

EAST GRINSTEAD MEMORIAL ESTATE

APRIL 2023 NEWSLETTER

Writing this in mid-March, and after walking through the woods yesterday, it made me wonder where the data for the recent climate reports has come from – apparently, we have had an unseasonably dry winter period with portents of water shortages later in the year, but who would believe it given the soggiessness of the ground underfoot throughout the woods and playing fields? My intention was to include in this letter some cute photo's of newly flowering plant life to encourage us all to venture out and enjoy a spot of nature, but very little to show after the recent cold snap. If reading this results in you proving me wrong, I'd be delighted!

Grants

We are now in our annual grant-making season and it caused me to reflect upon the wider contribution of the Estate and its members. Last year, given the trials of the immediate post-covid world, your Board increased our donations by 50% to £30,000 for the benefit of local causes (<https://www.egmel.co.uk/grants/>), and one of those beneficiaries was the Conservators of Ashdown Forest. As a consequence, on a blustery day in January, we were invited to the unveiling of the newly installed defibrillator at the Forest Visitor Centre which our grant of £1,000 had enabled. It was a joy to see that life-saving piece of equipment in place and made me wonder where else such machines were located. Do you know where to find one on the Memorial Estate? (Answer at the bottom of this newsletter). If you know of a local cause worthy of our financial support, then please encourage them to make an approach by 31 March annually to grants@egmel.co.uk with details of why you believe that organisation should be considered.

Ashplats Conservation Group

The volunteers at the Ashplats Conservation Group <https://ashplats.org> have been as busy as ever and one of the aspects they have focussed upon of late has been our little-seen dormouse population. Work was undertaken back in 2015 installing a range of nesting boxes, and the group are now looking to protect the dormouse presence by providing a new suite of nesting tubes for when the little critters come out of hibernation in the next month or two. This is a lot easier to write than to achieve as I gather there are various compliance issues to address. The Trust is considering how best we can help, but in the meantime, here is a rare photo captured in 2015:



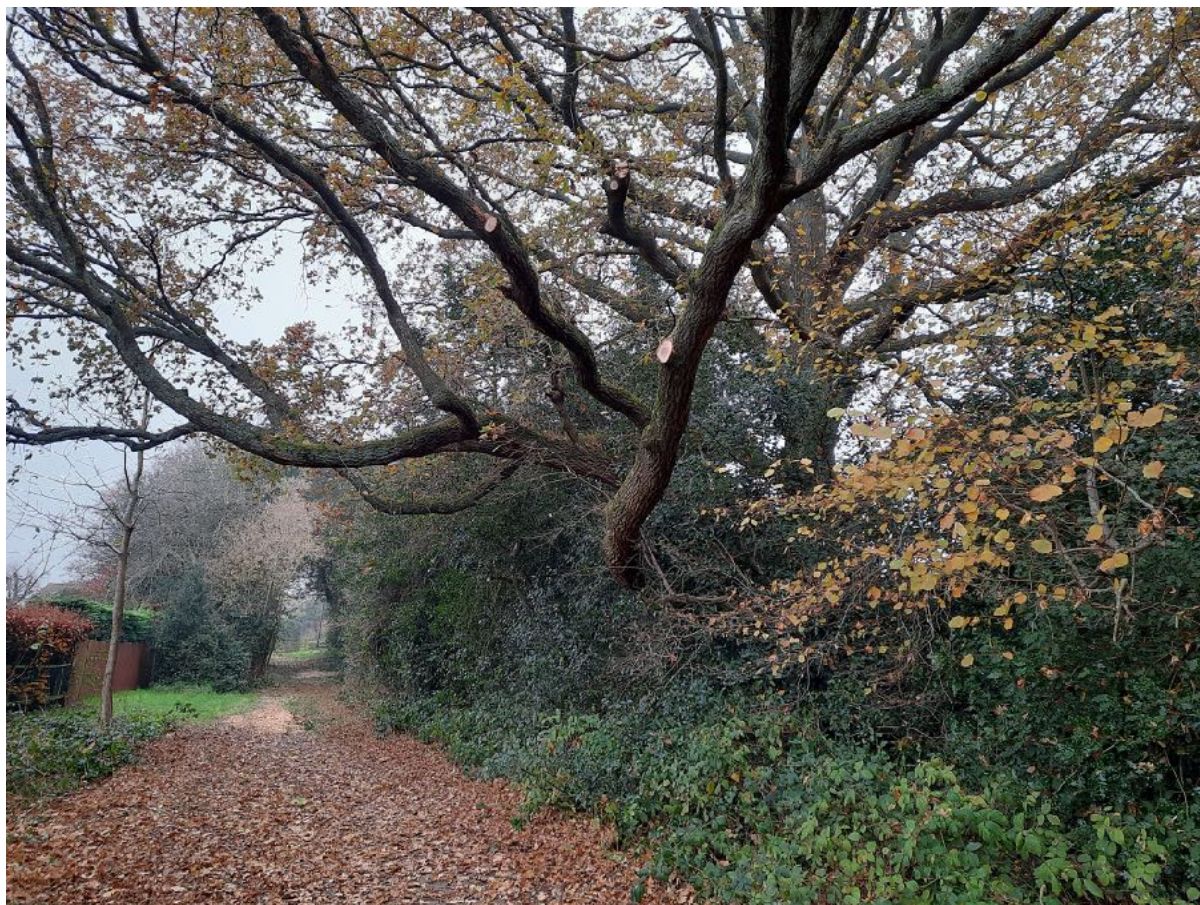
Dormouse captured on camera (see tail top centre)

Governance

Board development continues with much-needed policy development being spearheaded by Chris Nunn. Why, I hear you ask? The answer lies in the fact that as a company and registered charity, we as directors are legally required to ensure we operate safely and cost effectively to safeguard the assets and reputation of the charity and comply with modern UK governance standards. Historically, we have relied on the professionalism of our Board to guide us through the challenges faced from time to time, ensuring we apply the highest of business and ethical considerations to our decision making. Whilst inherently, the charity is a simple entity with no employees, it does have significant assets entrusted to it. Having an established and codified set of procedures and authorities that are adhered to, not only safeguards the charity and its assets going forward, but its volunteer Directors as well. The Board also recognises the work undertaken recently by our Imberhorne Students in that we need to enhance our web/social media presence. Accordingly, we are actively seeking additional volunteer support to take the lead on raising the profile of the Estate to ensure we gain traction for further improvement and protections in the years ahead. If you know anyone willing to help in this area, we would be delighted to hear from you chair@egmel.co.uk

Mid Sussex District Council

Turning to developments over the last four months with our principle tenant Mid Sussex District Council, we had encouraging signs of progress in December when they cleared the Holtye Track back to previously agreed width parameters, having successfully negotiated tree planning requirements to effect the work. Keeping the track to these limits is critical to the health of the woods and will allow contractor access for much overdue and necessary maintenance activity.



The Holtye track after recent sensitive tree surgery and scrub clearance

One aspect of potential progress that is being hindered is that of obtaining permission from the agents acting for the management company of the Bluebell Estate to, at no cost, widen the access gates on to the Holtye Track where it bisects Stirling Way. If any member has any influence in this area, we would love to hear from them chair@egmel.co.uk Other than the track clearance progress, MSDC have been inauspiciously quiet of late – we have been promised details on their proposals for boardwalks in the woods and also for clarity on the finances emanating from SANG income and expenditure, but at the time of writing the silence is pronounced. There are concerns the Charity has held for some years, echoed by members at last

year's AGM, that the 10year plan committed to by MSDC at the time of the current lease negotiations, has in large part failed to deliver its promise, and nor has any subsequent iteration. Members will be aware of the difficulties your Board has encountered over a number of years in holding MSDC to account for this lack of progress, and as a consequence, in the autumn your Board enlisted the support of a firm of specialist lawyers to advise how best to ensure planned progress is delivered by the Council. We have received advice and will be considering the way forward at our forthcoming Board meeting.

Looking forward to some Spring warmth!

Lloyd Richards

Chair

- A. The defibrillator is housed on the rear elevation of the toilet block diagonally opposite the main entrance to East Court