

## **FORCE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2014 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome and thank you for coming to our eleventh Annual General Meeting. I will be giving a short report on the year to April 2014 followed by an update on the pollution issues that have been a feature of the last few years.

One of the reasons this report is shortened is due to the changes in structure that we have been implementing over the last year or so, leading to the creation of seven separate portfolio managers. These portfolios – and the people responsible for them - are set out in your notes for the meeting, and selected portfolio reports will follow my presentation. You may note that not all the roles are taken, and each portfolio leader would I am sure welcome support, so please talk to the relevant person if you are interested in supporting them.

The main purpose of moving to this portfolio structure has been to better share the work load as our activities have grown – and I have to say, even though it is still early days, that Trustees have stepped up to the task and as a result we are able to do a lot more.

For the same reason we actively seek partnerships with other organisations that have complementary interests and values. Our partnership with the Conservation Volunteers (TCV), for example, has blossomed in the last year and whereas we only deliver one volunteer day per month ourselves, this partnership delivers two to three volunteer events per week along the Crane valley.

We have been really impressed at how much volunteers can do and how well they do it. The cumulative benefit of manual working by relatively few people can be seen throughout the valley – and for this reason we look for a significant part of all our contract work to be delivered through volunteer groups such as TCV. It is important that the volunteers also benefit from this – and we are seeking to design our volunteer events to support the needs and wishes of volunteers.

We also have a good network of (mostly) local suppliers, working with us on a contract basis and providing skills such as leaflet production, outdoor teaching, bridge manufacture and chain saw sculpting.

Our role as part of the wider Crane Valley Partnership is of crucial importance to us – linking with all the key parties throughout the catchment. Therefore I am delighted that Ilse Steyl, CVP project officer, is here tonight and will be presenting to us after the break. The Partnership has been essential to several major projects that we started in the last year.

We worked with the Partnership to secure £375,000 from the GLA through the Big Green Fund and, led by the sterling efforts from Martin, we are now over halfway through delivering our parts of this project. The Partnership has also helped with the creation of a network of Citizen Scientists, in a project called “Citizen Crane”. Eleven monitoring sites are collecting monthly data and we have already identified several chronic pollution problems and reported these to the Environment Agency and Thames Water.

The Outdoor Education Programme under Frances continues to go from strength to strength, and it has been a great pleasure to witness so many children enjoying learning outdoors and getting so much from it.

Finally, and most importantly, I come to you our members. We are very grateful for your continued support – last year we celebrated our membership growing above 500 for the first time and this number is of great importance, not least in conferring legitimacy to our negotiations with statutory organisations. We also have over 350 followers on Facebook – providing valuable interaction and feedback with local people.

So thanks again to members, Trustees, partners and other supporters. As always it has been our combined efforts that have made a difference.

Rob Gray  
Chair of FORCE  
November 2014