

## **FoSPA Conservation Group Report for AGM April 2026**

The Conservation group continues to meet fortnightly on Sundays. We meet whatever the weather, unless it is not safe (e.g. very windy) but obviously not everybody is able to attend every session. Training in the use of tools (which are all manual) is given to everybody as required and we are grateful to FoSPA for funding new equipment such as saws and loppers. If you like being active outdoors and enjoy the park, please feel free to get in touch via [conservation@fospa.org.uk](mailto:conservation@fospa.org.uk) to enquire about joining us. Our volunteers are from varying walks of life and span a range of ages and abilities. It is a friendly and welcoming group. Most of us are adults but we can accept some under 18 year olds, for example those carrying out voluntary experience for Duke of Edinburgh awards, provided they attend with a nominated responsible adult.

We carry out work according to a program agreed with the Park Rangers. The main tasks undertaken in the last 12 months have been Heathland restoration in the Bracebridge car park area and Rhododendron/holly clearance between Hartopp gate and the Bistro. We have also spent some time restoring Blackroot meadow, improving the paddling stream, thinning out some woodland near town gate and mending some fencing along the edge of the Park reserve.

In October, members of the conservation group presented the monthly FoSPA evening talk. This covered the origins of the group and highlighted some of the projects we have been involved with recently. It also reflected on the associated benefits to mental and physical health.

### **TASK 1: Heathland Restoration near Bracebridge car park**

Heathland is a rare and threatened habitat characterised by nutrient poor soils. Typical flora are heather and gorse. Unfortunately, the heathland in the park is gradually disappearing due to succession – i.e if unmanaged it will revert to woodland. In the case of the Bracebridge area this is mainly in the form of self-seeded birch trees. The work took the form of felling the self-seeded saplings and a few larger trees and using the cut material to make dead hedges to guide people along paths in the hope of preventing erosion of archaeological features (military practice trenches). We also moved the larger logs off the heathland area into the woodland so that their decay did not enrich the soil. Some dead hedging was used to help define the edge of the carpark and to protect areas of heather re-growth. As always, we removed any litter which we found.

**Total** 9 work sessions equating to 718.5 volunteer hours. We were assisted by 10 university students at the session on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2025



*Removing birch saplings*



*Cleared area surrounded by dead hedge*

## **TASK 2: Rhododendron Clearance in Hartopp Triangle**

The triangular area of woodland between Hartopp gate and the railway line was very dark and overgrown with rhododendrons. These shade out native flora and potentially harbour a disease called phytopthera. Also within this area, there were many young self-seeded holly trees which required thinning to allow more light to reach the ground and to enable the older more established trees to thrive. The work comprised chopping down rhododendrons and using the cut material to create interesting dead hedge features which also provide habitat for small creatures. This and the thinning out of the young holly trees created more pathways through the woodland enhancing accessibility.

**Total:** 10 work sessions equating to 668 volunteer hours



*Cutting down rhododendron*



*Creating a feature out of a dead hedge*

## **TASK 3: Tree thinning near town gate**

This area opposite the end of the driveway into Browns was very congested with many small trees which had grown very tall and thin. The established oak trees were very crowded. We thinned out smaller trees to allow those which are left to thrive. We also coppiced some of the willow and cut back bramble and holly. We used the cut material to create a dead hedge along the edge of the stream to improve safety.

**Total:** 2 work sessions equating to 135 volunteer hours



*Cleared woodland*

#### **TASK 4: Blackroot meadow and paddling stream**

The rangers asked us to clear brambles and small trees as part of the restoration of Blackroot meadow. This will allow the cows to move in and disturb the soil which promotes the growth of grasses and plants.

We had previously worked on the paddling stream so whilst in the adjacent Blackroot meadow, some people returned to the stream to further improve the revetments. At the same time a few of the group made fence repairs along the road back towards town gate.

**Total:** 3 work sessions equating to 234 volunteer hours



*Restoring Blackroot Meadow*



*Replacing revetments*

Karen Reader for FoSPA Conservation Group  
7<sup>th</sup> March 2026