

The Friends of Harmers Wood newsletter February 2026



Introduction

It is about 6 months since we met at the Helsby Community Centre to set up a new committee to manage Harmers Wood. Our case was unusual in that all except one of the previous committee, including all the officers, resigned at once leaving a brand new committee to navigate the various tasks of managing the wood.

The outgoing committee officers Julie Hunt, Theresa Summers and Maureen Parker guided us as much as they could but it was some time before we were able to meet as a committee fully recognised by both Companies House and the Charity Commission.

By that time, we had received one resignation so the current trustees are:

- Peter Llewellyn (Chair)
- Donna Jackson (Vice Chair)
- Andrew Jackson (Treasurer)
- Gill Samson (Minuting secretary)
- Suzanne Knight
- Michelle Hillyer
- Tom Smith
- Vince Duff

Managing the Wood

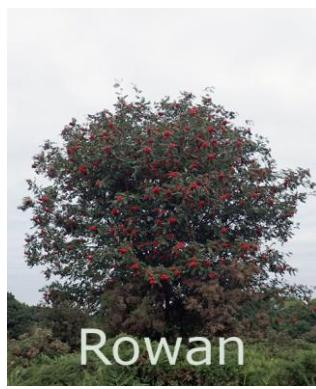
The day-to-day maintenance is managed by Bob Hughes, David George and Ian Hogan who have done a splendid job for years now. The sorts of regular maintenance they do includes checking fence posts and replacing where necessary, cutting down bracken or any growth encroaching on the footpaths. They also check the footpaths and woodland generally after stormy weather for broken branches, fallen trees etc. and look out for possible vandalism, damage or wear on seats and picnic tables.

They remove certain shrubs or trees which could become a nuisance. Believe it or not, the native Holly Tree (*Ilex aquifolium*) seeds readily in Harmers Wood and can become a nuisance so Holly along with one or two other species, are regularly removed.

The Condition of Harmers Wood

Our vice chair, Donna Jackson, invited a woodland expert from Cheshire West and Chester Council to come and look at Harmers Wood and give his opinion. He told us that he had expected to find some problems and was pleasantly surprised at the disease-free condition of the wood. This isn't a lucky accident. Our woodland management team above know what they are doing and have kept the wood in good condition, removing partially broken branches which can harbour disease.

Mr Pimborough, the woodland expert, also suggested that we do a survey to find out exactly what species we have growing there and to inform future management. That task has been taken on by Tom Smith one of our trustees. Tom is an ecologist and together with some colleagues and friends has already started the surveys with further updates to be undertaken during spring and summer. We knew beforehand that the dominant tree species were Sessile Oak and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus petraea* and *Quercus robur*), Silver Birch and Downy Birch (*Betula pendula* and *Betula pubescens*) and Rowan or Mountain Ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*) but there are other trees as well. There are very few herbaceous species within the wood apart from some grasses, ferns such



as Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*).

The biggest range of wild plants is at the edge of the wood. The dominant plant of the understory though is Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) which we do need to thin down somehow. This is not an easy task as this plant produces a network of roots and can send up shoots from anywhere.



Our expert recommended removing the decorative, randomly planted species like garden daffodils to take the wood to a natural state of tree and plant population. Although similar woods to Harmers Wood have Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) growing in them, he did not recommend planting them. It was tried in the past but most of the planted bluebells failed to thrive. There are a few at the entrance.

Tom has also begun to identify some of the fungi and moths which can be found in the wood, many of which appear in the Autumn. Some of the moths are shown on our website: https://www.harmerswood.org/3_pages/tomsblog_new.html and further updates on species identified will be provided on the website and Facebook group ('Friends of Harmers Wood') during the coming years as monitoring gets underway



Vandalism

We were surprised and disappointed to find that someone had deliberately screwed a long screw into one of the picnic bench seats. The long screw had been deliberately placed from the underneath so that the pointed end was protruding about 40 millimetres but not very visible. Obviously, this could have hurt someone or caused a tear in their clothes. It has been removed now but it wasn't straightforward.

If you see anyone looking suspicious and apparently messing with our tables, seats or benches please contact us by email: harmerswood@yahoo.com

Income

You probably know that that Harmers Wood has no regular source of income and relies on grants and donations to cover expenses such as maintenance, tools, insurance and administrative costs.

We were grateful to the Helsby Village Society who nominated Harmers Wood as a worthy recipient of some of their funds when their society closed last year. Their allocation of £250 was very welcome. We were also pleased to receive a charitable donation from RSK for £250 too. Neither of these donations were expected so they have provided a welcome boost to our funds.

Before that, our local Green Councillor Chris Copeman, had approved a significant allocation from a fund he controls in 2025 and has promised the same for 2026. Thank you, Chris, your help has been much appreciated.

Regular Expenditure

Surely there can't be much expense looking after a wood where people just use footpaths can there?

It surprised me to see how much we have had to pay out for service invisible to the woodland user.

The first is insurance. As you know our eight acre woodland has four quarries at least one of which could pose a significant danger to walkers were it not fenced off. We pay about £180 per year for public liability insurance. Some keen climbers also use the Classroom Quarry walls for practice but are expected to have their own insurance according to advice we have received.

Occasionally, we need to pay for new tools to help maintain the wood and replace fence posts. It surprised us to have to pay several bills to Companies House just for completing their legally required administrative procedures.

Future Expenditure

In the previous paragraph I suggested that climbers using the Classroom Quarry are expected to have their own insurance. We need to erect a notice saying this explicitly so there can be no dispute should there be an uninsured accident.

In addition, we need to place some “Danger Cliff Edge” signs on the fencing near the footpath next to Ben’s Quarry where there are sheer drops to the bottom and no easy way out.

Finally, the exit onto the road near the farm is not as safe as it could be particularly for elderly people (like me) and it needs to be wider and have at least one handrail.

As climate change has already brought wetter winters to Britain and a greater frequency of storms with high winds, Harmers Wood occasionally suffers major damage to its trees beyond the scope of our regular maintenance team. If we need to remove high up branches or fell trees made dangerous by storm damage, we would have to hire specialist contractors. This has happened in the past and it can be expensive but is unpredictable so we need to keep a certain amount of cash in the bank to cover such possibilities.

The Friends of Harmers Wood Trust Governance

This is the boring bit. Sorry.

Our current constitution comprises two main parts. One part assumes we are trustees of a registered charity and the other assumes we have a board of directors with a company secretary.

The two constitutional parts are not reconciled so that they have different quorums for meetings and different requirements for regular meetings of trustees/directors. Yet there are no time limits on the length a trustee can remain in post. This is a consequence of the need to be a liability limited organisation at the time it was set up. At that time, it was the only way of limiting the liability of volunteer trustees

These days, a relatively new organisation run only by the Charity Commission called a **Charitable Incorporated Organisation** (CIO) covers all the needs we currently have. The trustees therefore would like The Friends of Harmers Wood Trust to become a CIO which will make us responsible only to the Charity Commission. It also allows us to

select some aspects of the constitution ourselves and will cut out all of the annual expenditure which Companies House currently requires.

To this end we (Donna and Andrew Jackson) have started to adapt one of the templates supplied by the Charity Commission and this will shortly be put to the trustees for formal approval. We will publish the proposed new constitution on the website, probably within a month or so and arrange an extraordinary Annual General Meeting so that all trustees, members and any interested members of the public, can have a say in the next steps.

Assuming such a meeting approves the proposal of the new constitution, we will be in a good position to submit our application to become a CIO. We think this could all be achieved before the first anniversary (31st July 2026) of the new trustees taking on the management of Harmers Wood in 2025.

Should the Charity Commission approve our application to become a CIO we will have to dissolve the old Charity but we understand that the Charity Commission will contact Companies House on our behalf and remove Harmers Wood as a limited company from their records. (Hooray)

It would be our intention to hold another Annual General Meeting around 31st July 2026 at which, according to the new CIO constitution, all current trustees would have to resign and submit themselves to the meeting for re-election. This must happen only on the first AGM after the CIO has been set up.

Finally.....

I hope this newsletter has been useful to you. If you have any suggestions for other information connected with Harmers Wood which you would like to receive, then email me at harmerswood@yahoo.com.

Peter Llewellyn February 2026

