confirmed but we are expecting it to be in early October.



Our day of planned butterfly identification training was a little washed out to say the least but Phil Gilbert (a County Recorder for Butterflies) has thoughtfully offered to come and visit us during the autumn and give a talk on British butterflies (such as the Painted Lady shown here). If this proves popular then we may have some additional people prepared to present on other aspects of flora and fauna relevant to our Nature Reserve to help ease those dark days of winter! Phil will return in the late Spring to train us in butterfly survey techniques with a view of establishing an annual survey on the Reserve.

If you are interested in any of these events or have any ideas for training or talks please get in touch via an email to kingsnortonlnr@aol.com we will then get in touch when the details are confirmed. Lisa.

Subscriptions

All to note: Your 2009 subscription to the FKNNR is now due. Thanks to the 50 who have renewed already.

There are several outstanding membership renewals from June 2008! Please send a cheque to (+ donation? or ask for a standing order form from) the Treasurer, 21 Woodglade Croft, 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.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Working Party Progress

If you walk or cycle along the River Rea route between Popes Lane and the Camp pub you cannot fail to notice the ever-increasing volume of red/purple flowers belonging to that invasive species – Himalayan Balsam. A little is fine but when it starts to crowd out native species an attempt has to be made to keep it in check. That has been the essence of working party activity over the past three months and that has been difficult to sustain due to the continual wet weather. Other routine work programmes were followed to keep areas free of fallen timber and accumulated rubbish as required by the Management Plan but water and the occasional warm spell caused rapid growth. However, we have kept the bramble, ivy, nettle and Japanese Knotweed in the places we can control them.

The work done on the two small reedbeds at Wychall Reservoir over the past three years has produced an attractive site now well used by dragonflies and birds alike. The area has also been enhanced with a small wildflower patch next to the cycle route. This has resulted in many favourable comments. However, it is a pity that the cycle route continues to be plagued by some young artists who consider that graffiti also enhances the local environment – this is removed regularly. Tree management, scything the grass, keeping paths open and the inevitable litter picking are tasks that have kept the "TWO" regulars as busy as ever. These activities have occurred right across the LNR in all areas accessible to the general public. Fallen trees following one particularly windy day required some effort to cut up and remove and thanks go to the 'Birmingham & Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers' for assisting with this and other clearance activities. Further work has also been undertaken on footpath consolidation on the north bank of the River Rea and on the public right of way between Beaks Hill Road and Meadow Hill Road.

The clearance work in the old orchard adjacent to Beaks Hill Rd and at the end of Merecroft Pool has started to 'green up' and some minor improvements this coming winter should enhance the area even further. Some success is finally coming our way in that Severn Trent have now identified most of the miss-connections in that area that resulted in all that grey and soapy water entering the pool. Cleaner water at last!

So plenty of recent activity to keep on top of the necessary work. More is required on the LNR 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

FKNNR Diary Dates

Date	Location	Details
8 September	BW Meadow	Tidy up/Path chippings
15 September	River Rea Wychall Lane	Scythe area/Hazel maintenance
22 September	Beaks Hill Road	Prune trees/Dead hedges
29 September	Camp Pub entrance	Tidy up & dead hedge
6 October	Wychall (Popes Lane end)	Clearance/Prune/log piles
13 October	Pinehurst Meadow	Construct bird feeding area
22 October	Old Orchard area	Prune trees/Dead hedges
29 October	Wychall Reservoir	Clearance/path/planting
3 November	Wychall Reedbeds	Prune trees/Reedbed Maintenance
10 November	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up & dead hedge repairs
14 November	Burman's Drive	Saturday – LNR Clean Up
17 November	Wychall Meadows	Prune trees/Dead hedges
25 November	Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up & dead hedge
1 December	River Rea – North Bank	Clearance/path/planting
5 December	Woodland across LNR	Tree planting day
8 December	Wychall Reservoir	Clearance/path/hedges
15 December	Merecroft Pool	Bluebell protection work
1 January	Merecroft/Old orchard area	Tidy up & new year drinks

For working party days - please meet on site and wear stout waterproof 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 LNR Management Plan.

*Tuesday Work Outs (TWOs Working Parties) – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs.
All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.*

**Please support our Saturday Tidy up on 14th November
(start at 10.30 hours).**

FKNNR Monthly Guided Walks

The last Saturday every month at 10.30 to 12.00 a.m. Meet at the corner of Wychall Lane & Meadow Hill Road (The BW Meadow entrance).

For all walks - please meet on site and wear stout waterproof footwear and oldish clothes (It can be wet and muddy!). We will alternate the walks between the South side of the LNR and the River Rea/Wychall corridor.

September 26 / October 31 / November 28 / January 1 (see above).

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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

A Day Out (1) - A Sign of the times

A Code of Conduct for Kings Norton perhaps?



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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve A Day Out (2)

A small group of Friends had a wonderful day out on 26 May when we visited the Attenborough Nature Reserve just outside Nottingham (where were the rest of you? you missed a real treat!). Starting at the excellent eco-friendly Visitor Centre which is built on an island (complete with drawbridge to keep out vandals when it is closed!), we spent several happy hours inspecting this fabulous reserve bounded on one side by the Trent and comprising many flooded former sand and gravel pits and even barges going to and from the current workings. It's a haven for wildlife of all sorts, especially waterfowl, but the highlight of the day for me was hearing and seeing a grasshopper warbler and seeing a good number of geese on and alongside the river. The provision for wildlife of the whole site, and the educational, bird watching and catering facilities of the Centre, gave us much food for thought as to what can be achieved in a semi-urban area. Amanda.



A suggestion & perhaps one idea to follow up as part of the Pinehurst Meadow bird feeding station (right).

A wooden scarecrow to attract birds! Complete with feeders.

This Attenborough Centre version attracted a flock of Tree Sparrows.



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The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



Alongside the cycle path beside Wychall Reservoir there lies the outlet point where River Rea floodwater exits the Reservoir. We have been notified that the Environment Agency [EA] is planning to do extensive work this coming winter at this location and with the Dam arrangement generally. We will ensure the LNR interests are taken into account and we will keep members posted on events.

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	Phil Evans*	0121 628 6769
Northfield District Ranger,	Matthew Osland-Barker	0121 447 7106
Trustee & Sage	Alan Bakewell*	0121 603 1127
Committee Members		

Jon Anson, Suzanne Ashley, Anne Price, Brian Hewitt,
Peter Cage, David Hampson, Jenny Bodycote, Nicola Human.

Environmental Agency Hotline 0800 807060
West Midlands Police 0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363
Community Police 07769 882113
Anti-social behaviour Hotline 0121 303 1111

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