

BEARSTED WOODLAND TRUST: MINUTES OF AGM 1 October 2017
2:30 pm, Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club

This year's AGM at the Bowls Club was attended by 41 people, including Management Committee Members and Friends of BWT.

Apologies were received from 23 persons including Richard and Dena Ashness, Trustees of BWT. Attendance and Apologies are given on attached lists.

Sharon Bayne and John Wale have succeeded Richard Ashness as co-chairs of the Management Committee, and John took the Chair for this year's AGM. Richard remains Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Welcome and Chairs' Remarks.

John opened the meeting with a vote of thanks to Richard for his outstanding work in leading BWT since its creation in 2004. This was supported unanimously.

John also paid tribute to all the work carried out in many ways by BWT volunteers who put in more than 5000 hours in total each year. As a Charity we are blessed with willing helpers, ably led by Jeff, David, and Peter, so we can maintain a regime of safe and effective site management.

John thanked Judy Buckley – now a member of the management Committee - for her sterling efforts in regularly updating the website and in preparing the Newsletter twice yearly, and Chris Street, whose local army of volunteers distribute the Newsletters, thereby saving BWT appreciable sums in postage.

Adrian Bouwens – a Thursday morning volunteer – had also joined the Management Committee.

John added that BWT was now entering a more mature phase: woodland and hedges planted in the early years were flourishing, but now required specialist equipment and techniques for maintenance; this is generating extra costs which we must plan for.

Although there is much to celebrate in BWT's development this brings both benefits and challenges. We need to bring in new plant and contractors to help us manage and nurture the site, and also be aware of benefits and risks to all users. Safety is paramount, especially when dealing with mature trees. Action will have to be systematic and planned, and allowed for in annual budgets.

John went on to say that one major challenge BWT has to face now is Ash Die Back, and in the later reports Sharon Bayne and Jeff Winn would describe the problems, what BWT has done to date, and what we intend to do in the future.

Reports for the Year 2016/17:

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

In the audited accounts to June 2017 Richard Ashness, Acting Hon Treasurer, reported an in-year surplus of £7120.76. Income from donations was similar to previous years but bank interest has reduced further. Site maintenance costs had risen through repairs to tractors and hired contractors. Reserves were still healthy. John Wale thanked Peter Martin of Bearsted Active Retirement Association for the Association's donation raised from the Sale of Second Hand Books.

John reminded the Meeting that BWT was still looking for a permanent Hon Treasurer!

Maintenance and Projects

Jeff Winn spoke of the Maintenance Team's efforts; his full report is attached. In addition to work within the 3-year plan, volunteers had cleared and replanted substantial areas of Roller Bench Wood, edged and redefined the Manning Maze, and planted additional trees in Moore Meadow. Some more mature hedges had been cut very neatly by a contractor, a process we would repeat in the coming year. Under BWT supervision, volunteers from The Tudor Park Hotel had repainted the Lilk Bridge.

BWT's 3-Year Plan and Ash Die-Back: Sharon Bayne emphasised the need for systematic planning, including resources, for maintenance of trees, hedges and hard areas, and in time repair or replacement of paths and fencing. The recent Crack Willow falls and resulting safety work by Tree Surgeons had brought home the need for vigilance.

Ash Die Back (ADB) is a national issue and at BWT it is a reality which we have to face: Sharon gave a presentation explaining the disease and its origins, the means of transmission and geographic areas of Kent which it had reached, and what BWT was proposing now and in the coming years. The disease had originated across the Channel, and had reached Suffolk first; diseased trees show leaf loss and crown die-back. Trees lose their energy and there is no cure. The disease spreads through wind-blown spores and leaves, the spores living on leaf stems. From July/August onwards the spores infect stems and hence next year's leaf growth. Locally, ADB was first noted at Penenden Heath in 2012 and is slowly spreading westwards. When a "critical mass" of infection is reached, the disease spreads more quickly. At BWT the most severely affected trees will have to be taken down, but others will be pollarded to see if healthy new growth can be established. Currently there are 3 trees in Moore Meadow known to have ADB; others thought to require surgery include some near the Harvie Field and some near Ashford Rd; there are a few on the fringe of the People's Wood and also the Old Wood. There will be regular inspection and monitoring of all these areas, but in the longer term there will need to be a programme of replacement with other species.

Trees and Benches: David Ward

David Ward reported that 22 Trees and 5 Benches had been sponsored during the year, with total income of £6,800 including 14 new Life Memberships. There would be a pause in tree sponsorship until Spring 2018 pending a survey of site needs and available space. The phased programme of plaque replacement was continuing.

Membership: Chris Street. Chris Street's report indicated BWT now had 1170 current Family Memberships (similar to 2016), including 504 Life Memberships (22 more than October 2016). 45 Renewals are outstanding. Chris thanked everyone in the BWT Newsletter Delivery Team who save us hundreds of pounds annually by delivering to Bearsted, Bearsted Park, Downswood and Grove Green. .

Newsletter and Website Editor: Judy Buckley

Judy spoke of the interest in Nature Notes, and thanked Claire Brown for her regular contributions. John added that Buzzards were now becoming more common, and there had been two confirmed early morning sightings of Red Kites above Moore Meadow.

Visits and Outreach: John Wale

John referred to visits from Roseacre and Thurnham Schools, and a guided walk for the Bearsted and Thurnham WI in August. Guides had held an Orienteering Exercise, and short talks had been given to Bearsted Parish Council and to Madginford Seniors, where some in the audience recounted their experiences as young people who loved to play many years ago in what is now Moore Meadow.

Green Flag Award: John Wale reported that BWT had again received marks within the highest category for a local Community Area; this followed a "mystery shopper" visit by a Green Flag judge during the summer.

Questions from Friends:

- John Broadhurst asked if there were comparisons between Ash DieBack and Dutch Elm Disease? - *Not biologically, but the regional and national impact in the longer term will be as devastating. Kent Downs AONB expects to lose 90% of Ash trees.*
- Does BWT have links with other local woodland groups to share information? *Yes, eg Bredhust Woodland Action Group and Vinters Valley Park Trust; so BWT is comparing occurrence and impact of ADB.*
- Are there resistant varieties? -*Possibly, but more research is needed before we replace.*
- Can BWT re-sell wood from felled Ash trees? -*Possibly: It is thought that trunks and heartwood are unaffected.*
- Will recycled disease-affected leaves be a problem? -*possibly, if spores are retained in leaf mould.*

- Could BWT think of longer term replacement through its Tree Sponsorship? – Yes, *this could be a way of reshaping BWT's space..*
- Andrew Knatchbull commented on the sensitive development of Moore Meadow, and the contrast this area provided with open spaces and panoramic views. – *Sharon and John confirmed the intention was to preserve these views in the longer-term. The same point had been made by a Green Flag judge.*
- Arlene Broadhurst wondered if the anecdotes from Madginford Seniors could provide the material for an Oral History project? – *John Wale agreed it would be useful to approach Kate Kersey.*
- Could something be done to arrest soil erosion on the bank above the collecting ring? – *This would be examined and action taken if practicable.*

The meeting ended at 15:45 with a vote of appreciation to the Management Committee members and all BWT volunteers.