

BEARSTED WOODLAND TRUST: MINUTES OF AGM

9 October 2022 2:30 pm, Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club

Attendance: 35 Members and Friends and Trustee.
Apologies received from 40 Friends and Trustees.

1/2 Chair's Welcome and Opening Remarks John Wale (Chair, BWT Management Committee)

1 Chair's Welcome

It was great to be able to meet in person again as we are better able to cope with Covid now. The Bowls Club were thanked for the use of their clubhouse.

Attendance and Apologies are given on attached lists.

2 Opening Remarks

John Wale introduced the members of the Management Committee: Adrian Bouwens as Vice Chair; Martin Gray: Treasurer and Trustee; Barbara Long: Newsletter Editor; Chris Street: Membership secretary and Dave Ward: Tree sponsorship. Apologies had been received from Martin Herrema: Web Editor.

John emphasised the importance of BWT to the wider community during the past 12 months: open air, nature in and around, rural surroundings; peace, solace, and the opportunity to meet friends or family in the open. Mostly it has been a very good year: our site continues to mature, needing careful watch on both trees and hedges. The Jubilee Wood trees had been planned for and to be planted later this year. The car park was granted planning permission and the Cellpave surface laid in early 2022 which is manufactured from recycled plastic. This is environmentally friendly, as it is a no dig solution, with the pavers fitted together and then rolled into the existing ground surface so avoiding the need for excavation: since then the grass has been mown several times. The entrance gates and height barrier have been installed and we are now awaiting final tie-ins to the access drive as awaiting discussion with KCC. The new Platinum Jubilee Bench donated by Bearsted and Thurnham Society has been a splendid addition. Sadly, widespread vandalism of the notice boards and fences, the new bird hide and tree plaques in public areas have been very disappointing but, in reality, a fact of life locally with repairs in hand for notice boards plus replacement tree plaques were expensive!

It was much appreciated the return of a local school on visits with Thurnham CEI making it their first external trip in March. There was very good work by committee members to add calendars and Christmas cards to the items we can sell with Martin Herrema looking at how best to develop our website. A huge thanks to Michael Buckley for his skilled and careful work with photographs and archives: a recent talk to local WI showed how valuable these records are for some families.

Development of wildlife features has enhanced the potential for birds, bees and other wildlife to find food and sanctuary on BWT land.

All volunteers put in a great deal of their time, both on site and behind the scenes: it is therefore all the more rewarding when people stop us on site, in the car park, or in the village to offer thanks and appreciation. Above all, BWT is a team effort, exemplified by innovation, ideas, new skills and ways to solve problems. There are always new challenges, but with our volunteers and support of a friends we usually overcome them. Thanks to them and to all of you.

3 Report from the Trustees

Martin Gray, on behalf of the trustees, expressed their thanks to the Management Committee and volunteers for all the day to day management of the Trust and to the friends of BWT for their support of the trust.

Secondly the trustees have met recently and have approved this year's accounts and the trustee's annual report which will be submitted in due course to our regulator, the Charity Commission.

4 Accounts for 2021/22 and Hon Treasurer's Report

Martin Gray presented the Independently Examined Statement of Accounts (copies available at meeting and on website) for the year to June 2022 and reported an in-year deficit of £(16,396) compared to last year's surplus of £5,082. This was largely due to the planned expenditure on the Ashford Road car park.

The majority of the car park costs were for the CellPave AP tiles made from recycled plastic which costed £10,706. Site costs increased slightly but included £462 for materials to repair the maze which was successfully repaired by our maintenance volunteers but would have cost much more as we had received an initial contractor's quote for over £8,000. The expected tree surgeons cost of £6,240 for the trees suffering ash die-back were incurred in July following the initial £900 cost in June last year.

Overall membership fees remained steady, with an increase in donations largely offsetting the reduction in tree and bench sponsorship as it was paused but now recommenced. BWT now have a card reader which can accept contactless payments as well as debit cards using Chip and Pin and was used for the first time at the June Bearsted Fayre. Reserves remain in a healthy position. These annual accounts have been examined and reviewed by our Independent Examiner, Anil Mathur, and by BWT's Management Committee.

5 Maintenance, Projects and Volunteers

Jeff Winn sent his apologies due to contracting Covid a few days ago (Jeff fortunately has subsequently recovered and was welcomed back later this month). John Wale thanked all the Maintenance volunteers for their efforts during the year and noted that the maintenance team is now run jointly by Jeff Winn (Tues), by myself (Wed) and Adrian (Thurs). A new Maintenance Plan and a Hedge Cutting Plan have been developed and implemented during the year. In-house proposals for path maintenance have also been developed and new links forged with the Gurkhas. Jim Cooper has joined the team recently and we have welcomed his knowledge in helping us to better maintain and improve the availability of the two tractors and their flails. A bird-hide was created in the spring but unfortunately has suffered vandalism a couple of times and has been subsequently repaired. The maze has been renovated by the volunteers and now looks much better. The maintenance volunteers requested a defibrillator which was purchased and a first aid course provided to show how it should be used and to also refresh their first aid knowledge.

6 Trees and Benches, Sponsorship

David Ward noted we had now resumed sponsoring trees. It has been agreed to allow trees in Moore meadow to be available for sponsorship and we have had 5 tree sponsorships taken up giving us £1250 income so far. Our waiting list has 25 people on it and I am gradually working through it.

During the course of the year we have had to replace a considerable number of tree plaque due to breakages, wear and tear and vandalism.

Dave has been experimenting with reinforcing the back of the plaques with a metal strip to prevent plaques being snapped off at the point of attachment to the tree, and so far this seems to be working. But recently we have had 17 plaques ripped off trees in the Oak Avenue plus damage to the bird hide again and it's difficult to know what further we can do to prevent this vandalism: any suggestions would be welcome. Currently we have 24 outstanding plaques to be replaced which will take some time to process.

7 Environment and Wildlife, including Wild Flower Areas

Adrian Bouwens mentioned for the last few years we have been trying to be more conscious of our responsibilities as a landowner for wildlife and the environment. We have stopped burning the cuttings and brash and now use these to make dead hedges which are a wonderful habitat for insects, small mammals, frogs, slugs and other creepy crawlies.

We are also managing our mowing regime to allow grass to grow long in appropriate places to encourage more wildlife. Our wildlife strips that many of you have admired bring colour and food for bees and invertebrates which in turn provide food for other wild life. We were disappointed that the strip behind the agricultural machinery didn't take but we will try again next year. Sharp eyed visitors will notice that there are now two Kent bat boxes in the pines in Moore Meadow. These were made and put up by the volunteers and we hope we can attract some bats.

The volunteers have also built a bee hotel now in Church Meadow. That strange stack of logs at the end of Oak Avenue is a stag beetle tower to encourage those magnificent chaps. There is another one in Roller Bench Wood and I hope you will see more in the future.

We are leaving more wood to rot to provide habitat and food. Grubs and insects, notably wasps, are munching their way through the old turkey oak and unfortunately the Green Man, which you should see coming back soon, and of course there are log piles throughout the trust.

I am going to mention the car park because environment has been an important part of the project. The original planned concrete base has been replaced by the plastic honeycomb matting. Plastic yes but it does allow the grass to grow through and now it just looks as it was as a field. We have planted over 1000 whips for hedging around 2 sides and along the boundaries, we have dead hedges along the south side, log piles along the north side and of course this will be surrounded by Jubilee wood.

8 Membership Report and Newsletter Delivery Team: Chris Street

Membership

We have **1163** current family memberships, which includes **580** Life Members.

37 new members have joined BWT since this time last year; we're really pleased to see that **11** of these joined with Life Membership.

190 members now receive their newsletter by email. This helps us to save money on printing and especially postage for those members who live outside the Bearsted area.

Our minimum donation for membership has been held at the same amount for 18 years since the beginning of our trust in June 2004. As notified at renewal time in July we reluctantly decided that we needed to increase our suggested minimum annual membership to £10 and life membership to £150 in line with the current inflation rates and hope this can be maintained for a similar number of years.

Newsletter Deliveries

Chris thanked all the delivery team who volunteer to deliver our newsletters and renewal letters. It was good to see so many of the team at our volunteers' get-together in the summer. We have a wonderful, dedicated team and without their help, it would cost BWT hundreds of pounds each time renewal letters and newsletters are delivered. The 'by hand' delivery is divided into 30 rounds covering Bearsted, Weaving Street, Bearsted Park, Otham Lane, Thurnham Lane and part of Grove Green. For the last couple of years we have also had help from a local postman, the son of one of our members, who has volunteered to deliver to our Downswood members.

8 Newsletter, Calendars and Notelets

Newsletter

Barbara Long noted that pandemic restrictions meant we produced only a single newsletter in both 2020 and 2021. We were careful not to put our hand-delivery team at risk, especially given our age profile! But having a single, bumper issue worked so well we have decided to continue that pattern, keeping members up to date online over the year.

Every member of the Management Committee and even the Chairman of Trustees contributed to this summer's issue, which was again designed with flair by Sue Fuller. But I would also welcome input from friends - whether ideas, short articles or photos. If photographs please forward them in print quality - Apps like WhatsApp compress the image and the quality restricts the size of image we can reproduce.

Calendars and cards

As you will have read in the Woodlander - and can see on display here - we have produced Calendars and Christmas Cards for the first time this year. We have also launched a new design of note cards.

It's a way of spreading the word about BWT and its status as a local, independent, charity and of encouraging new members. So many of the people who enjoy our 26 acres still seem unaware that they are managed and maintained by volunteers. It's also a way of raising funds, of course.

The new products were launched at the Bearsted and Thurnham Fayre and you can also order them from BWT online : <https://www.bearstedwoodlandtrust.org/souvenirs>

They are also being stocked by Taylors newsagents on The Green. Taylors report people are already buying as many as four or five calendars at a time so I urge you to buy while you can! We don't have all our stock here, but Chris will deliver to any address within Bearsted if you would like to place an order.

9 Website

<https://www.bearstedwoodlandtrust.org/>

Martin Herrema sent his apologies as unable to attend so John Wale read his report. The BWT Management Committee had agreed that it wished to investigate a redesign of the website. The main focus during 2022 has therefore been to establish the options and costs involved in implementing such a redesign. Martin had made contact with a Maidstone-based web services agency and arranged an initial scoping meeting. This meeting proved useful in establishing the different levels of possible redesign and the costs involved, depending on BWT's requirements.

Following further consultation with BWT's Management Committee, Martin submitted a detailed brief to the web agency and obtained quotes. These quotes were then discussed at a subsequent Management Committee meeting. Members present decided the costs involved in progressing the project could not be justified at present, given uncertainties over other areas of expenditure such as the car park project.

It was therefore decided to 'park' the web redesign project, subject to discussions with the current website hosting company on possible smaller scale design 'tweaks' that would have less impact on budgets.

10 Community Outreach and Green Flag

As mentioned in the Introduction John Wale noted that Thurnham CEI made their first external trip in March to Bearsted Woodland Trust. John had also recommenced presentational talks to local organisations including Bearsted WI.

Green Flag had made a full inspection this year and was an outstanding success. A very experienced judge who has worked across England was very complimentary about BWT and their volunteers who deserve much credit for our achievements.

11 Any Other Business and Questions Notified by Friends

Felicity Simpson thanked the Management Committee members and Trustees for all their efforts in making BWT such a wonderful community asset; this was endorsed enthusiastically by all present. Glynis Ireland from the boot camp who meet on a Tuesday in Elizabeth Harvie field mentioned that they are disturbed by noise and grass cutting and John Wale agreed to follow up on this.