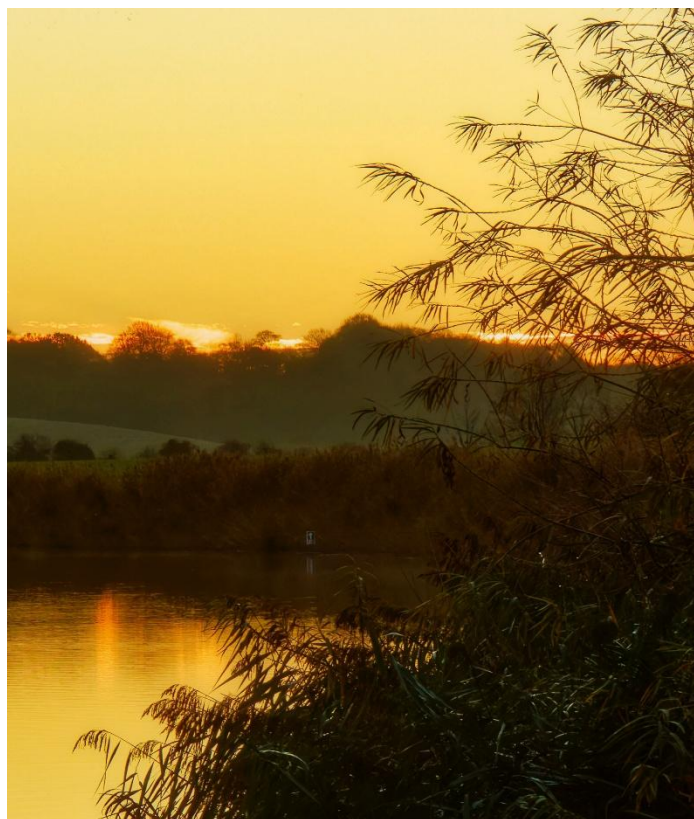

HOB HEY WOOD FRIENDS GROUP ANNUAL REPORT



2025

Mark O'Sullivan



Summary

- Over 200 volunteer hours
- Planted 215 trees
- Three guided walks around the wood hosted by group members
- Two talks about Hob Hey Wood given to local groups
- Liaised with CW&C to get significant improvements to bridlepath completed
- Fallen tree clearance
- Other maintenance tasks, litter picking, invasive species control
- 2026 calendar produced and sold
- Continued with bat monitoring programme
- Very active on social media
- Regular feedback to FTC Amenities Committee
- Over half of the Southern Path Replacement Project completed
- Wildlife recording has now identified over 900 species, some rare
- Continued with meadow creation
- Butterfly transect walk completed first year
- Made connections with other organisations



Scything the meadow

Volunteer activities

Twelve volunteer days were completed in 2025, two more than in 2024. Several members performed solo tasks in the wood during the year, such as pruning, invasive species removal, and litter picking.

Tree Planting

210 trees obtained free of charge from the Woodland Trust's 'Free Trees for Schools and Communities' scheme were planted near the main bridge. These were all native species that will enhance the biodiversity of the woodland. They were used as hedging and to fill in gaps created by the work in the wood.

In December, five wych elm, gifted by Butterfly Conservation, were planted in Hob Hey to provide future homes for the white-letter hairstreak butterfly.

Meadow Management

The new meadow was given more attention this year. A 'hay cut' is required to impoverish the soil, encouraging wildflowers. This year, we did two.

In April, the volunteers performed the first hay cut, removing the arisings to impoverish the soil. In August, Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Wild Network arranged a scything course in the meadow.

This allowed more of our members to be trained, and they completed half of the scything, which was finished by our volunteers the next day.



Longhorn beetle in our meadow

Yellow rattle seeds were also purchased and scattered in the meadow to help control the vigorous grasses that out-compete the wildflowers we are trying to encourage to grow here.

We were gifted 600 wildflower plug plants from Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which were planted in the meadow to further enhance its biodiversity.

Bat Monitoring Programme

In March and June 2023, under the guidance of licensed bat handler Tom Kenwright, twenty bat boxes were installed in the wood. Six of the boxes were built by group member John Gascoyne, the others were purchased, financed by FTC.

The purchased boxes are removable and are being monitored by Tom. Information on the number and species of bats roosting in the wood will add to the scientific knowledge of bats in Cheshire; very little is known about these secretive mammals.

In 2025, the number of bats using the boxes increased significantly. During the Frodsham Festival of Walks walk in May, Tom was able to show a group of 30 people one of five brown long-eared bats roosting in one of the boxes.



Other Maintenance Tasks

Many other varied activities were performed by the volunteers. These included the removal of several trees that fell across paths during storms. Repair of boardwalk mesh and boards. Cleaning of paths and steps of fallen leaves and soil. Litter picking. Invasive sycamore saplings were again tackled (these grow fast and can overrun an area, leading to poor biodiversity).

The noticeboard erected in 2021 was kept up to date with seasonal highlights provided. Feedback indicated that this was appreciated by visitors and several volunteers were recruited by seeing the volunteer dates on the board.

The repairs to the stone steps leading from the picnic table to the stream were completed.

Replacement of Paths, Bridges, and Boardwalks in the Southern Wood

In late 2023, the group initiated a project to replace all the infrastructure in the southern part of the woodland, as the steps, bridges, and paths installed over 20 years ago are now rotting away.

In 2024, the project had been fully funded, and work started in Q2 2024. As of today, approximately 60% of the work has been completed with the final three boardwalks, and 53 steps to be installed in 2026.

Many visitors have commented on how much of an improvement the project has made. It will be even better when completed.

Bridlepath improvements

The bridlepath through the wood has had very poor drainage for several years. There were large patches that became deep mud during winter, and a broken land drain on the final slope down to the wood turned the path into a stream during rainy weather.

In October 2024, Brian Webber and Helen Hayes from our group met with CW&C Council to request improvements to be made.

These works were performed in Q2 2025 and included: repair to the broken land drain and routing the water under the path. Filling in the muddy areas and digging drains next to the path. Other drainage work on the path in the wood.

Now that we've entered winter, many people have experienced a much-improved walk down to the wood with hardly any mud present at all!

Social media and 'outreach' activities

The group maintains a website (hobheywood.wixsite.com/friends) which contains a huge amount of information on the wood and the group's activities, including maps and directed walks. This was maintained and updated in 2025.

Our Facebook page, updated almost daily with photos and stories about the wood and its inhabitants, has once again proven very popular with many appreciative comments about the wood and the group. The page now has over 1,700 members.

During the summer, we were made aware of a proposal to potentially build hundreds of new homes on the edge of Frodsham, the area covering Hob Hey. Our group was able to highlight this to the residents of Frodsham, encouraging them to comment on the proposal, giving information on how to do this and also reasons why building near Hob Hey would be a bad idea. Lots of people appreciated this and responded. We feel it was a good use of our group's knowledge and social media presence, helping people to give their voice about the proposal.

Our social media efforts did result in us welcoming several new volunteers to the group. Hopefully, this will continue into 2026.

Guided Walks

The group led a guided walk and bat talk as part of the Frodsham Festival of Walks. This was attended by over 60 members of the public and appeared to be well-received. Tom Kenwright inspected our bat boxes as part of the walk, and we were able to show people a brown long-eared bat in Tom's hand!

Three other guided walks, with smaller groups, were held, including a fungal foray with Rachel Drapeur, which saw us find 61 species of fungi, and a fungal appreciation course led by Myco Manchester.



Fungal course

Presentations to Local Groups

Mark O'Sullivan gave three talks during the year, including two to branches of the WI, Norley and Frodsham. In addition to these, he presented on Hob Hey at the Cheshire Wildlife Trust Annual General Meeting.

Once again, when talking to people, many had never heard of Hob Hey or knew where it is. The beauty and range of wildlife that can be seen there were surprising to many people.

Our work seems to have increased the number of people visiting and caring about the wood.



Talk to Frodsham WI

Collaboration With Other Organisations

2025 saw the group make connections with other organisations to hopefully learn from them. These included Cheshire Wildlife Trust, especially their Wild Network group (which has been incredibly beneficial to the group), Butterfly Conservation, and Myco Manchester. We also met with Neil Oxley, who manages all the local Woodland Trust woodlands, including the new Frodsham Woods.

In early 2025, Mike Perchard and Nigel Pemberton set up a 'Butterfly Transect' walk at Hob Hey. This involves a set route that is walked each week in butterfly season, with the number, location, and species of butterflies recorded. This formal system generates real scientific data that adds to the knowledge of butterflies in Cheshire, a really exciting project that I am proud our group is a part of.

Finances

We received £25420 from the Marshes Community Benefit Fund for our project to replace all paths and bridges in the southern part of Hob Hey, along with £1000 from Rotary for the project, with other donations of £150.

We received £763 from sales of the Hob Hey Calendar.

We also gained £90 from giving talks to local groups and received donations from CAF of £160.

Expenditure was as follows:

Tools and equipment	£572
Liability insurance	£134
Path replacement project	£30384

Wildlife recording

As an ancient woodland, Hob Hey Wood is an incredibly biodiverse place. Despite this, little formal recording has been performed, and until 2021, knowledge of the species living here was scant. In 2021, a project commenced to record as many species as possible and input them into the biological recording database 'iRecord'. By the end of 2025, over 900 species had been recorded.

This is 'the tip of the iceberg' as many species are difficult to identify, but it does show just how biodiverse the wood is, given its size. Further efforts will continue in 2026, including, hopefully, a year-long moth survey!



Springtail

If Hob Hey Wood was to be destroyed by 'development', it would be a significant loss to biodiversity in Cheshire and must not be allowed to happen. Fortunately, its ownership by Frodsham Town Council, registration with Fields in Trust, and the popularity of the wood with local people make that a very unlikely event.



Grey dagger moth caterpillar

Plans for 2026

The project to replace all the paths, boardwalks, steps and bridges in the southern part of the wood should be completed early in the year.



New long-lasting bridge in Hob Hey

Activities for 2026:

- Leading a walk as part of Frodsham Festival of Walks
- Other guided walks (fungal foray, wildflower walk)
- Giving talks on the wood to interested groups
- Year-long moth trapping survey
- Look into getting owl boxes installed on the woodland edge
- Continued biological recording
- Maintenance tasks: boardwalk repair; drain clearance; invasive species removal; litter picking; step clearance; step repairs; pruning overhanging branches
- Tree planting
- Alder buckthorn planting for brimstone butterflies
- Meadow hay cuts
- Promotion of the wood via social media
- Production of a calendar to raise funds
- Regular feedback to FTC
- Look to attract more volunteers
- Promotion of Hob Hey with local schools
- Look at possible purchases to extend the woodland
- Look into registering Hob Hey Wood as a Local Nature Reserve
- Installation of further bat boxes



Mark O'Sullivan

Secretary of Hob Hey Wood Friends Group

07/01/2026