**ANNUAL WARP REPORT FOR PARISH COUNCIL 2021**

We have had a year of mixed fortunes. With the announcement of the first Covid 19 Lockdown our regular volunteer days had to be halted. However, with a bit of ingenuity, various maintenance requirements were achieved by asking trusted volunteers to carry out specific tasks on their own. Sheep huts were renovated, tree defences were erected and an electric fence was installed around the pond on the island. This fence was required as a term of the funding granted by FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) who were tasked with providing suitable habitat for great crested newts. The newts like to have tall vegetation around their breeding ponds so we need to prevent sheep grazing too close to it. All the work was in sheep grazing areas to which the public does not have access so maintaining adequate social distancing was not a difficulty.

We are very grateful to the Parish Council for the continued funding for contractors to carry out regular maintenance work. The contractors continued to work throughout the pandemic and so overall the site has been kept looking neat and tidy.

The Washpool has become increasingly popular during the pandemic with an observable rise in visitors. We have noticed that there are many new visitors from outside the village (they often ask for directions). They have been very complementary, expressing surprise and delight at finding such a delightful spot. The presence of our friendly sheep has made it particularly attractive to young families. Presumably with so many popular attractions currently closed, a visit to see the sheep provides a welcome alternative.

The two stretches of boardwalk in the main part of Washpool are showing signs of age and we had been advised that they wouldn't last another season. We decided we would like to replace them with banked up paths so as not to have the problem reoccur in years to come. This proved to be a cheaper option than replacing with new boardwalk but was still prohibitively expensive. Happily we have managed to secure the necessary funding from the Wiltshire community fund (thanks Clair for identifying this grant for us). We are awaiting a date from Adam Webb (THWC Group) as to when he can start work on this project but we expect it to be sometime this year.

The grant will cover replacing the boardwalk, as well as funding some direction signs to Washpool, updating of our leaflet and the installation of a pipe to divert a small amount of water from the stream to the lower pond in the hopes of making it hold water a little longer in the season; thus creating a dipping pond for children. It also provides some money for repairs to the main track into Washpool which suffers damage from runoff from the main track in heavy rain.

Unfortunately the amount I requested for track repairs turned out to be woefully inadequate when Thames Water had major problems at the sewage pumping station. They had to hose mud off the tankers they were using before leaving they left the site and went onto public roads. As a result there was a continuous heavy flow of water out of the Butts Road Business Unit car park and down our track to the stream which made the state of our track considerably worse. I am collaborating with the owner of the business units and Burderop estate to obtain compensation from Thames Water for repairs.

Now that the current restrictions have eased we will have an informal management team meeting on site to discuss new projects and how to restart our volunteer operations again.

We envisage a busy but productive year ahead.

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers to come and join us helping to keep Washpool looking lovely. All being well we will soon be able to re-establish our regular Volunteer Days, usually on the 3rd Sunday in the months of January, March, May, July, September, and November although we do sometimes organise extra days when there is more to do. It is a very social occasion with tea, coffee and homemade cakes provided to power the work.

Some but by no means all the work is physically challenging and we try our best to find something to suit everyone's ability. We normally work from 10.00am until 2.30pm but you don't need to commit to the whole day. Even if you can only spare the odd hour we will still be pleased to see you. We can certainly recommend a day spent working with us in Washpool to lift your mood and I guess most of us could do with that at the moment.

If you are interested please send an email to washpool@gmail.com and we will get in touch with details of our next Volunteer day.

If this sounds a little too energetic but you would still like to support us, we have Friends of Washpool. For this you pay an annual subscription of £5 for an individual or £10 for couples and families. In return for this you will be invited to special events arranged from time to time throughout the year. We use the funds generated by Friends of Washpool to pay for small projects and expenses such as plants, seeds and items for the sheep.

If you are interested in becoming a Friend please complete the Friends application form.

*WARP Management Team*