

17th Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting.

Minutes of the AGM held at Weir Wood Sailing Clubhouse on 4th April 2014. The meeting commenced at 7.15pm.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming members to the 17th AGM of the Society and outlining the agenda. A notebook was circulated for members to record their presence at this meeting.

Present: Committee: Bob Johnson [Chairman], Glenn Tocher [Treasurer], Derek Washington [Website editor], Alan Caulkett, Peter Johnson, Barbara Mortlock, Shaun Taylor, Phil Holland. (9)

Members: M Caulkett, J Johnson, M Tocher, C Webb, M Washington, A Guest, L Berry, J Ross, M Roberts, P & T Bacon, R & S Booth, S & A Bass, B & E Robinson, R & J Lowe, A & M Pendry. (20)

Apologies for absence: Peter Erridge (Minute Secretary), Shirley Dunsmore-Rouse (Committee Member), Doug Roberts [Auditor], R Tullet, A Wende, J Kinchington.

1] Approval of 2013 AGM Minutes.

Copies of the 2013 AGM minutes were available at the meeting. No amendments or alterations were suggested. The Chairman asked that they be accepted as a true and accurate record. Hands were raised in acceptance.

2] Matters arising.

A] Woodland Improvement Grant. Grey Alder, a non-native tree, is a problem in the study area where it suckers and we find it difficult to control. The grant was for professional advice, help and funding to manage this problem. The application had been on hold requiring approval and support by Southern Water, but this has not been forthcoming. Due to the time delay this application has probably now expired and this application is considered closed.

B] The Corporate Clay Pigeon shoot planning proposal at Mayes Farm that were withdrawn now exactly 2 years ago have never been raised again and the matter is now considered closed.

C] Q & A session from last year.

No direct questions were raised. A comment regarding the finishing date for winter bird feeding was discussed and answered by the chairman at the time.

3] Chairman's report.

A] Reserve management:

Bob gave details of last year's East Sussex County Council (ESCC) extension contract to remind everyone of the changes that had occurred, a major difference was that the ESCC were no longer responsible for deciding and scheduling what work was to be carried out by the volunteers each week, those decisions were now to be the responsibility of the Friends. We decided to update the old ESCC Management Plan for 2013 and arranged the work for volunteers and ranger as necessary. That ESCC extension contract officially ended on 31st March 2014.

We were not being informed about what was happening regarding the provision of a Ranger from 1st April 2014 onwards to assist us in managing the nature reserve. We eventually found out Southern Water (SW) had a problem agreeing a new management contract with the ESCC. The major problem for the ESCC with renewing a further 12 month contract was the amount of funds available from SW did not cover the full weekly ESCC Ranger visit costs over a full year. ESCC spending cuts meant they could not subsidise SW. SW were saying they had no further funds available this year due to their own internal budget cuts. (Stand-off and nothing was happening)

We therefore suggested a possible flexible solution where we have a slightly reduced number of Ranger visits but those will be spread over a 12 month period, with us working occasionally alone on dates when there is no Ranger available. We plan to carry out survey work etc. such as nest box surveying when no ranger available.

A strategy was drawn up and discussed by your Committee on how we could best satisfy all the needs of the Nature Reserve and help bring costs within the SW and ESCC monetary limits.

We put forward our strategy proposals to the ESCC who found them acceptable and they have put them forward to SW.

ESCC required us, as part of their contract proposals to SW, to provide a Tuesday volunteer work plan for the coming year, giving monthly basic details of the work we intend to carry out over that period. A draft work plan has been written by the Committee and sent to ESCC and they have forwarded it to SW and Natural England for comment and agreement.

We have also updated the Management Plan which details the various compartment areas around the reservoir for the work plan, which acts as its reference document.

We have now received the first draft copy of a contract drawn up by ESCC and sent to SW and ourselves for comment. We are a partner in this contract and will therefore be required to sign it and show our commitment.

The draft is still to be properly discussed by the Committee but my first impressions of the initial draft were good, however SW were not so happy and they require amendments, so this is still currently work in progress.

As the old contract has now expired and a new one is yet to be signed, this interim period will cause problems as SW will not officially allow any access by ESCC or ourselves onto their land until a contract is signed and completed.

B] Open Day

Last year we were unable to get suitable permissions from SW for an Open Day, SW required us to both provide Public liability cover and to have signed a contract. There was insufficient time to organise these requirements and we were therefore left with no option but to cancel. This year if our signature as a partner is put on the eventual agreed ESCC / SW contract we will be official and I have been advised by SW that with that signature and compliance with public liability insurance we have permission for an "Open Day". It is our intention, to have our Open Day on Sunday 20th July. We expect to be able to have pond dipping over the meadows and bird ringing displays amongst other things.

C] Nature Reserve – Round up

Bob firstly thanked the Tuesday work parties for their work during the last 12 months, and highlighted the great camaraderie there has been within the regular group which make the days effective and enjoyable, the outcome is that the work parties have achieved a lot in the last 12 months. Here are some of the achievements:

For our expected Open Day, we have built a pond dipping platform at Whillet's meadow pond this will make this a more enjoyable and safer experience. Meadow pond has also had to have regular control of invasive species such as Pond weed and Crassula which can quickly choke it, if not controlled.

Other work has been clearing silt from two pond-lets in the study area, also opening out to the light and clearing silt from the bog area in the birch woodland to encourage dragonflies and insects, we have also added two insect hotels made from pallets. The car park has had a lot of work. We renewed damaged signs, constructed more seats at the Car Park, recently car park edging posts were installed due to vehicles driving onto grass seating areas etc., we replaced the fence at the viewing area following vandalism. Refreshed the bird hide woodwork with a coat of protective paint, further refresh work to the interior is also intended. We repaired a rotting otter holt roof, renewed the artificial nest on the top of the Osprey Pole (Luckily we had a volunteer who was happy working at heights).

We have had to retrieve and replace anchorages on some of the Tern rafts, two rafts are now in position awaiting Terns – The third raft has been damaged and is along North bank awaiting decisions on its future. (Some anchorage repairs have been completed), but ideally other work is needed and refloating may be a problem.

We cleared felled trees left by Power workers under the pylons at Whillet's. We also cleared back more trees behind the reed bed at Whillet's Pool which was restricting light and growth, this has now opened up the area and we are hoping this will expand the reed bed with a benefit to the wildlife. Whillet's Pool island was also cleared of bramble to make it attractive for nesting wildfowl. Various areas had trees cut back to keep viewing areas clear and effective.

Whillet's meadows access bridge to the back meadows had to have a decking overhaul to make it safe for use, and ensure it would hold the grass cutting tractors.

We planted – 10 Black Poplar trees around the reserve, all seem healthy. 50 Hazel tree saplings have been planted as understory in the study area wood, at an area where we have thinned some dense oak tree cover to make some glades to let back some light to encourage the lower growing understory plants to thrive which is so important for wildlife.

We have cleared further vegetation along Pintail bank to further open this out, and it has been attracting Snipe, Lapwing, and wildfowl generally (mainly geese) which will help keep the grass down and benefit the meadow. We have also cleared an area opposite the viewing area to allow the Ducks etc. to access this small meadow area plus erecting a new Barn Owl box. This should benefit those watching from the hide and viewing area, as well as the wildlife.

We have been carrying out the winter bird feeding and my thanks to my helpers Shirley & David who both carry this out once a week. We will be finishing feeding in the next week or two in line with our normal practice.

The nest box crew of Alan & Shaun with help from one of our regular volunteers Colin Webb, monitor, maintain, and have been building nest boxes. I would like to thank Colin who kindly donated a brand new barn owl box to us. Several old boxes have been renewed, storm tree damage in December necessitating some boxes needing new trees including the Whillet's Meadow Barn Owl box. Thankfully the owls have been seen visiting the box in its new position.

D] Website.

In the past 12 months the home page has been accessed more than 11,000 times, with visits from 74 countries. In the last five years, 43 photographers have submitted nearly 3,000 photographs, 1,000 of those during the last 12 months. We have no statistics about the number of sighting reports, but these are received almost daily, we try to keep the sightings page updated within a day or so of the data coming in. Only a selection of sightings are displayed on the web site but all records submitted are added to the society's database. We are also undertaking a long-term programme of archiving historic records and reports via a secure web site, some of this material where suitable will eventually be made available to the public web. We would like to thank all those people that do contribute pictures and sightings to the website, please get involved and keep them coming they are all very welcome.

E] The Treasurers Report, Membership and Work Parties. (Given by Glenn)

Glenn confirmed copies of the audited accounts were sent out to all members prior to the AGM with their last newsletter, and additional copies were available at the meeting also. Glenn highlighted that we had recently received reimbursements from Southern Water of £326 outstanding from 2013 which were not on the audited account but meant the accounts were looking healthy.

Glenn then asked if there were any questions regarding the accounts, no questions were raised.

Postage costs for newsletters is ever rising. Glenn confirmed 63 of our members now take email newsletters which has given us a saving of £180/year. If any further members would be happy to have email newsletters and save us further costs, which allows more of your money to be available to be spent on the reserve, then please contact Glenn with your email address and this will be arranged. We will continue to send out paper copies to those that want them, and you can always change back from email if required.

We currently have 200 members as of end of 2013.

Work parties. Glenn was pleased with how well the work parties had been attended as well as what they had achieved pointing out we had 278 volunteer days over the last 12 months. These took place on most Tuesdays with usually 6-8 regular members plus some irregular attendees, all are welcome. Our thanks went to Crispin our Ranger who supplied necessary tools and undertook specialised tasks for us. We can always accommodate additional work party help – offers via work@weirwood.me.uk or turn up at the Hide for 10am. on Tuesdays.

Glenn finished his talk by thanking Bob for all his hard work as Chairman which was much appreciated. With no further questions, he handed back to Bob who then asked for the Acceptance of the accounts by a show of hands, which was given.

Bob expressed his thanks to Doug Roberts our auditor who ensures all our records and accounts are in satisfactory order. Doug has audited our accounts for a number of years now; and has kindly agreed to be auditor again. We are not legally bound to have them audited, but with membership funds we want to prove that all money received and spent is properly accounted for.

A show of hands approved Doug Roberts as our auditor again for this year.

F] Thanks to Committee & helpers.

Bob wanted to thank Committee and helpers who usually have a thankless task, and to announce some Committee changes.

Thanks in particular to Glenn for the hours of time and hard work he puts in, what with being Treasurer, managing the Tuesday working parties with extra work as we now operate a maintenance log book for organising the work in advance, and also being membership Secretary, he is being kept very busy.

Also to Peter Erridge for his work as our Minute Secretary and Publicity Officer.

Our Constitution rules normally dictates this third Officer is listed as full Secretary – However the role of full Secretary has been proved difficult to fill, so we delegated some of the Secretary duties to the Chairman.

Thanks to Derek for all the hard work he has put in for the Committee, his primary task is running the website which he maintains to a very high standard and my thanks to him for all the hard work he has put in both on the website plus a host of other tasks he has volunteered to carry out as a very active and involved Committee member.

My thanks to Shaun & Alan who now make up our nest box team. Shaun still designs and builds a lot of our projects such as Tern Rafts and repairs hides etc.

I would like to thank and highlight to everyone the work done by Barbara Mortlock as she has received the honorary Stonechat Award for services to the Sussex Ornithological Society at their recent Conference in January, a lot of that praise was for her work for us at Weir Wood Reservoir. Barbara took over the Weir Wood Reservoir Bird Log in 1985 and was also the Wetland bird Survey recorder which she continued completing until 2006. Barbara collated and researched all the bird sightings records back to 1954 and eventually published two books her first "Birds of Weir Wood 1954-1989" published in January 1992. A second book updated the story to the end of the 20th century.

Barbara is a founder member of the Friends of Weir Wood Society that was formed in 1996, she continues to be a Committee member and still sends in our bird records to the SOS. Our Society Constitution was mainly drawn up and written by Barbara. Well done and thank you Barbara, a worthy winner of the award.

I would finally like to thank all the Committee generally for their efforts, dedication and hard work. They have all had roles to play including our new member Phil who has been involved with the bird ringing and nest box survey work and is also a regular at the Tuesday Work Parties.

4 Elections of Officers and Committee. All were elected by a majority show of hands.

A] Officers. Chairman - Bob Johnson has agreed to stand again as Chairman. No other nominations. Approved.

Treasurer - Glenn Tocher has agreed to stand again as Treasurer. No other nominations. Approved

Minute Secretary – Peter Erridge has agreed to stand again. No other nominations. Approved

B] Committee Member changes:

John Kinchington who has not been involved this year has decided not to stand for re-election as his interests and time are now being spent elsewhere and will stand down. I would like to thank him for his past work most notably being our spokesperson when we were fighting the Clay Pigeon Shoot Proposal.

Due to recent ill health Derek Washington feels he now needs to reduce his work load and stress levels and therefore has decided not to stand for re-election to the Committee.

However he has advised he would be happy just to continue to run the website for the time being, knowing we have no-one who can replace him, so he will carry on the website work for the Committee, and remains accountable just for that role.

C] Committee Members standing for re-election

All those standing for re-election were approved by a majority vote.

Committee Member – Peter Johnson	Approved
Committee Member – Shaun Taylor	Approved
Committee Member – Shirley Dunsmore-Rouse	Approved
Committee Member – Barbara Mortlock.	Approved
Committee Member – Alan Caulkett	Approved
Committee Member – Philip Holland	Approved

D] Constitution Rules amendments to Aims & Objectives:

Bob raised that some of our aims and objectives needed slight amendment as our working practices had changed over the years and these now needed to be reflected in our Constitution documents. These changes do not in any way change the Society aims and principles.

The following amendments to the Constitution Aims & Objectives – 4 off Society furtherance section changes to rule furtherance's 3, 7, 8 &, 10 plus a new additional aim 12 with its furtherance.

3. Originally - Send a representative to the LNR Management Advisory Committee to express the independent views of the Society.

(However that Committee no longer exists)

Changed to - Send a representative to any Management Committee to express the independent views of the Society.

7. Originally - Involve the members of the Society in its activities and in developing ideas for improving public awareness and education.

(No acknowledgement of our "Open Day" and wildlife displays)

Changed to - Involve the members of the Society in its activities such as "Open Days" to promote and educate both members and the public about the site and develop ideas for improving public awareness and education.

8. Originally - Assist environmental organisations with suitable volunteers to help carry out Weir Wood survey work.

(We now have a requirement to provide suitable liability cover, and we are protecting the Society by including insurance as well, when we enter a site when a Ranger is not present)

Changed to - Assist environmental organisations with suitable volunteers to help carry out Weir Wood survey work. Provide suitable liability cover and insurance as necessary to protect the volunteers and the Society when entering Southern Water property when no authorised Ranger is on site.

10. Originally - Set up a computer system to provide data input to the Sussex Ornithological Society and the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

(We now encompass sightings to more bodies, and the SOS records are sent via a specialised input system.)

Changed to - Provide electronic wildlife sightings and data to recognised wildlife bodies.

12. New Aim - Provide an information website.

12. New Furtherance - Provide a website for members and the public giving information about the Friends and the nature reserve. Provide a secure electronic storage area for Committee documents.

All the above changes were put to the membership and all were agreed by a majority show of hands vote and these changes will now be reflected in our Constitution Aims & Objectives document (amendment 2) dated 4/4/14.

5] Question & Answer session:

1] Andy Majowski asked about the two website areas mentioned in our new objective 12 and website furtherance aim. Bob explained that there is the normal website area that all members and public can visit which has the photographs and sightings etc. There is now a separate secure area which can only be accessed by a password where we now keep electronic copies of Management Plans, Committee Meeting minutes and other sensitive data which cannot be put out on the public domain, and is solely for Committee members when requiring reference data of that information, and saves everyone on Committee needing to have and store their own copies. In electronic form these documents are printable if a hard copy is required.

2] Barbara Mortlock asked whether SW had reimbursed all monies owed and Glenn confirmed this was the case. Glenn explained why this money had become outstanding with the instance of the early repair required to the Whillet's meadow access gate in the interests of the reserve and wildlife, it needed immediate attention so after getting SW agreement for the gate costs we carried out the work rather than wait for SW to eventually arrange a contractor for repair. Barbara then asked whether all the work and monies spent by the "Friends" was recognised and appreciated by SW. We could confirm we will now be sending SW work sheets of all we carry out as part of the new management contract we are awaiting. The monetary value of the work we do is difficult to exactly quantify, but Barbara feels we should be able to have some quantification of both work and monetary cost that the "Friends" provide to SW, so we could inform the public of the value of our work, and this will now be considered.

3] The question of SW involvement was mentioned and Derek Washington pointed out that this year SW have suggested having a SW volunteers work day, and would like to take or use our photographs to advertise our work in their Company News sheets.

6] Close of AGM

Bob brought the meeting to a close by thanking all for attending.

Thanks to Glenn & Peter who were involved in organising the event, and the Sailing Club who kindly allowed us to use the clubhouse for the evening.

The formal meeting closed at 7.55pm.

Our speaker for this AGM - 8.00pm scheduled start: Alan Stewart – Senior Lecturer - Life Sciences at University of Sussex – Subject talk "Managing habitats to help conserve insects and other invertebrates" plus specific information about the life cycle and conservation problems for the Glow-worm.

Refreshments were available at the mid talk interval with tea or coffee and biscuits at 50p, all the proceeds of which go towards our funds. Our thanks to Judy, Marie and Maureen who so ably carry out the refreshment duties and who have kindly donated teas & biscuits etc. to us.

Minutes by Bob Johnson