

FOURTEEN years ago, Fishers Field was a derelict patch of earth earmarked for development. Today it's a thriving haven for wildlife and a focus for all the community, thanks to the work of the Friends group.



Friends of Fishers Field with mayor of Hertsmere Cllr Pat Strack and Hertsmere MP James Clappison. Picture courtesy of CMS

When plans were first mooted to build on Fishers Field in 1994, there was widespread concern among local residents.

Thanks to the drive and initiative of two residents— Joe Wiggs and Muriel Halsall – a campaign was started to save the site, which lies within the Green Belt and Watling Chase Community Forest, and turn it into a nature reserve. Working with land-owners Hertsmere Borough Council (HBC), their campaign came to fruition in 1998, when two hectares were granted Local Nature Reserve status.

The Friends of Fisher Fields was set up to help enhance the site for the benefit of local wildlife and the enjoyment of the public.

Today, a core team of eight volunteers work closely with HBC and the Countryside Management Service (CMS) and draw on a large pool of willing helpers to attend work sessions when areas need to be cleared or trees planted.

The Friends have been instrumental in helping Fishers Field Nature Reserve win the Green Flag Community Award four times in a row.

Bushey-based master blacksmith Steve Rook has been involved with the Friends for eight years, and is its current chairman.

He created the reserve's four forged steel benches at his workshop Newlyn Forge in Bushey Hall Road.

He said: "People can walk around the nature reserve or sit and contemplate. During the summer, there is always a lot of stuff happening, but it is also just a pleasant place to sit."

“So often these days, people’s gardens are so spick and span, they don’t actually attract much wildlife. It is different at Fishers Field. There’s always lots to see.”

The Friends have planted more than 500 trees on site, as well as hedgerows along the southern and western boundaries. In 2001 they worked with the CMS to create wildflower meadow and in August 2010 created a pond.

Plans are now afoot to create bee hives at the reserve in a bid to boost the local bee population.

Bee numbers across the UK have plummeted in recent years because of a loss of habitat, disease and changing environmental and climate conditions. Their decline impacts on humans as bee pollination is vital in agriculture.

Though no inventory has been completed of the wildlife at the site, foxes, rabbits, muntjac deer, dragonflies, green woodpeckers and shrews, have been spotted there.

Friends secretary Betty McBean said: “I think the way the world is at the moment - everything being concreted over - nobody is thinking about wildlife.

“But it isn’t just a question of trying to save a few pretty birds. For example, if we haven’t got bees, we won’t have food.

“Fishers Field nature reserve is mainly there for the wildlife, to support it and help it to develop, but we also want people to enjoy it.”

The annual picnic day has helped to spread awareness of the reserve and encourage more visitors to the site. It has been held at Fishers Field for the last five years.

This most recent event saw 250 people come along for the day, including the mayor of Hertsmere Councillor Pat Strack and Hertsmere MP James Clappison. He attended to mark 10 years since he planted a tree on the site.



Volunteers at work



Friends treasurer Ursula NiAonghusa, left, with the Green Flag Community Award.

Cllr Jean Heywood, portfolio-holder for the environment said: “The story of the Fishers Field Nature Reserve and its development over the past 14 years is testimony to the hard work and community spirit of so many individuals.

“It shows all that can be achieved if enough people are willing to give up their time and work in partnership with the local authority and other agencies for the improvement of their local area.

“The crowning success has been the Green Flag Community Awards, which are richly deserved.”

Anyone who would like to find out more about joining the Friends group should call Hertsmere Borough Council on 0800 731 1810 or email parcs@hertsmere.gov.uk