

BEARSTED WOODLAND TRUST: MINUTES OF AGM 2015
27 September 2015, 2:30 pm, Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club

Present: 37 Members and Friends, (see attendance sheet) including Richard Ashness (Chairman); Dena Ashness (Trustee); Sharon Bayne (Trustee); Chris Street; David Ward; Jeff Winn; Peter Schmoeger; John Wale (Deputy Chairman - who took notes).

Apologies: None given.

Chairman's Remarks: The Chairman welcomed members to the AGM and thanked everyone who worked for, and supported BWT in various ways, giving time freely in the cause of sustaining and enhancing BWT.

Richard paid a special tribute to Bernard Head, who had passed away during the summer. Bernard had been BWT's Treasurer and Trustee since its formation. He had been an excellent Treasurer for more 11 years and had been a wonderful supporter and advocate for BWT. Despite his illness, he had carried on as Treasurer with his usual care and thoroughness. He would be greatly missed.

Richard was carrying out the role of Acting Honorary Treasure until a permanent replacement could be found.

Treasurer's Report: Richard Ashness, presented the audited Accounts for the year to 30 June 2015, a signed copy of which was available to all present. He reported an in-year deficit of £6705, due entirely to major capital expenditure on resurfacing of Willson Avenue. A grant from KCC would help to reduce this figure in the following year's accounts. Other Income and Expenditure for 2014 were in line with previous years. Reserves were in a healthy position, although BWT would be looking at ways to achieve a better return on investments; this was difficult in the current economic climate. BWT was very fortunate to have volunteer skills which enabled us to repair equipment in-house, the only expenditure being parts and consumables. The Accounts and Report were noted. In answer to a question Richard confirmed the money received for Life Memberships was the same as the previous year.

Maintenance

Jeff Winn reported that BWT had 24 regular volunteers, a slight increase on last year. All work was carried out in line with the Three-year Plan developed by Sharon Bayne, our Environments and Ecological Consultant; Additional work included:

1. Drainage improvements with pipe and ballast in a depression across the public footpath in Moore Meadow; this will be grassed over.
2. New double gates and a pedestrian access at the Roundwell entrance to Moore Meadow, facilitating a new entrance at the eastern limit of our site and improved safety for BWT vehicles and plant entering the site.
3. The old Farm Machinery in Moore Meadow had been moved and set up securely as a feature.
4. Hay-Cut: Following delay and practical problems the arrangement with RAMSAK made in 2014 had not been renewed.
5. The 2015 Hay-cut had utilised Tractor, Cutter Rake and Baler hired at no cost to BWT from Medway Valley Countryside Partnership; however there was a high cost in time and physical work, particularly in collecting and delivering the equipment. Following training for Peter and Jeff, we had successfully cut 60% of our Hay Meadows, producing about 150 bales of hay, 130 of which had been collected by Buttercups Goat Sanctuary, and which had fed their goats for 1 month; also 20 bales were collected by Cobtree Young Farmers, from whom a £40 cheque had been received. We are still reviewing the approach to the Hay-cut in 2016; the message is that the equipment must be the right size for access and available at a suitable time.

Trees and Benches: David Ward reported that during the past year 16 trees and 4 benches had been sponsored, generating a combined income of £4775; as a result, BWT welcomed 8 new Life Members.

1. Between November 2014 and February 2015 approximately 500 whips were planted on the south side of Moore Meadow, together with a small number of more mature trees; all are native species.
2. The 300-year old Oak Tree which fell in October 2014 has been tidied up and made safe by BWT; it is a very popular feature with the young, and its remains will be left in-situ.
3. Wooden posts for tree plaques are rotting after about 5-7 years and are gradually being replaced by approved spring nail fixings: the Oak Avenue is an example.

Membership: Chris Street's report indicated there were now 1175 Family Memberships and 10 new Life Memberships converted from annual membership; this is becoming more popular. There are 62 subscription renewals outstanding. Chris also thanked all in the Delivery Team, who distribute Newsletters and Information Leaflets.

Community Links: John Wale referred to the visit by 90 pupils from Thurnham School's Year 2 in March; they had all written appreciative letters, excerpts from which had been reproduced in the Newsletter.

BWT had also been the location for an Orienteering Evening for Kent Girl Guides organised by the GGA.

The Junior Football Pitch is well-used by Roseacre Raiders, although Bearsted FC have now found another pitch in Otham for their Junior Sides. It is possible that Roseacre Raiders may extend their usage to Sundays as well as Saturday.

Environmental Management Plan: Sharon Bayne confirmed she had amended the 3-Year Plan which strikes a balance between amenity value and nature/wildlife. Moore Meadow is subject to a lighter management approach in order to preserve existing features. Feedback from users is very positive.

Management Committee: The current Management Committee comprised six plus two additional members. No additional nominations were received by the due date, and members of the present Committee were re-appointed.

Any Other Business:

Access for All: The Deputy Chairman reported that although there had been a slight reduction in the number of dogs off leads in the designated area, many walkers – members and non- members alike - were ignoring the code. The full code with clear signage and double acting gates had been in operation for 7 months, so the Management Committee felt this needed to be in place for a much longer period, more than 1 year, to allow behaviours to settle.

In answer to a question about walker numbers, John Wale replied that it seemed that some dog walkers – many of whom were non-members - had chosen to walk elsewhere. However many walkers were in evidence at all times of the day in both eastern and western areas. The Chairman expressed surprise that more people had not conformed to the Trust's code, which had been arrived at following a democratically conducted survey of BWT members.

Judy Buckley mentioned an experience where a puppy on lead was bothered by older dogs off-lead. There had been other incidents reported to BWT Committee,

Chas Ashley felt some who were ignoring the code were doing so deliberately as a protest. This was dangerous, since moving machinery is a potential hazard to dogs during the mowing season, even with the watchful approach of volunteers.

AGM Notification: Following a question regarding publicity for the AGM, the Chairman and other Committee Members responded that: the date had been advertised in the Summer Newsletter; also on the BWT website; at the Village Fayre in June; and also via notices posted on site in early September. However in 2016 an additional email would be sent to all members.

Community Purchase of Land: The Chairman referred to the unsuccessful community bid for purchase of agricultural land between Thurnham Lane and Water Lane. The bid had been structured on donations promised by BWT, Bearsted PC, and by many local residents, whose generosity was very touching. In answer to a further question on how wide BWT's aspirations might be for future land purchase, Richard added that this would be a matter for BWT's Trustees who had a responsibility to ensure BWT was not exposed to unacceptable risk. However BWT would be interested in land which was had contiguous boundaries with the current site, although previous attempts to acquire such land had failed. He now felt that BWT would restrict all future considerations to adjoining land, and always be dependent upon individual circumstances.

Development of Lilk Meadow ("Roundwell" Park) The Chairman clarified that the Developer had been willing to offer "surplus land" along the Lilk Stream area to BWT, but this has been declined. The land would be run by the Len Valley Conservation Partnership.

Litter on Site: A member raised the issue of litter left at the "top end" of BWT, and wondered if letter bins could be used or signs placed asking all users to take litter home. Generally BWT was not in favour of additional signage or litter bins, but there was general agreement that the site should be respected by everyone who visits. Jeff Winn added that the time when litter is most prolific is after Friday and Saturday evenings (mainly cans), and volunteers always collect litter as they work around the site. Peter Schmoeger said that on average he took 4 plastic bin bags per month to tip, including material for recycling.
