

## **2018 Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting (21st)**

Minutes of the AGM held at Forest Row Community Centre on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018.  
The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:15 by welcoming members to the 21st AGM of the Society. A sheet was on a table for members attending to sign.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Peter Johnson (Committee Member), Glenn Tocher (Committee member), Doug Roberts (Auditor), Bob & Jeannie Dyche, Michael & Nora Wreatham, Brad Scott, David Nicholl. 29 Members were present for the AGM meeting.

### **2. Approval of the 2017 AGM minutes**

Copies of the AGM minutes were available for members at the back of the room. These minutes were accepted by a majority vote.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Previous 2017 AGM minutes.**

There were no questions asked or matters raised.

### **4. Chairman's Report**

By Bob Johnson

Bob said there had been concern last year whether ESCC would continue to provide us with Rangers to help us, as they had been considering no longer being involved with non ESCC sites.

Thankfully, they had decided to renew their contract with Southern Water for a further 12 months covering the 2018-19 period following a small increase in monies from Southern Water. The new contract had been signed and would come into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

Bob said that he still did not know if ESCC would agree for further contracts beyond April 2019. The Friends would be talking to them during the next 12 months about their future plans for the reserve.

Further good news was that Southern Water had been showing more interest in the reserve. From the newsletters the members would know that they had finally agreed to pay for all the Whillet's bridges decking materials. This had allowed the repairs to be completed in September 2017.

Southern Water had also agreed to put monies toward some SSSI habitat improvements, following recommendations made by Natural England regarding the lack of fen type vegetation at the waters' edge. A new reed bed had been proposed at the dam end opposite the picnic area. The reed bed would be a longer term project with the Friend's volunteers assisting with some of the work.

Bob thanked the East Grinstead Rotary Club who had been helping the Friends by kindly taking on the task of fully maintaining the picnic area. This year they also generously donated £200 for the building & installation of 2 new seats at the picnic area. The work party volunteers had just completed that work, so people should now find better seats with views over the water to the South Bank, toward the area which would eventually become the new reed bed.

Bob also thanked Peter Erridge, who over the last couple of years had been giving illustrated talks about Weir Wood Reservoir, its nature & history, to various local

groups. Peter had very generously been donating to the Friends all the monies he raised from these talks and had already donated over £400 towards our funds.

Bob gave thanks to all the volunteers at Weir Wood, particularly the Tuesday Volunteers & helpers who had bonded well and made a very effective and happy work team with the regular ESCC Rangers Matthew & Michael. Together they had all worked brilliantly and achieved a huge amount, making this another very successful year for the habitat management work.

But, not forgetting the other volunteers who carried out work outside of Tuesdays, such as Bob & Duncan who topped up the bird feeders on non-work party days, Alastair, who was one of the official wildlife recorders and who liaised with the Sussex Ornithological Society regarding rarer bird sightings, also Darrin who carried out bird ringing in the study area and also assisted our other bird ringer Phil.

Bob then detailed some of the Work Party achievements that had been made in the last 12 months. This was beside the regular work of checking and overhauling nest boxes, refugia etc, cutting hedges, controlling blackthorn & bramble, keeping paths clear and general site management.

A large area of willows had been cleared to make a more open area for wildfowl directly opposite the viewing area. The hedge at the back of this area had been layered and the bracken and developing scrub had been cut back. As a trial, some small pondlets had been dug in this area to test whether it could give some wet areas as water levels dropped, but this had given mixed results.

A couple of floating platforms had been built with mink traps mounted on them to improve mink control efficiency. Also constructed and fitted were two 30kg anchorages, one for a broken anchorage on a Tern raft, the other for the buoy rope where an anchorage had snapped. The buoy rope warning notices had been renewed and some new buoys had been fitted.

New support posts and deer browsing protection had been fitted to all the Black Poplar Trees.

The main beams had been overhauled & all decking boards renewed on the foot bridge across Plaw Hatch Stream. Security work had been carried out at the hide and at reserve access point areas to help stop the illegal trespass problems that had been occurring. The volunteers participated in a special wildlife visit to Whillet's meadows for some special needs children from Grove Park School.

Part cutting of Whillet's meadows by tractor had been organised, and then the cuttings hand raked and transported to heaped piles at meadow edges to make amphibian herbariums and refuges for small mammals.

The work party had cut down an almost 200m length of Willow trees growing well out into the water along South Bank, opposite the picnic area, in the first stage of preparing the area for a new reed-bed.

Fence repairs had been carried out along North bank, from the canoeist's car park, and also trees had been cut back to give improved views from the "Lecomber" seat view point.

A new Tern raft had been built which was now in position awaiting the Terns' arrival. Last year the three Common Tern rafts had had 3 pairs residing and they had successfully raised 8 chicks with broods of 3, 3 & 2, one of our best years. The old barrel design Tern raft that was listing badly had been towed in, initially for repairs, but was then found to be rotten beyond repair and had to be scrapped.

The heronry had seen another increase in nest numbers in 2017, with 42 nests that showed some activity at one point (making it the largest heronry in Sussex). Eventually there had been 23 successful nests which produced 34 young. At one end of the Heronry there had been the first breeding Cormorants (3 nests), of which 2 nests had produced young, not necessarily a good thing if this encouraged more Cormorants to nest.

The Great Crested Grebe breeding had not been so successful. Of the many pairs that had been displaying, very few nests had actually been seen, and as far as the West End Reserve was concerned only one pair had been successful. Initially they had three young, but one had gone missing after a couple of weeks probably predated. Just one pair had managed to successfully nest at the dam end with 2 young. It was thought the decline in nesting had been due to the generally higher water levels. It was therefore being considered whether to build and trial an artificial platform for Grebes to an RSPB design to see if they would use them.

An area of concern had been the amount of pheasant & wildfowl shooting that had occurred during the Autumn/Winter on land that was very adjacent to the reserve. The police had been contacted over one incident because of our concerns, but their investigations had proved those involved had not actually been breaking the law, even though it had been obvious it was the Nature Reserve that had been the draw. They had been standing close to the reserve boundary, then had just waited for birds to fly over the field they were in, and then fired at them. If this problem persisted we would have to contact Natural England to see whether they could amend the SSSI to allow extra protection with a shooting exclusion zone from the reserve boundary fence.

## **5. Membership Secretary & Website Editor Report.** By Tom Howard-Jones

**Membership:** Tom advised there were currently 160 paid-up members so far. There were 70 members from last year who had not yet paid their membership for 2018. Those present who had not yet renewed were invited to do so at the meeting. Tom said that over 60% of members already received their newsletters by email and asked if other members willing to receive their newsletters this way would let him know. This had already saved enough costs to be able to keep the annual subscription at £3.

Tom said that the use of electronic versions of our membership card were being trialled by sending them to those who receive electronic newsletters. These membership cards can be printed or just held on your phone. Tom hoped that this was going well, although, for some members, attempting to print them the right size had proved difficult. Tom said he would be interested in any feedback.

Tom had noted that many people had been sending donations with their membership, often sending £5 or even more in some cases. More money was now being received in donations than from the direct £3 membership fee.

This was much appreciated and allowed us to do even more conservation work. Tom thanked all who had donated in this way very much indeed.

**Web Site:** There had been some 40,000 visitors to the site, who made over 200,000 page viewings over the last year. The most visited pages were Recent Photos and Latest Sightings.

Thanks were given to those sending in photos and sightings and encouragement given for more to take part. Tom asked that wildlife sightings should be sent using the official sightings email address. That way they would be captured and sent on to other bodies who wanted our sighting records.

Tom said suggestions or requests would be welcomed for any future improvements or changes people would like to be seen on the site. He reminded that the new version of the website went live in March 2015, and was now some 3 years old, but still seemed to be going well.

**Facebook Group:** In November 2016 our new Facebook “Friends of Weir Wood Group” was started. We now had 128 members. It seemed to be popular, in the last 28 days there had been 174 posts, comments and reactions. However, he would like to see a wider variety of inputs.

Tom asked that if anyone wanted to learn more about inputting on Facebook to contact him, citing that Facebook would let you know when anything happened in the Group, and was good at letting people know about forthcoming events etc.

**Final thanks:** Tom gave a special thanks to Peter Johnson for his work in sorting out the difficult issues that cropped up occasionally with the web site and the Facebook group.

Tom said that finally he wanted to thank the Chairman, who had been thanking many other people, but needed to be thanked for the enthusiasm, energy and hard work he had given toward the successful running of the Society.

## **6. Treasurers Report**

by Bob Hastings

2017 Audited Accounts: All members had previously been sent a copy of the accounts with their last newsletter, also copies of the accounts were available for members at the meeting.

The Treasurer pointed out the accounts had been fully audited by Doug Roberts in mid-January and been approved by him. He then went on to detail and explain some of the figures on the accounts. Regarding income, our £3 membership fees had raised over £600 with our 200+ members, plus we had received £874 in donations, so a particularly good year for income. Bob also reiterated the Chairman’s comments and thanked Peter Erridge for his additional donations towards our funds.

All donations went into our conservation fund. Members fees went into our general fund that covers admin, newsletters & leaflet printing & postage etc.

Also received was a yearly £700 allowance from Southern Water via ESCC specifically towards paying for such things as grass cutting contractors, Employee Liability Insurance Cover for the work parties, and other costs directly needed to maintain the Nature Reserve. All expenditure needed to be approved by ESCC. The Society paid the initial costs and was then reimbursed from the £700 held by ESCC.

The Treasurer then outlined some of the expenditure on the accounts. He highlighted the particularly unusual large payment of £3,052 that was made in “Other Conservation Costs” which was for the materials for the new Whillet’s meadow bridges, these costs had been quickly reimbursed by Southern Water. The other expenditures in both the General & Conservation funds were considered to be self-explanatory.

Overall our total funds had increased by £730.

The Treasurer asked if there were any questions regarding the accounts from the members, but none were asked.

Finally, the 2017 accounts were accepted and Doug Roberts was also agreed to be the auditor for the 2018 accounts by a majority show of hands.

## **7. Election of Committee and Officers**

The Chairman thanked his Committee for their hard work in managing and running the Society, plus he highlighted and detailed how most were also involved in helping on our Tuesday work parties, so had multiple roles.

No nominations had been put forward for any of the Officer or Committee Member roles, however all standing members had agreed to stand for re-election.

### **Officer Election Result**

Chairman - Bob Johnson

Treasurer - Bob Hastings

Membership Secretary - Tom Howard-Jones

Website Editor - Tom Howard-Jones

Minute & General Secretary – Vacant. (Bob Johnson currently covers this role)

All above were re-elected by a majority show of hands

### **Committee Member Election Result**

Committee Members: Peter Johnson, Shaun Taylor, Alan Caulkett,  
Phil Holland, Richard Lowe, Glenn Tocher.

All above were re-elected by a majority show of hands.

## **8. AOB - Question & Answer session:**

A: Mark Roberts asked about the number of pot holes in the hide car park and who was responsible for repairing them? The Chairman responded by advising that the car park was the responsibility of Forest Row Parish Council, and he had also noted the pot holes were getting worse and would contact the Council to see if some pot hole repairs could be carried out.

B: Peter Erridge advised he will be continuing to do his Weir Wood talks for another season, and was currently taking bookings, so if anyone was looking for a speaker to please let him know.

## **9. Closure**

**Details were given to members for the following forthcoming events:**

Members Spring flowers & birds walk on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> April

Public "Open" Day on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July

Fungi Foray – Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September

Thanks was given to our volunteer refreshment ladies Judy, Maureen & Marie.

The AGM meeting was formally closed at 19:50, with the Chairman thanking all who attended for giving their support.

At 20:00 An illustrated talk by our guest speaker followed. This year the Society were pleased to have Nick Aplin, Chairman of the Sussex Fungus Group, a County Recorder and local fungi expert, who gave us a very interesting talk on Fungi, including talking about some rarities he had found within our Nature Reserve.

Minutes by Bob Johnson

19<sup>th</sup> March 2018