

BEARSTED WOODLAND TRUST: MINUTES OF AGM

1 October 2023 2:30 pm, Bearsted and Thurnham Bowls Club

Attendance: 41 Members and Friends and Trustee.
Apologies received from 20 Friends and Trustees.

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

1 Chair's Welcome

It was good to meet in person again with probably the warmest weather we have ever had for our AGM this year. The Bowls Club were thanked for the use of their clubhouse and for BWT life members, Brian and June and litter pickers, to prepare the room and run the bar. Attendance and Apologies are given on attached lists.

2 Summary of the Year's Activities

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 Martin Herrema: Web Editor. Unfortunately, Dave Ward: Tree sponsorship, was unable to attend this year having to attend hospital with a close family member.

BWT is now entering its 20th year and it is noticeable how the trust has moved on from the initial presentation Peter Willson prepared to get the trust up and running. The site has grown from the initial 10 acres to the 26 we have today which includes the lovely view of the down to be enjoyed from Pauline Moore's field. The site continues to mature and is much used and continues to be enjoyed and the interest shown in it by outside bodies.

Special mention must go to Dave Ward who started volunteering in the early 2000's and became involved in tree sponsorship in 2008 who will now retire from the committee at the end of the year. One innovation this year was the creation of a litter picking team, which includes Brian and June helping out today. We maintain strong links to local schools including a visit by Roseacre and Thurnham schools to plant trees in the new Jubilee Wood on one of the wettest days of the year with many children bringing their grandparents. In March brought the return of Thurnham CEI to visit our wood and continually ask interesting questions.

The car park was finally granted further planning permission on 13 June to complete construction. The entrance gates and height barrier have been installed, electrics mostly installed covering gate automation and the EV charger installed and we are now waiting for the last gate to be done and the existing entrance gate removed before opening the car park.

All 78 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.

Due to Richard Ashness and Martin's involvement in getting the car park open this summer the Trustees will meet after this Friend's AGM to sign off on this year's accounts which will then be submitted in due course to our regulator, the Charity Commission (Last year's 2022 accounts and Trustees return were filed on time).

4 Accounts for 2022/23 and Hon Treasurer's Report

Martin Gray presented the Independently Examined Statement of Accounts (copies available at the meeting and on website) for the year to June 2023 and reported an in-year surplus of £10,440 compared to last year's deficit of £(16,397). This was largely due to the resumption of tree sponsorship, increase in interest received and the reduction in car park expenditure.

Overall membership fees increased due to an increase in life membership, required to be able to sponsor a tree, as a result of the increase in tree sponsorship and we had a full year's receipt from the sale of calendars, christmas cards and notelets. Interest received increased from a very low level.

Tree expenditure included £1,355 on trees for the new Jubilee Wood. Site costs increased reflecting expenditure on path maintenance, fencing materials partly due to vandalism and to increased material costs on tractor repairs. The £5,656 car park costs included £2,656 for the height barrier. 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, Litter Picking and Volunteers

John Wale thanked all the maintenance volunteers (24), litter picking (16) and other volunteers for their efforts during the year which amount to 5,000 volunteer hours pa and noted also that the maintenance team continues to be run jointly by Jeff Winn (Tues), John Wale (Wed) and Adrian (Thurs).

The Maintenance Plan and Hedge Cutting Plan continue to evolve with a healthy discussion on summer mowing. Vandalism continues to occur with damage to the bird hide and to the older plaques on trees (the newer designed plaques appear to be working for now). The larger nitrous oxide gas cannisters are unfortunately being found now by the new litter picking team which reflects the national trend. It is really noticeable the impact the Saturday and Monday litter picking teams have made with initially bags full of rubbish being collected.

The fencing at the Church Landway entrance was replaced with the large potholes close to Gore cottage having been filled in on a trial basis and will be monitored to see how successful they are. The tractors continue to be maintained by 3 to 4 key individuals. The bird hide has been repaired again this year due to vandalism.

The junior football pitch has not been played on this year but we are in discussions with MPE, a local junior football club, but have still need to reach agreement.

We are grateful to Brian Carter, who was present, for cataloguing our photo archive.

6 Trees and Benches, Sponsorship

As noted, Dave Ward was unable to attend but notes that he continues to work through the tree sponsorship waiting list which is currently at 10. Since last year 23 trees were sponsored in Riders Wood which brings the total to 375 sponsored trees.

During the course of the year, we continue to get the occasional plaque ripped off trees but thankfully this year has seen considerably less than last year. A lot of the original plaques are now showing signs of advanced corrosion and we will systematically replace as required. We monitor each tree plaque 2 to 3 times a year to release the plaque screws as the tree grows to avoid the plaque will getting embedded in the tree.

Dave welcomed this year, Peter Lawler, to assist him with tree sponsorship.

7 Environment and Wildlife

Adrian Bouwens mentioned that we have a managed environment here to allow trees and plants to grow with vigour and will be coppicing the smaller trees and shrubs on the north side of Oak Avenue this year. Wildflower planting and areas within the prepared 2023 strips had met with variable success. Ox-Eye Daisies had been very good, other areas less so. Dry Hedges were being extended around the site and Jubilee Wood borders. John Puckett, a Kent Bat expert, visited in the spring and identified several species in evidence, and BWT will now be installing more bat boxes near Lilk Stream within Goat Field. Stag beetles continue to be found in our rotting trees and a lizard hibernatum been built. Cyclamen had been grown from seeds by maintenance volunteers and had been planted out. Miner bees continued to nest in the sand pit.

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.

John Wale noted that our soil is slightly acidic soil 4.5 to 5.5ph with less topsoil as you move towards Roundwell.

8 Membership Report and Newsletter Delivery Team: Chris Street read by Barbara Long

Membership

We have **1126** current family memberships, including **593** Life Members.

That's 37 fewer than this time last year, largely due to people passing away or moving from the area - however **29** new members joined this year, **14** of them with life membership.

Several of the names now deleted from our membership list were people who haven't paid their annual subscription for two years, despite several reminders.

266 people who pay annually received their reminders at the beginning of July. By 1st September **75** were still outstanding, today **63** are still unpaid. Chasing these add quite a bit to the Membership Secretary's already busy workload.

Newsletter Deliveries

Many of the original reminders were hand delivered by our loyal Delivery Team (43) alongside our newsletter, "The Woodlander". We are grateful for their support, which saves BWT hundreds of pounds in postal charges. Pam Hampson, now 92, has delivered since the very start!

Between them they cover 28 delivery rounds across Bearsted, Weaving Street, Bearsted Park, Otham Lane, Thurnham Lane and part of Grove Green.

8 Newsletter, Calendars, Christmas cards

Newsletter

Barbara Long noted that The Woodlander is now published annually - which allows us to cover the whole spread of BWT activities and news across the year in a bumper 12 page issue. Many people now access the newsletter online, again cost saving for BWT.

I'm glad to say feedback to this change has been very positive and would like to thank designer Sue Fuller for her creativity. Some of the material in the latest issue has been contributed by my colleagues on the Management Committee but I would welcome input from our supporters. You can reach me through the website with ideas, items and images.

Calendars and cards

Last Christmas we launched BWT Calendars and Christmas Cards for the first time and also produced new designs of notecards to add to our long term stock. All but a handful of Calendars were sold by the end of November and the sale of Christmas cards also exceeded expectations. This new initiative represented a substantial investment for BWT but I am pleased to report a healthy profit. Sales income totalled £1,371 against production costs of £805 and we still have some cards in stock.

As well as raising funds for the Trust, the primary aim was always to raise awareness of BWT and attract new support and following last year's success we have just published two new designs of Christmas Card (from photographs taken by Management Committee members Martin Gray and Martin Herrema) and also a 2024 Calendar - which marks the 20th anniversary of the creation of BWT with pictures from the archives

They are all on sale here or you can order through Chris Street. We also plan to have them in local shops again this year - but as a member buying direct the calendars are offered at a discount.

9 Website

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

Martin Herrema was pleased to see visitor numbers to our website had more than doubled from last year growing to 2800 from 1300 per month a year ago.

PR had been made more difficult with the sad demise of The Downsmail so Martin was providing articles in the Bearsted Community Ad Magazine.

10 Community Outreach and Green Flag

John Wale noted that in addition to the annual visit by Thurnham CEI, 8 to 9 members of the U3A visited and were shown around. John provides talks on the local meeting circuit which provides a respectable income. We were again awarded the Green Flag, after a mystery shopper visit, which we have been applying for since Peter Wilson had received grant aid for BWT. We continue to benefit from 50 free whips each year which are grown initially in the nursery before being planted out.

11 Any Other Business and Questions Notified by Friends

Paul Rowley had written in beforehand to propose that we put in specific friendship benches. The management committee had considered this but thought we were already adequately covered with 40 (mainly sponsored) benches throughout BWT.

Chas Ashley noted that the maintenance volunteers had seen electric scooters within BWT and thought there was a safety issue in that travel much faster than pedestrians and that we should consider amending our rules: John Wale agreed that it would be considered at our management committee.