

**Friends of Pitts Wood
Report to Quinton Ward Forum 15.11.22**

1. How Friends of Pitts Wood were badly mislead by BCC /the City Solicitors

On 6th September 2018 Peter Beck, Cllr Kate Booth and BCC Simon Needle met with the BCC City Solicitor. The City Solicitor suggested, and it was agreed, that Quinton Ward Forum would try and negotiate with Woodhouse Academy Trust in order to re-establish a Friends Group who would re-assume responsibility for managing Pitts Wood and would also encourage local community access to the Wood.

Therefore at the Ward Forum meeting of the 9th of March 2019 Cllr. Kate Booth asked Peter Beck to coordinate a Pitts Wood Focus/Steering Group 1) to negotiate with Woodhouse Primary Academy Head Teacher and 2) re-establish a constituted FoPW.

However the BCC City Solicitor had failed to understand that legally this negotiation should be with The Academy Trust and not Woodhouse Primary Academy! Totally misled we re-established a Friends Group, negotiated with the School Head Teacher (including a constitution approved by him), and spent three years carrying out nature conservation work (the wood had been largely neglected/inappropriately managed since the school had become an Academy in 2013) and encouraging community access.

All appeared fine but how wrong we were! On 17th January this year, FoPW applied for funding from Severn Trent Community Fund for a Water Project at the wood (with the work to be carried out by the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country). Out of the blue on 27th January the Academy Trust declared that 1) the Head Teacher of Woodhouse Primary Academy had no authority to negotiate with FoPW and take decisions about the wood; 2) they were very concerned about the local community being allowed access to the wood; 3) they felt that the wood was presently too dangerous for children as it had water features and they instructed the Head Teacher to put up notices alerting the public of the risk, that the wood was private and warning the local community to keep out. In subsequent discussion with the Academy Trust, they insisted that any grant monies should go into their bank account and not that of FoPW. It also transpired that their main concern was the issue of public liability.

However, in any case Severn Trent was not able to release of the grant money to FoPW because the consent of the Pitts Wood land owner (i.e either the Academy Trust or BCC) was withheld. Finally on 14th April, FoPW were informed that the Academy Trust wanted to end their lease of the wood and transfer it back to BCC. Protracted negotiations ensued between the Academy Trust and BCC.

The present situation, as far as we are aware, is that Academy Trust has approached the Department for Education for permission to relinquish the lease on the wood (which is regarded as an “asset”). In the meantime the Water Project remains on hold. It is not clear whether Severn Trent will be able to give FoPW

unlimited time to obtain the written consent of the Landowner. Severn Trent also require written confirmation regarding community access to the wood.

Peter Beck

2. MOVING FORWARD AT PITTS WOOD

The transfer of the lease of Pitts Wood back to the Council will invalidate our current constitution. With this in mind, the existing FoPW Management Group will be meeting on 17th November to consider our position and to determine the way forward for the Friends Group.

We anticipate that a new constitution will have to be devised, this time with Birmingham City Council. Overall, however, our aims and objectives should remain the same in terms of managing and developing Pitts Wood in accordance with its status as an ancient woodland, promoting the environmental education of children, and restoring community involvement and community access to the wood. A public meeting will have to be convened in due course in order for the Friends Group to be properly constituted.

Our occasional open days always prove popular and result in lots of lots of visits particularly from parents of children at Woodhouse Primary Academy. Also, when working in the wood we leave the gate unlocked so people can have a look round.

However, whilst we have a core band of volunteers, we do not have many recruits from amongst the residents whose houses border the wood and who benefit from good air quality and the sight and sound of birds. We really need more help to get the wood back to a healthy state, especially younger people. We have so far promoted Pitts Wood within Quinton and via our Facebook page, but should we be asking further out into the constituency? Our open meeting for the new constitution will be publicised widely, but should we do more? How can we create more interest?

Meanwhile we keep our fingers crossed that the funding is released from Severn Trent Community Fund and that the Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust are able to start on the water project in the New Year. This will certainly give us heart and encouragement.

Pitts Wood is a real gem. Let's ensure its future.

Clare Sandercock