

## David Bull reports on a Prime Ministers Reception he attended at 10 Downing Street on 22 July 2009 16:00 – 18:00

*“To celebrate the contribution that people make everyday in support of their local environmental wildlife projects and organisations”*

I was astonished to receive a personal invitation from the Prime Minister. Evidently I had been nominated by the Woodland Trust, owners of Hillhouse Wood in West Bergholt, to represent the “Friends” of the wood. An organiser from “defra” explained to us on the day that this event was to recognise the importance of the Third Sector (voluntary sector) as opposed to the Business and Government sectors, in environmental matters.

The 150 people invited from throughout the UK, were all volunteers, 9 being from the Woodland Trust. Others came from organisations such as County Wild Life Trusts, RSPB., .BTCV., Forestry Commission, National Trust, Carbon Trust, Inner City Environmental Trusts, Community Recycling Initiatives etc.

In the initial queue at the Downing Street gates I met up with the Yorkshire Woodland Trust Representative and we proceeded together through the security procedures and took photos outside the famous door.

As we walked along the historic corridors inside No.10 the Prime Minister suddenly swept out of a door beside us, shook us by the hand and thanked us most sincerely for “the voluntary work you and your organisations do for local environments and wild life”. He moved on very rapidly evidently having another engagement before the reception.

We assembled in the very pleasant garden behind Nos 10 & 11 on the large lawn where drinks and canapés were being served. Seven representatives from the Woodland Trust gathered together since we could recognise the smart oak leaf lapel badges of the Trust. The reps were from Suffolk, Kent, Yorkshire, Liverpool, Wales and Scotland, and also with us was the organiser of the BTCV from Colchester. It was very interesting to share experiences and views with other members.

The Prime Minister and two other ministers (Hilary Benn & Ed Milliband) with environmental interests moved slowly through the assembly discussing and questioning various voluntary activities. He (Gordon Brown) gave a lengthy almost impassioned address about all the voluntary work going on for the benefit of environmental wildlife in the UK, and thanked us all most sincerely for “*all the work you and your organisations carry out for the benefit of everyone*”. He seemed to be very knowledgeable on the extensive range of voluntary environmental work and was only too aware how difficult it had been to select 150 people out of the many thousands working across the UK. “*Please take my thanks back to your colleagues*”.

He made the point that “*the government is pledged to do all it can for the environment; many of you were working in this field long before the ideas of climate change became widely recognised*”. He referred to the World Climate Change conference in Copenhagen later this year. “*I hope all your organisations will join us in*



*shaping the government's initiatives for slowing down climate change". His own children were mentioned for their efforts with the adjacent vegetable patch in the garden.*

*Lastly he put great emphasis on how much "you and your organisations are appreciated for the vital role you play in promoting and sustaining environmental wildlife for future generations; you are an inspiration to us all" (Previously we had been told that he well knew of the Woodland Trust since he had been planting trees with his family in Scotland).*

To conclude, on the way out we were given further access to No.10 including a "general discussion between ourselves" around the cabinet table!!

Altogether a very interesting and uplifting experience which gave due recognition to all the voluntary work being done for the environment and wildlife, and more particularly to the work of the **Friends of Hillhouse Wood**.