

Minutes of the AGM 27 September, 2020 2.00 pm

Introductory Note: Owing to restrictions of Covid19 the AGM was held on-line using Zoom.

Present: John Wale, Sharon Bayne, Martin Gray, David Ward, Adrian Bouwens, Barbara Long.

Apologies: Jeff Winn, Chris Street.

Approximately 17 Friends and Volunteers at BWT had logged in.

The agenda set out below had been sent out to all members in advance.

1. Welcome and Introduction:

John Wale and Sharon Bayne, Co- Chairs, welcomed everyone watching and listening.

This AGM was a unique experience for BWT, but thankfully there were experienced zoomers to help us through: thanks to Sharon Bayne and Martin Gray in particular.

John explained that the format would be as in the past, with reports and summaries which will all be reproduced in, or with, Minutes.

There were some pre-notified questions which would be answered as best we can. Any other points which were raised and required investigation or analysis would be answered after the meeting.

John introduced Martin Gray, BWT's new Hon Treasurer, and Barbara Long, who had succeeded Judy Buckley as Newsletter Editor.

2. Summary of Year's Activities and Reports for the Year 2019/2020, including impact of Coronavirus (Co Chairs), and Information from Trustees

John Wale gave the CoChairs' report:

When BWT was created by the Founder Trustees, no one could have anticipated its importance to everyone in the community in the way we have seen during 2020.

Maturing open spaces, hedgerows, parkland and paths have offered much to many. We saw a wet winter, with floods around the Lilk, followed by a sunny, dry Spring.

In March, all site volunteer work had to stop because of Covid-19, and resumed in June after careful risk analysis and safety protocols for everyone working on our land.

We had many visitors. We all had an appreciation of our site, its setting, its Spring Beauty and (with daily or regular visits for exercise), an opportunity to observe nature. We all felt closer to BWT at a time when links to people and our traditional activities became-and still are-restricted.

BWT became a lifeline in lockdown.

We had stopped volunteer activities for three months: during this period trees blossomed and came into leaf, the grass grew tall; and we all saw the site with a new perspective.

We had visitors of all ages, including many who were new to our land. People used our excellent website, rang us up to find out more, and to visit. Fitness enthusiasts found the fitness trail much to their liking, as Adrian Bouewens will report .

Visitor numbers overall grew significantly, as did website hits.

We even had a theatrical "first" - an open air Covid-compliant drama production in August by the "Chandeliers" - strictly for cast and families only.

The progressive impact of additional visitors on nearby car parks led the founders of the Trust to consider additional parking. They are now minded to donate the plot of land on Ashford Road (formerly referred to as the "building plot") as a small car park to serve the eastern end of the BWT site. A planning consultant had been appointed by them to investigate the practicalities of this.

In the summer we also saw the appearance of "Cyril the Snake" -started by a 10 year old boy along Oak Avenue. This winding assembly of beautifully decorated stones gave young people a sense of purpose and ownership during lockdown as Cyril grew longer through their individual efforts.

Meanwhile, the trees and hedges grew, and wildlife, especially garden and field birds, carried on as normal. We saw jays, buzzards, magpies galore; blackbirds and robins shouting out their territory, and the wildflowers sown near the main entrance field giving ideas for further areas, about which we will hear more from Adrian.

Barbara produced her first Newsletter, for which we have received many expressions of appreciation, including phone calls and donations. Judy, as ever, kept our comprehensive website up to date, with a huge increase in hits.

Martin Gray, our new Hon Treasurer, has carefully managed the financial side, and his detailed report and audited statement of accounts are set out separately. John thanked Richard Ashness for his sterling work as Acting Hon Treasurer, and we, the Management Committee, thank all our volunteers who have contributed so much to BWT in the past 12 months.

3. Accounts for 2019/20 and Hon Treasurer's Report: Martin Gray

Reports for the Year 2019/20

Treasurer's Independently Examined Statement of Accounts (copies at meeting and on website).

In the independently examined accounts for the year to June 2020 Martin Gray reported an in-year deficit of £(4,644) compared to last year's surplus of £11,971.

This was largely due to increased expenditure on :

- fitness trail costs of £10,008, for which the grant had been received in the previous financial year.

- replacement fencing £7,952.
- security door and equipment £6,528 (net of insurance claim receipt of £6,029) as a result of the June 2019 barn break-in.

Overall membership fees remained steady, with donations (including Tree and bench sponsorship) reducing in the year so impacting on gift aid receipts.

The deficit would have been much worse but for the unexpected and generous legacy of £10,000 from life member, Stephen Burt.

Martin emphasised the importance of Gift Aid which has over the past 16 years generated £72,000 in additional income as it allows us to reclaim an extra 25% in tax on every eligible donation made by a UK taxpayer. If in doubt please use the contact form and the Treasurer will answer any questions you may have.

It was noted that there is an approximate 50:50 split of membership fees received by cheques/cash versus internet banking with Martin noting that he and Chris much appreciate electronic banking, especially standing orders with 1 July payment at the start of our membership year, as it reduces our administrative effort. With the bank's introduction of Confirmation of Payee this year it is now much safer to ensure your electronic payment arrives at your intended bank account.

Martin thanked Richard Ashness, the previous Acting Hon Treasurer, for all his assistance in the handover of responsibilities during the COVID crisis.

These annual accounts have been examined and reviewed by our Independent Examiner, Rod Hewson, and by BWT's Management Committee. Martin noted that Rod had after 16 years in this role decided it was an appropriate time for him to retire and so this will be his last year as our Independent Examiner. Martin, on behalf of the Committee, expressed his grateful thanks to Rod for having been our Independent Examiner right from the Trust's inception in 2005 to this year.

4. Maintenance, Projects and Volunteers: Jeff Winn (Given by John Wale).

This time last year we reported that the new security measures were being put in place following the break-in in June 2019; the work was eventually completed just before Christmas last year, but only after a considerable amount of frustration caused by the installers inability to turn up on time, and to complete the work satisfactorily.

However once this was done we were able to replace the equipment that was stolen. We used this opportunity to assess what we needed, and after discussion with our supplier, we decided to replace the petrol grass and hedge trimmers with battery versions which have proved very successful, and popular with all the volunteers.

Then in March 2020, Covid hit, and we had to shut down for three months. This meant that when we returned in June there was a lot of work required. All the volunteers were very keen to resume, but with the Covid protocols which we had to put in place we had to restrict the numbers on any one day which necessitated instigating a rota system. With a couple of new recruits the volunteers now number 22.

We have of course not been able to have any of the usual external groups from the local community helping with various projects.

It became obvious that a lot of people liked the longer grass/and so this has been left in some areas until later in the year.

Several sections of fencing have been replaced down the slope from the Elizabeth Harvie field from the bridge to Barn Meadow and along Gore Cottage drive. The annual hedge cut was carried out by our usual contractor in February and the notice board in The Peoples Wood was dismantled, renovated and replaced by the volunteers. We have also designed and built a new wood store behind the Barn to keep our supplies dry and give us more room in the workshop. The steps from Church Meadow down towards the bridge have been re-surfaced and the drainage channels in various places were cleaned out, or in one case, a new longer drain pipe was laid. The very hot weather through the summer meant that the grass in our 3 hay meadows had not grown much and it was therefore decided that it was not economic to pay for this to be cut and baled for hay. We will be cutting these areas ourselves later in the year. As always thanks to all the volunteers who continue to turn out in all weathers all year round.

5. Trees and Benches, including Sponsorship Policy and Replacement Policy: David Ward presented his report.

BENCHES.

As indicated in last year's report, we will not be providing any more benches as we already have 46, which we feel is adequate.

However it has been suggested we could put 1 or 2 beside the football pitch for parents to watch the matches.

This will be considered for the future.

It has also probably come to peoples' notice that several benches have been removed. This is because of advanced decay in either the legs or seat have made them unsafe to use.

We are in the process of replacing them and hope to complete this exercise early next year.

TREES.

Since last September we have taken £1020 in tree sponsorship

As we have over 400 sponsored trees it has been decided by the Management Committee to continue to sponsor trees for members only as from this September.

We are continually having to replace plaques due to damage and wear and tear. If anyone would like to replace their current plaques with the new oval type David can arrange to get that done at a cost of £10.

We are also looking into a stronger material for the plaques in the hope that less damage will occur.

6. BWT Fitness Trail 2019 and Wild Flower Area 2020/21: Adrian Bouwens.

FITNESS TRAIL

It would seem that the fitness trail has been much used particularly during lockdown. The serious fitness fanatics incorporate the exercises in their running circuit, others casually try their hand at each exercise but I do like it when young children see the exercises as grown up climbing frames which we hope will encourage them to exercise more when they are older.

WILD FLOWERS

The experimental wild flower strip has proved to have been successful and shown that some wild flowers will thrive in our somewhat rich and sandy soil. In the flower mix there were over 40 different flower types, some were annuals and others biennials or perennials. You will have noticed that not all 40 varieties have flowered but that was expected, but we will wait until next year to see the biennials and perennials.

BWT was awarded a grant from Maidstone Borough Council's Go Green Go Wild initiative and we will be sowing a new meadow in the triangle as you approach to People's Wood. We will also expand slightly the current wildflower strip. The seed mix contains over 40 varieties of wild flowers aimed at pollinators mainly butterflies and bees. (These are shown on display boards).

OWL BOX

At last year's AGM we were asked to look into the erection of an owl box in Pauline Moore's field (Moore Meadow). After taking advice we have decided against this, as the advice is that they should not be located near main roads (A20) and motorways, because owls tend to fly low and are at risk of being hit by vehicles.

7. Newsletter and Membership Report: Barbara Long/ Chris Street

Membership Chris Street (given on her behalf by Barbara Long)

We have 1185 current family memberships,

which includes 547 Life Members.

Since this time last year 28 new members have joined BWT. We're really pleased to see that half of these joined with Life Membership.

During the last year 50 more members have opted to receive their newsletter by email. This helps us to save postage on deliveries outside the Bearsted area.

This year we have also seen an increase in the amount of people paying their annual membership online.

Deliveries

Chris thanked all the delivery team who volunteer to deliver our newsletters etc. We have a wonderful, reliable team and without their help, it would cost BWT hundreds of pounds each time renewal letters and newsletters are delivered.

8. Community Outreach and Green Flag : John Wale said that because of Covid-19; the Green Flag inspection in 2020 would not involve a visit by a judge. The application outcome would be made known later in the year, probably October.

9. Any other Business and pre-notified Questions from Friends

John Wale referred to pre-notified questions as follows:

From Wendi Usher:

Wendi had emailed to say that she enjoys walking around the Woodland Trust but questioned whether there was a policy of too much maintenance through grass cutting, tree pruning etc, She and wondered if a policy of reduced maintenance with grass left to grow longer and planting with wild flower seeds (including Yellow Rattle) and cutting mown paths through would look so much more natural and much better for wildlife.

Response:

As reported above, this year BWT had left the grass on meadow areas to grow tall, with mown paths. We shall consider repeating this course in future years, since many walkers appreciated this.

We are actively preparing three areas for wildflower meadows and have a grant to help fund work in preparing these. Sowing of mixed wildflower seeds is scheduled for October; please keep watch on the BWT website for further news.

10. Closing Remarks: John and Sharon thanked all on the Management Committee, especially those who arranged and helped with the Zoom meeting today.

There were thanks expressed to the Management Committee for organising the on-line meeting, and to all Volunteers and Committee for keeping the site so well and and thereby providing comfort to many.