

## **2023 Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting**

These are the Minutes for the Society's 26th AGM held at Forest Row Community Centre on 31st March 2023.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:15 by welcoming all. He then reminded everyone of the AGM agenda and pointed out that paper copies of the 2022 Audited Accounts and 2022 AGM Minutes were available at the meeting should anyone wish to refer to a copy. The documents had also been available to view or download from our website. Members were also asked to sign in, so there would be a record of those present. (37 members attended)

### **AGM Business**

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

Doug Roberts (Auditor), Alan Catterall, Fiona & Keith Bewers, Ingrid Paine, Peter & Terriss Bacon.

#### **2. Approval of the 2022 AGM minutes.**

The 2022 AGM minutes were accepted as a true record by a majority vote.

#### **3. Matters arising from the Previous 2022 AGM minutes**

There were no matters arising. All the 2022 Aims & Objectives & Constitution Rule changes had been approved. The Chairman reminded that these documents all remained available to view on our website.

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

The Chairman started by thanking his group of volunteers pointing out they were a helpful and willing group who were happy to help and be assigned tasks. He then thanked the Rangers who also were always very helpful and been willing to get involved with our larger projects.

He noted the work parties had had a very productive 12 months and went on to tell the members about some of the larger project work more recently completed or planned, these included:

The new floating GC Grebe nesting platform trial that had recently been completed to see whether the Grebes would use an artificial nest site, as they had struggled to produce young in recent years and were in decline at the site.

A new Tern raft which was in the process of being built to replace the one that was in very poor repair and had started breaking up during last summer's drought.

This winter Pintail Bank meadow had attracted good numbers of grazing geese and Wigeon, including flocks of Barnacle Geese, following previous habitat management work. It was decided to increase the amount of viewable meadow within the reserve, so some trees and waterside vegetation had been cleared on the north bank opposite the viewing area. This should give improved views and provide another open water

access meadow area which we hoped would attract more grazing wildfowl. The early signs were very encouraging.

At Whillet's, the dipping platform at meadow pond had rotted at the ground supports, was deemed unsafe, and being too rotten to repair, it was scrapped. We have just installed a new larger dipping platform with steel frames concreted into the ground to give a stronger and more resilient base support. A timber platform similar in design to before has been bolted to this steel frame. Having timbers above the ground will make it much more durable.

Last summer we put in a substantial viewing platform at the back of the reed bed which has proved very useful for monitoring the winter roosts and enabled us to better monitor summer wildlife at the reed bed.

We also did quite a bit of work around the hide and car park. We fitted a new roof to the hide, we repainted the hide inside and out. We infilled many of the larger holes in the car park. We replaced rotted base supports on the bench seats.

It was hoped to do some work this summer on seats and tables at the millennium picnic site which had suffered from vandalism.

We would still continue to cut hedges, mow meadows, and generally maintain the reserve in line with our new 5-year contract and our new 2022 – 2027 management plan.

## **5. Membership Secretary & Website Editor Report.**

**Membership:** The Membership Secretary started by advising we currently have 171 paid up members with 120 having not yet renewed. He said if there were any members present who still needed to renew they could see him afterwards.

Tom noted that the vast majority of our members have now agreed to communicate by our preferred option of email. We have kept our annual membership fee at £3 per person, which was so cheap that most people also included a donation. He advised that we were concerned that £3 did not cover postage costs for newsletters, but we now have no members who only give £3 and receive posted newsletters. We very much appreciated these voluntary donations that so many of our members made. So far received £471 in fees and £1138 in donations. The donation money all went toward our conservation work, and Tom thanked all for their generosity.

For comparison at the end of last year we had 243 paid up members with £678 in fees and £1535 in donations.

**Web Site:** Tom advised that to the public the web site had been running ok, but behind the scenes we had been having numerous problems with the new host. Peter Johnson had been manfully working hard to resolve these and managed to keep it all running so far, although we were aware that more software update/renewal work will be needed. Tom thanked Peter for all his hard work.

Tom pointed out that the majority of the website postings were only from the same handful of people and wanted to encourage new contributors and get more people to

participate. He finally asked if anyone had suggestions for improvements as we were always open to new ideas.

**Facebook Group:** Tom advised the Facebook group was running ok, with no spurious hacks or other problems. We have 277 active members and he pointed out that interestingly there were more contributors on Facebook, and they covered a wider range of subjects than on the website.

**FOWW 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book** – Tom gave a quick resume of the book history advising that of the 300 we had printed, we only had 20 left (now collector's items!!). He reminded people that we still had some available at the AGM for sale at £6.

## **6. Treasurers Report.**

The Treasurer presented the audited accounts for 2022, (paper copies being available for those at the AGM), and then talked through all of the audited account figures explaining the various income and expenditures.

The General fund where membership fees were based paid our admin costs. In 2022 we received £729 and after various admin costs newsletters, postage, insurance, public liability cover & website costs etc. there was a surplus of £93.91.

The Conservation fund is where all members donations and a grant from Southern Water are based which paid for our all projects and general conservation work, including any work party tools, bird food, grass cutting , tractor hire etc. In 2022 we brought in £3024.20 and we ended up with a surplus of £252.15

He then went on to show all our bank and savings account balances and explain where our money came from. The 2022 bank balance sheet at year end showed a healthy balance of £9,515 which was a very healthy financial position. This enabled us to be able to quickly respond to any major conservation work as required.

Bob then went on to thank our auditor Doug Roberts, a retired Tax Inspector, for again doing a thorough audit in January of our 2022 Accounts. He was pleased that Mr Roberts had again agreed to stand as our auditor for the 2023 accounts.

The Treasurer then went on to ask if there were any questions:

Question – Sue Greig asked – Had we tried to apply for any charitable grant funds that are available for ecological projects?

The Chairman replied that we had not recently tried, but we were not a registered charity and did not have that official status. We were very much just a volunteer group for Southern Water and there were downsides to obtaining charitable status.

Sue Greig agreed - If we were not a registered charity, grants would be difficult.

Committee Member Richard Allan also added that we were trying to forge better links with Southern Water over funding for projects, but it was proving a slow process.

### Acceptance of the accounts & auditor.

The Treasurer report finished with asking for a majority vote by a show of hands for acceptance of the Accounts, and then acceptance of Doug Roberts as our 2023 Auditor. Both were accepted by a majority vote.

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

The Chairman advised that Bob Hastings had decided the time was right for him to stand down from the Committee and his role as Treasurer and would not stand for re-election. He thanked Bob for the wonderful job he had done as our Treasurer since taking over the role in 2016. His management had seen our finances rise to the strong position we were now in.

Bob had also got us through a very difficult period more recently when the Society and the Committee had to jump through many hoops to meet new money laundering laws. The bank did not make things easy for us even temporarily closing our bank account on several occasions even though we had tried to do all they asked to meet the requirements.

Bob eventually got compensation from the bank for the way we were treated after the Society made an official complaint. We were now all approved and everything was okay, but it had been a very stressful period for the Committee, particularly for Bob who had to deal with the matter.

The Members finished by also showing their appreciation with a round of applause.

The Chairman advised that Darrin Madgin who was one of our bird ringers, joined the Committee in 2021 but due to unforeseen work and family commitments Darrin had not been able to get involved with Committee work as he had hoped and had resigned from the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Tom who had been holding multiple roles on the Committee for some years and been doing a brilliant job. However, there were increased workloads now, particularly with running the new Website which had had multiple problems. There was an opportunity to reduce his work load slightly, so Tom had agreed to pass on the role of Membership Secretary to someone else. Tom would continue on the Committee in his Website & Social media roles as before.

The Chairman finally thanked the rest of his Committee, for their hard work and dedication in managing and running our Society. They had all done an excellent job in their respective roles which had made for a good team spirit within the Committee. The members gave the Committee their appreciation with a round of applause.

**Election of Officers:** Two new Officer nominations had been put forward, one for the Treasurer role, and one for the Membership Secretary role.

Committee Member - Ian Hodgson agreed to stand for the position of Treasurer. Ian had previously worked for a bank, so had a good deal of knowledge and experience on accounting rules and banking matters.

Proposed by Bob Johnson    Seconded by Bob Hastings.

Ian Hodgson – Treasurer. (Duly elected with a majority show of hands approval. No objections).

Committee Member - John Edwards agreed to stand for the position of Membership Secretary. John had previously worked as a Company Secretary so had a good deal of knowledge and experience regarding membership rules and matters.

Proposed by Bob Johnson    Seconded by Tom Howard-Jones

John Edwards – Membership Secretary: (Duly elected with a majority show of hands approval. No objections).

All other Officer members were happy to continue.

Chairman - Bob Johnson

Website & Facebook Editor - Tom Howard-Jones

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

All the above were accepted with a majority show of hands approval. No objections.

### **Committee Members standing for election:**

Shaun Taylor had not been able to get involved with Committee work in the last year due to his long term ill health. Shaun did not want to leave the Committee but appreciated that at present he was not well enough to participate fully. The Committee have offered Shaun an advisory role, hopeful that his health would improve and he could become a more active Committee member again.

There are no new nominations for Committee members.

All the present Committee members are all standing for re-election.

Committee Member – Richard Allan

Committee Member – Phil Holland

Committee Member – Peter Johnson

Committee Member – Shaun Taylor (Advisory)

All the above were duly elected on a majority show of hands vote.

### **8. Any Other Business - Any Questions:**

The Chairman asked if there were any questions or other business anyone would like to raise? None was forthcoming.

The AGM meeting was therefore formally closed at 19:45.

The Chairman gave thanks to the refreshment ladies Judy, Joy & Marie who would be serving the refreshments at the interval before our Guest Speaker.

James Adler - Chief Executive for the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest gave us an illustrated talk “Weald to Waves” on the Ashdown Forest and its connection to the new Green Corridor initiative project to the Knepp Estate and coast.

The talk was very well received.