

BEARSTED WOODLAND TRUST: MINUTES OF AGM
30 September 2018 2:30 pm, Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club

The 2018 AGM was attended by 45 people, including Trustees, Management Committee Members, Friends of BWT and one well-behaved dog. Apologies were received from 18 persons.

The Attendance List and Apologies are given in appendices to the Minutes. John Wale took the Chair, explaining that he and Co-Chair Sharon Bayne would manage the meeting.

Welcome and Chairs' Remarks.

John opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and by thanking the Bowls Club for the use of their clubhouse.

John and Sharon thanked all the volunteers for the tremendous efforts they put in during the year. As a Charity we are blessed with willing helpers, ably led by Jeff, David, and Peter on site; Chris Street looks after Membership and Renewals; this year she also managed the challenge of ensuring BWT complied with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Judy Buckley worked tirelessly on the website and Newsletters, and David Ward secured substantial income through Sponsorship of trees and benches.

Jeff Winn had received a well-deserved Mynn Award from Bearsted Parish Council for his work at BWT.

In terms of weather, 2018 was a year of contrasts and extremes: a very cold and prolonged winter followed by a cold Spring and a very hot dry Summer extending over several months. These climatic contrasts meant BWT had to keep a careful watch on trees, and action to keep new planting areas well-watered, and older diseased or dead trees removed or made safe. The latter brought significant costs, as predicted in 2017.

Trees and hedges continue to mature, which is good for the landscape and wildlife, but this brings changes in management approaches. Ash Die-back had affected some areas of older trees, and their removal or pollarding enabled us to appreciate the challenges and judge the best way to deal with the problem.

As always, we appreciate comments and questions from those who use the site; appreciative comments are always welcome and we always listen to constructive suggestions. We are aware of the fragility of the landscape and the fact that in time it will change, giving an opportunity for enrichment in the longer term.

In conclusion, John said that although the site was maturing, so were BWT's Volunteer group and we needed to be mindful that we did not neglect succession planning.

Reports for the Year 2017/18

Audited Statement of Accounts (copies available at meeting and on website).

In the audited accounts to June 2018 Richard Ashness, Acting Hon Treasurer, reported an in-year deficit of £10,914.55. This was explained by the expenditure of £20,820 on Tree Surgery necessitated by Ash Die-back. Tree and Bench Sponsorship had risen but income from other donations was slightly down. In

Expenditure, other site costs were down, Reserves were still healthy. John Wale thanked 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! There were no questions.

Maintenance and Projects

Jeff Winn presented his report (see attached). Jeff spoke of the work of the Maintenance Team, which was largely governed by the Three-year Maintenance Plan.

During the past year a gate had been unbolted and stolen from Moore Meadow; Police had been informed, and security on other gates had increased.

Areas for attention in 2018/2019 would be

- repair and renewal of boundary fencing as needed; some were now more than 10 years old.
- repair and improvement of some of the paths and steps.

BWT's 3-Year Management Plan: Sharon Bayne emphasised the value of systematic planning, including resources, for maintenance of trees, hedges and hard areas.

As feared, Ash Die Back has become a national issue. At BWT it became a reality which we had to face in 2018 for management and safety reasons; this required expensive outlays and specialist contractors. The most severely affected trees have been taken down and leaves burned. Others, specifically in Moore Meadow, have been pollarded, and already healthy new growth is visible in some areas. There continues to be regular inspection and monitoring across the site.

Trees and Benches: David Ward

Bearsted Woodland Trust, over 14 years, has arranged sponsorship of about 450 trees and 64 benches!

Having looked at remaining space available and the objectives of the 3Year Plan, the Management Committee has concluded that no more benches are needed, and tree planting should be paused.

Therefore, it was announced that sponsorship will be suspended from 1st October 2018 for two years, after which the situation will be reviewed.

Membership and General Data Protection Regulations: Chris Street. Chris Street's report indicated BWT now had 1189 current Family Memberships including 516 Life Memberships. 85 renewals are outstanding. Chris thanked all in the BWT Newsletter Delivery Team who save us hundreds of pounds annually by delivering to Bearsted, Bearsted Park, Downswood and Grove Green. Chris had received 709 letters of consent for GDPR and is chasing outstanding replies as time permits.

Newsletter and Website Editor: Judy Buckley

Judy mentioned regular updates and information bulletins which make the website so useful. John Wale thanked Judy for her dedicated work in producing the Newsletter twice each year, and for keeping the Website up to date. He added that

Buzzards had been seen again, as well as further sightings of Red Kites in areas close to the North Downs.

Visits and Outreach: John Wale

John referred to visits from Roseacre and Thurnham Schools, and a sponsored walk organised by Madginford School.

Green Flag Award: John Wale reported that a full inspection had been carried out by the GF judge, Stephen Tickner, on Sunday 20 May. Stephen was very thorough, not having seen the site before; he found it welcoming and impressive. He commended the site layout, signage, and overall condition. BWT had again received marks within the highest category for a local Community Area.

Questions from Friends:

Funds and Subscriptions:

- **Mike Henderson (Volunteer)** wondered if a leaflet drop would be worthwhils in order to publicise the site and the fact that BWT does not receive other income or grants.
- **Dave Green (Volunteer)** asked whether the Annual Membership Subscription of £5, which has been unchanged since at least 2008, was still realistic, and wondered if BWT Management Committee could consider raising this to (eg) £10 pa? *It was agreed the management Committee would look at these two pints.*
- **John Broadhurst (Trustee)** suggested that a Forward Plan for Trees and Planting would be another way of raising funds as well as enhancing the long term value of the site. *This was another point to consider.*
- Another Friend suggested BWT Life Members, of which there were many, be asked to consider making voluntary donations from time to time.
- **Ash Die-Back:** Were there any other remedies apart from felling? *Sharon Bayne replied that there were no treatments possible for ADB; Peter Schmoeger added that larger trees took time to show the disease; last year's pollarding in Moore Meadow had taken away affected outer branches, but in the longer term we do not know whether the trees will recover. The White Horse Wood Project "Ash to Ash" was local and would be watched carefully for comparison purposes.*
- **Were other tress affected by disease? Yes:-** *Sharon referred to problems affecting Horse Chestnut trees in our area of Kent.*

There were no further questions. Brian Clifford proposed a vote of thanks to all Volunteers and Management Committee for the work they do in developing and maintaining BWT as a Community Asset. This was endorsed unanimously.

The Meeting closed at 3.40 pm

BWT AGM REPORT 2018: Maintenance and Projects: Jeff Winn

The volunteer team numbers have fallen slightly this year, although still adequate at present; however we are aware of the need to recruit additional team members in due course.

The general maintenance of the site has continued in accordance with the Management Plan as in previous years, so I will concentrate on the more significant events which have taken place this year.

In October last year the wooden stepping stones carved with animals and insects by Steve, who carved the owls and the horse, were laid beside the path leading to the children's maze.

In November the Main Gate notice board was renovated and re-installed, and the fence around Moore Meadow near Hillbeck was repaired after damage caused when the tree surgeon was taking down some dead wood from an oak tree.

In December the privet hedge on the left of the main entrance was thinned out, and in January we replaced a number of trees in the two areas that were planted in Moore Meadow, using the spare whips from our nursery area. We also replaced a number of fence rails that had deteriorated.

February saw all the hedges cut by our contractor, and the steps by Gore Cottage were renovated. It was reported to us that the wire fence above the fishing lake had been cut, presumably to gain access to the lake; the fencing was repaired. At about the same time the wooden pedestrian gate from Roundwell was stolen. This was reported to the Police and replaced by BWT using a spare gate .

In April we raised the height of the fence around the Southern Water inspection manhole for safety reasons. We also had very heavy rain in April, and the wooden sleepers on the Public Footpath down to then bridge were all displaced. Our volunteer team replaced them all, but at the end of May the same thing happened again, and this time they were replaced by a KCC contractor.

We also renovated the notice board at the Sutton Street entrance.

At the end of June the three areas of hay meadow in front of Gore Cottage were cut and baled for us, by Ian Betts of Otham, and were collected by a stable in Lenham.

June and July were very dry, and so we used our water bowser every week to water as many of the new trees as possible. Also, a number of benches were repaired.

We discovered that the padlock and chain on our main entrance gate had been tampered with, we suspect with a view to gaining access for vehicles or to break into the Barn. We took action immediately and secured both the main entrance and the Roundwell gate with high security chains and padlocks.

Jeff Winn September 2018