

Stowey Green Spaces Group

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ANNUAL REPORT YEAR 01 APRIL 2019 – 31 MARCH 2020 and
SUMMARY ACCOUNTS 01 May 2018 -31 March 2020

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1 General

Stowey Green Spaces Group (SGSG) first Report was produced in May 2019 and submitted at the annual Parish Meetings of both Nether and Over Stowey. Our work building steps on the north side of the A39 in collaboration with Stowey Walking was accidentally omitted from that Report.

Terry Sackett and Paul Brierley have joined us on a regular basis. We have been able to call on both Nigel Phillips and Louis Pearson for ecological advice from time to time. Our meetings are open to everyone who is interested in our work.

Our administration has now tightened and the financial year runs to 31 March, which is the period covered by this report, barring any activity after our last meeting on 10 Mar 2020 shortly after which the Coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic (COVID) lockdown came into being. On 23 March Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in a televised address to the nation, said that Britons should only go outside to buy food, to exercise once a day, or to go to work if they absolutely could not work from home. This year Terry Abbiss set up Dropbox facilities for both a Diary and Volunteer Time, the latter being important to help funding applications.

In January we set up our own local working group at the instigation of Paul, the Stowey Volunteers, with 12 volunteers planning to contribute 2 hours work on the 4th Tuesday of each month.

We followed the major planning application to Sedgemoor for erection of 109 dwellings on the Cricketer Farm site with access onto the A39, landscaping, parking, public open space and associated works. The application, number 36/19/00016, remains “under consideration”.

We commented on the Nether Stowey Neighbourhood Plan as consultees and as a result Objective 6 – to protect the character of the local landscape - includes the point under Policy E4 that development proposals should ensure the network of public rights of way are safeguarded. Millennium and Jubilee Woods, the Recreation Ground, The Mount, and Plot 173 are included in the Plan as Community Assets. At the invitation of the Nether Stowey Parish Council we submitted a brief paragraph on our organisation for a potential village Welcome Pack.

2 Finance and Funding

We received £400 from sales of wood from Stowey Wood with expenditure there of £200 for the construction of two “leaky dams”. Other net outgoings included £120 for mechanical clearance along the Bypass Wood and just under £100 each on Litter Picking equipment and public liability insurance.

In February Nether Stowey Parish Council awarded us a grant to cover both insurance and also use of the Portacabin on the Recreation Ground for Litter Picking Saturdays. With the exception of payment for use of The Portacabin in February, the last Litter Pick before virus lockdown, these expenses arise in the 2020-2021 financial year. Since then, as a result of COVID, we have been advised by Zurich that we have a two month extension on insurance cover, originally due May 2020 and now August.

£100 was raised from donations at Roy’s presentations to local societies. Janet and Nigel Phillips generously donated the information panel in the Old Gaol on The Cross, while we paid for printed leaflets and a dispenser for them.

Following discussions with Bill Jenman, indications were that we would be awarded some £5,000 from the £2.6m Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (originally “Reimagining The Manor”) with some flexibility and also additional input of volunteer time (£50 and £150 per day for amateur and professional volunteers respectively) for matched funding to cover: design by Terry Sackett, printing, mounting and installation of 7 interpretive panels - including on The Mount where use of the existing frame and artwork are hoped to be developed to reflect required edits; information leaflets for The Mount, Stowey and Millennium/Jubilee Woods; and also improvements to paths in Stowey Wood and by the stream on the Recreation Ground. The funding is expected to be in place in the forthcoming year.

With regard to possible funding for the Nether Stowey Bypass Wood, we have noted that NS Parish Council has £500 earmarked for this area from many years ago, which may be available to SGSG.

3 Green Spaces Work

Previous years' work planting spring bulbs in public places is showing good results.

Roy has sourced a supply of beech saplings for possible future use.

3.1 Recreation Ground

Nether Stowey Village Hall and Recreation Ground CIO (NSVH&RG CIO) own the Recreation Ground, for which SGSG advise as a sub-committee responsible for planning of work on the boundaries. SGSG uses the Portacabin on the Ground for the monthly litter picking briefings and sometimes for the monthly committee meetings.

Green Spaces work on the Ground this year included the extension of the compost bin to a second bay, clearance around the hedge saplings on the east boundary and cutting back of blackthorn, which thrives in its sunny position along the east hedge.

Other work included cutting back the area in front of the cemetery by the newly formed Stowey Volunteers. This was not the 'wild area' success it had been hoped for: the nettles grew so tall that they fell onto the winding path designed to attract children to see butterflies, and a wasps nest arose across one of the paths.

With thanks to the supervision of Kevin Hellier, the Ground's volunteer for overall maintenance and safety, and use of an outside contractor by the trustees, the stream was excavated at the downstream end to prevent flooding on the Old A39.

3.2 Stowey Wood

The wood is categorised as a Planted Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS), for which the Somerset County Council license to members of SGSG for its management remains in place. We believe we are delivering on our aims of increased biodiversity and benefit to the community. Much individual work within the Wood has been carried out by Roy as well as Richard's professional expertise and mechanical equipment that has been well called upon.

Locations, left and right within the Wood are referenced here as seen from the lower entrance to the Wood.

There has been no further felling and the great majority of the 420 saplings planted last year on the cleared right hand slope, including wild fruit trees by children from NS VC Primary School, remain in good health, with only one failure, and about 5% of the tree guards have been removed. Further additions are from self-seeded saplings. About 40% of the guards have been removed from the saplings planted at an earlier date on the other side of the stream.

A good variety of wild flowers now make a spectacular sight with the area open to sunlight, including foxgloves and, recently on the right hand slope above the picnic table, broom plants (*Cytisus scoparius*) as well as primroses, more of which have been planted by Roy, bluebells, wood anemones and opposite leaved golden saxifrage.

Maintenance work has included bramble reduction, clearance of the stream banks and also clearance of paths for walkers on the left hand slope. Two leaky dams have been put in place and the invasive Himalayan Balsam hopefully eliminated along the stream together with most of the rhododendron at the upper end of the Wood.

Old wire fencing and posts were removed from below the upper left boundary

3.3 Stowey Rocks Plantation

With permission of the Somerset County Council's leaseholders Remke and Richard Plowright, Roy has planted saplings on the slope before the downstream entrance to Stowey Wood.

3.4 The Mount,

Also known as Castle Mount, this is publicly accessible private land owned by Sue Aubrey and includes the remains of a motte-and-bailey castle, a Scheduled Ancient Monument under the eye of English Heritage/Historic England. There has been evidence of metal detecting, prohibited on all English Heritage sites, and a suitable sign put up accordingly. Planning permission for a private house to be built on the land below The Mount on the other side of Butcher's Lane was refused.

The green issues during the year have revolved around the re-growth of bracken in spite of Asulux spraying, removal of gorse and need for fencing upgrade/replacement, together with research into suitable fence post material, to ensure enclosure of the Herdwick sheep that keep the bracken at bay. Walkers and dogs are an on-going occasional risk to the wellbeing of the sheep.

Historic England agreed to cover a £5,000 4-year management plan to control bracken, gorse and scrub but wet weather in March delayed the start. Fencing funding is also to be officially approved from Bill Jenman's Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. AONB volunteer work can usefully be used as matched volunteer funding and the area is always of interest to our Green Spaces Group for volunteer tasks.

3.5 Millennium and Jubilee Woods

This has been a quiet year for work in these now well-established woods that were planted with the help of the NS VC Primary School. Blackthorn was cut back on the shady lower path of the Millennium Wood, beloved by walkers who have difficulty on slopes, where it had extended from a pretty archway over the path into the understory.

3.6 Nether Stowey Bypass Wood

This new project for the Green Spaces covers the area to the south of the A39 from Lime Street past the Village Hall and on to the Church centre and for which ownership is unclear. As far as the Parish Council has been able to establish this seems to be divided between Highways, Somerset County Council and Sedgemoor District Council. Roy wrote to the County Council suggesting a management arrangement, which they referred for advice to the Arboricultural Department. Chris Edwards of AONB, in favour of advancing the project, told us that the original planting was by the Woodland Trust but the source of more recent planting, where many of the tree guards have outgrown their purpose, is a mystery. In January Roy also solicited help from the SDC Tree Officer who was at the Trees for Somerset Conference.

Following Roy's approach, on 11 November NS Parish Council discussed the adoption of A39 Woodland Area a) *To consider taking a licence from the County Council for the wooded area adjacent to the A39* b) *If approved, to authorise the Chairman and Clerk to sign the documents on the Council's behalf*. But the County Council had not responded to the Clerk's request for information so it was agreed to consider this proposal at a later date, when the information required was available.

We decided to continue with the project informally and in September started by cutting brambles off trees and removing the redundant tree guards. We celebrated Big Climate Fightback Day on Saturday 30 November by inviting The Willing to provide and plant saplings. 14 people planted 66 saplings. This followed mechanical clearance along the path, well used by dog walkers and causing some criticism as the ground was sodden and consequently much churned up. We humbly issued an apology via the Quantock Messenger.

4 Litter picking

The monthly 3rd Saturday litter picks in Nether and Over Stowey, briefing and feedback at the Portacabin with tea or coffee, sometimes biscuits and very occasionally CAKE (thanks to Jo Scoins of RG) continued successfully with thanks to Sedgemoor Clean Surroundings team for taking the collected rubbish to their Bridgwater depot and dealing directly with items such as dead foxes and very large tyres in inaccessible places. Thanks also to Richard for his

utility truck and storage of bags and sometimes large items at Parsonage Farm pending collection.

From 11 pickers on the roll at the end of March 2019 we finished the year with 23, including 4 young ones. Some are regular attenders, some occasional and some do their own thing, particularly if they can't make the Saturday pick.

13 Brownies (with their Brown Owls) joined us for a special Litter Pick in September, thus qualifying for a 'badge'. Each Brownie was presented with a SGSG certificate.

We made 10 Saturday group collections over the financial year, having excluded Easter 2019 and cancelling March 2020 because of COVID restrictions. Group sessions averaged a haul of 10 bags per session, plus exceptionally large, heavy and unbagable items. The Saturday group members have not been asked to separate the waste they collect for recycling although some members choose to do so by removing the recyclable material from the Sedgemoor bags into their weekly home collections.

Our route list was modified and improved by Paul and will be put into place when we return to normal life after COVID.

5 Events, Community Projects, School liaison, Working Parties

5.1 Working parties

Taunton Midweek Volunteers

Taunton Mid-week Volunteers returned this year and worked with us in Stowey Wood in August and again in December - when their party of over a dozen volunteers brought excellent and imaginative picnic Christmas lunches that they kindly shared with us in the Portacabin.

In their two visits they cleared brambles and growth round the saplings as well as opening up the left slope mid-level path. A third visit was defeated by the arrival of COVID.

Quantock Countryside Volunteers

The Quantock Countryside Volunteers (QVC) joined us in Stowey Wood for a day in late March 2019, just before the beginning of this financial year.

Duke of Edinburgh Award groups

Following last year's visit, Bryony Uglow arranged an August D of E group from Nettlecombe to return to Stowey Wood again. They removed old wire fencing and posts from the upper level right bank of the Wood.

John Muir Family Day groups

Huw Davis of Nettlecombe returned again this year with a group, including a 3 year old, that worked successfully in Stowey Woods - clearing paths, stream edge and, most popularly, building a bridge across the stream.

The Willing

Roy recruited the willing from his wide circles of contact on several occasions throughout the year, both for work in Stowey Wood and in particular for our new tree project in the Nether Stowey Bypass Wood.

Stowey Volunteers

We successfully completed two sessions of work on the northwest corner of the Recreation Ground, following which Dave Davison returned alone and completed the task of mechanical strimming. The following month's plan to remove rhododendron in Stowey Wood were defeated by the arrival of the COVID lockdown – Roy carried out that task on his own.

5.2 School liaison

Our work in collaboration with Nether Stowey VC Primary School continued this year, thanks to Terry Abbiss, with a year groups 4 and 5 (9/10 year olds) November walk through the village to illustrate "Human effects on the environment". A spring event in March, planned by Terry with class teacher Lesley Bowditch to be natural history orientated, was cancelled with the arrival of the COVID lockdown.

5.3 Nettlecombe Court Field Centre of the Field Studies Council

Following Terry's initiative in interesting Nettlecombe in our work in Stowey Wood, Bryony Uglow and her colleagues have maintained the contact this year with return of the Duke of Edinburgh and John Muir Family group working parties. Bryony carried out a preliminary survey planned to be repeated a couple of times a year (ideally every season) to record long-term changes in the vegetation.

5.4 Nether Stowey Parish

After meeting to discuss the possibility of wild flower areas in the Parish, at the suggestion of Nether Stowey Parish Council's John Roberts, Chairman, and Kevin Ferriday, the Green Spaces willingly committed to the project as a community group eligible for funding. It is not considered an easily achievable project and the Council intended to make contact with relevant authorities and start with a small area at the end of Audley Close, near the far end of Butcher's Lane.

5.5 Party in the Park

The Green Spaces manned a stall at the annual Party in the Park in June on the Recreation Ground, with the objective of publicising and raising interest in our activities and exploring possible sources of local funding. We attracted visitors to a well organised display but failed to raise enthusiasm for purchasing Stowey Wood kindling or building bug hotels from the 24 pallets that were donated by the NSVH&RG CIO and of which 12 remain in storage at Hockpitt Farm.

5.6 Presentations

Stowey Wood in particular and the Green Spaces in general were promoted by Roy's presentations to four local groups over the year, including the Spaxton Society. The voluntary contributions raised boosted our funds.

5.7 Stowey Green Spaces and Stowey Walking

Members from Stowey Walking and Green Spaces, Nether Stowey Parish Council, the AONB and SCC Rights of Way gathered on The Cross to celebrate the installation of the new interpretation board giving information about places in and around the village, designed by Terry Sackett for the two organisations and funded by Nigel and Janet Phillips.

This event coincided with the launch of the Castles and Coast Way linking Nether Stowey with Stogursey and on to the England Coast Path at Shurton, for which a new signpost on The Cross points to the routes. Somerset County Council Rights of Way Team designed the new route, with funding contribution from EDF Energy.

5.8 Radio Bristol and Radio Somerset

In December Roy, Terry Sackett, Sarah Joy, Phil Peckham and Judith all contributed to the live show that went out from 12.30-12.45 about Nether Stowey. Radio Somerset's Andy Bennett returned in spring and interviewed Judith outside Coleridge Cottage for his afternoon show. Both occasions publicised the Green Spaces Group activities.

5.9 Trees for Somerset Conference

Members of our group attended this all-day event in January, organised by the group 'Reimagining the Levels'

5.10 The Somerset Nature Conference

Roy attended this event in February.

5.11 Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean

Arranged exceptionally on the 4th Saturday of March in collaboration with Stowey Walking and Walkers are Welcome as part of the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean, which had been widely publicised locally with the help of Terry Sackett's poster design, the event had to be postponed due to COVID.

6 Signage and other publicity

Our Facebook presence, stoweygreenspaces, continues and Rosie updates this as we request. We also have a tab, Stowey Green Spaces Group, on the Nether Stowey Recreation Ground website where this report will be posted when approved.

The Quantock Messenger regularly publishes our reports and also lists our Group on its Clubs & Societies page as well as Litter Pick days in its Diary Dates.

6.1 The Old Gaol on The Cross

With thanks to the Parish Council, The Old Gaol has been made home to the joint Green Spaces and Stowey Walking interpretation board, designed by Terry Sackett to point viewers towards the green spaces and walks rather than overwhelm them with information, as well as to the Recreation Ground fliers that Terry also designed. Following our suggestion, the Parish Council has also funded and placed a blue and white tourist information ‘i’ sign on the outside of the Old Gaol.

7 **Summary Accounts 01 May 2018 to 31 March 2020**

INCOME (£)

Donations

Spring & Autumn walks in 2018	112.10	
From talks to Societies	140.00	
Gift from a project	200.00	
Payment for the Gaol sign	<u>198.94</u>	651.04

Grants

From AONB ref.: GQLDF2018-048		1107.60
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Sales

Six loads of timber from Stowey Wood	600.00	
Hi-vis jacket	5.00	
Three picker sticks and 1 sack ring	<u>26.00</u>	631.00

Total Income **£2389.64**

EXPENSES

Tree planting guards and stakes		1107.60
Litter Picker sticks (3 lots)		100.50
Sack rings		47.94
Public & Liability Insurance		99.31
Sign for Gaol		198.94
Three place Leaflet Dispenser		12.84
Hire of Recreation Ground Portacabin (2x)		42.00
Construction of 2 "Leaky" Dams in Stowey Wood		200.00
Topping grass and bramble on the A39 by-pass verge		<u>120.00</u>

Total Expenses **£1929.13**

INCOME less EXPENDITURE = £460.51

ADD balance of Parish Council Grant ((£176.00) and monies in Bank Account = £636.51

T.P. Abbiss, Treasurer April 16th 2020

8 APPENDIX

8.1 Objectives

Stowey Green Spaces Group grew from an initial brief in late 2016 to advise on a long-term strategy for care of the trees, rough grass and undergrowth, hedges and stream on the Recreation Ground. The Group quickly expanded its horizons to include the green spaces of the surrounding areas and linking routes between them in order to maximise community interest and introduce visitors to our wider surroundings. Our objectives are to:

- Identify, assess and help protect and enhance the natural and developed landscape and features of the landscape in the local area;
- Assist in the long term management of local natural resources especially land based;
- Take a role in building awareness, educating residents and visitors at the local level about the natural environment and introducing the countryside to people who may be hesitant to 'use' it because of unfamiliarity with countryside practice;
- Take on local projects to achieve the above objectives;
- Gather and catalogue information on the natural environment;
- Engage with local schools and colleges - the next generations - to achieve the above objectives;
- Offer advice and recommendations for best management practices on public and private lands as requested;
- Liaise with Nether and Over Stowey Parish Councils, the Quantock AONB, Somerset County Council, Somerset Wildlife Trust, the Woodland Trust and others on green space issues;
- Keep public areas and roadsides in and around Nether and Over Stowey clear of litter, in liaison with Sedgemoor District Council.

8.2 Green Spaces

Nether Stowey Recreation Ground; Millennium and Jubilee Woods; Stowey Wood; Castle Mount; Public Rights of Way (footpaths and bridleways); Area between Banneson Road and Memorial Gate; Nether Stowey Plot 173; The Old A39; The Mount; Butchers Lane; The pedestrian lanes throughout Nether Stowey; Barn Close; Waterways; Rough woodland between RG and A39; Village Hall area, until it moves to the Recreation Ground; Nether Stowey Bypass Wood; Over Stowey Cricket field; any other green areas in the locality of Nether and Over Stowey.

8.3 Flora and fauna sighted in Stowey Wood

- **Birds:** Great spotted woodpeckers; Willow warblers; Blackcaps; Nuthatches; Cuckoo; Green Woodpecker; Chiffchaff; Dunnock; Wren.
- **Butterflies:** Yellow Brimstone; Small Tortoiseshell; Orange Tip; Speckled Wood; Meadow Brown; Gatekeeper; Red Admiral.
- **Wild flowers** including: foxgloves; broom (*Cytisus scoparius*); primroses; bluebells; wood anemones; opposite leaved golden saxifrage.

8.4 Wish list tasks for 2020-2021

- Stowey Wood:
 - Organisation of a baseline survey of flora and fauna
 - Update of management plan
 - Outstanding due to interruption of COVID VIRUS lockdown: Construction of steps connecting lower and upper paths on left hand slope; installation of non-slip material on the bridge
 - Publicity - information that was on NS PC website seems to have migrated – needs to be comprehensively returned!
- Nether Stowey By-pass Wood
 - Bramble clearing