

MARESFIELD CONSERVATION GROUP

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 17th June 2025 at 19.00 in Maresfield Village Hall

Present:

Committee:

Jo Lawrance, Chair [JL]
Richard Wane, Secretary [RW]
Tracie Coe [TC]
Bruce Milton, [BM]
Ian Shaw, [IS]
Stephany Reed-Perkins [SRP]
Tom Merchant [TM]
Caro Shaw [CS]

Apologies: Terence Brady [TB], Treasurer

Members [22]

Committee [8] plus Cathy Shaw, Stan Sadowski, Fred Taylor, Gary Adlam, Ann Thompson, Jennifer Altt, Graham Shaw, Pat Palmer, Phil Hamis, Anne Eden-Green, Naomi Forbes, Geoff Coe, Alexis Clarke, Adam Gibson-Brann.

Non-Members [4] Val Taylor, Ann Ashwell, Adrian Marshall, Jez Moore

RW noted that the meeting was quorate.

1. Welcome

JL welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Terence Brady, Marion and Anthony Myers, Sheila Cumming, Jeremy Hendy, Sally Adlam, Sally Edwards, Karen Tritton; and Ken and Jan Parks.

3. Matters Arising and Approval of Previous AGM Minutes

4. Matters Arising

RW noted that there were three action points from the last AGM:

- We were asked if the MCG could improve the appearance of the area around the Village Shop. We did ask the shop and flat owners but we didn't receive their permission.
- We were asked whether the village could have signs to deter HGVs from entering. We did ask the Highways department if we might have signs noting weight restrictions as a deterrent but this was refused.
- We were asked to check on the possibility of some further support for the provision of dog poo bins but we have unable to make progress in this regard.

The Minutes of the AGM held on 14th May 2024 had been circulated with the agenda and were approved.

5. Chair's Report – Jo Lawrance [JL]

JL reported on the previous year:

2024/25 has been another busy one for the Group, with significant progress made on our projects despite some changes within the team. We had a full calendar of events and activities.

Our AGM took place in May where we held a small presentation to say goodbye to our long-standing committee member Stan Sadowski. Stan had been a strong contributor to the Group, including serving as Membership Secretary which helped boost membership to its current level and had been in charge of the Group's website. We presented Stan with a well-deserved gift from his fellow committee members. All other members of the committee agreed to stand for another year.

Our village litter-picking continued in both April and October, ably supported by an impressive number of volunteers, resulting in us collecting over 30 bags of rubbish to be sent on to Newhaven and be converted into energy. The Group noted that, whilst it is sad to still be collecting so much rubbish, we have seen a slight drop in the number of bags collected and hope this is a trend that will continue.

In May, thanks to a generous bequest left to the village by Joan Bailey and with the hard work and support of her nephew David and our volunteers, we were able to use some of this bequest to put up a beautiful display board and footpath map in the centre of the village. The board and map are in memory of Andrew and Joan Bailey of Maresfield Park. The illustrated map depicts footpaths in and around the village for use by local walkers and visitors to our village. We will

be carefully considering the most meaningful and impactful way to use the rest of the bequest in line with our aims and mission.

In June, we published our summer Newsletter, distributing it for the first time via mailshot.

In July, we continued with our popular Cheese and Wine evening and 35 of us met in the beautiful gardens of Newnham Cottage, the home of Ann Thompson; our thanks to Ann for her wonderful hospitality and for arranging the perfect weather for an outdoor event.

Our wonderful Secretary, Stephanie Bassett, stepped back from her duties in July for personal reasons. We were very sorry to lose her skills and experience in this pivotal role and wish her well for the future.

In September, a photographic competition concluded with entries for images taken in Maresfield Parish through the seasons. An image for each month was chosen from the best entries and used to create the Maresfield Calendar for 2025, a first for the village. The beautifully printed photographs include village scenes, Nutley windmill, Friend's Clump on Ashdown Forest, Powder Mills and Underhill. The calendars have been sold at the village shop and The Chequers.

In November, we said goodbye to another long-standing member of the committee and the community, Rob Penfold. Both Rob and his wife Peta have been strong contributors to village life. Rob served on the MCG committee for nine years and Peta was the minute secretary. Rob worked tirelessly on numerous matters including guiding MCG's responses to development proposals, working with the Footpaths Group, project managing the new Village Map (mentioned above) and arranging the annual village Christmas tree.

December saw us work together with the Church and The Chequers to once again put up a spectacular Christmas tree covered in fairy lights. We were pleased to see that, despite the best efforts of the windy weather, the tree stayed firmly in place thanks to the efforts of the volunteers who put it up.

In January, the Committee launched its first bi-monthly newsletter for members and second annual photographic competition.

Our annual quiz night took place in March, raising over £1100 for East Sussex Young Carers. The Committee is extremely grateful to all those who joined us for this event and to the local businesses who supported us, including The Buxted Park Hotel and M&S Uckfield.

Our Footpaths Group has continued to work hard throughout the year, despite the wet weather which occasionally prevented us from venturing out. We have produced an annual Project Plan which covers the work the Group does in and around the village, which includes.

- Clearing our network of footpaths and drains, keeping them clear of fallen trees and debris;
- Replacing broken and rotten planters at the entrances to the village;
- Preserving wooden footpath signage;
- Litter picking;
- Erecting the historic map of the village by The Chequers;
- Replacement of the MCG notice board.

During the course of the year, we were fortunate to receive a grant from the Parish Council for village maintenance and, together with the help of some additional funds from our membership income, we used the grant to replace our notice board situated outside the village stores, as well as investing in some new tools for the Footpaths team.

We have been taking a fresh look at our governance and, with the assistance of a new Secretary co-opted onto the Committee in November who has reviewed and tidied up the data filed with the Charity Commission. We have also put together individual responsibility statements for the Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and other Trustees. These are designed to set out at a high level the areas of responsibility that each relevant Trustee has. As new Trustees join or transfer portfolios, it is intended these 'responsibility statements' will both clarify what is covered and by whom, together with documenting some of the processes and activities typically undertaken.

During the year MCG launched a new website, which covers many aspects of life in the village including the work of the MCG, a calendar of events and articles and images of historical interest. <https://www.maresfieldconservationgroup.org/>

We remain thankful to The Chequers who enable the Committee to meet monthly using a meeting room in the hotel. Each member of the Committee leads on a particular area of our work, enabling us to achieve the volume of outputs we do over the course of a year. You can see a copy of our monthly agenda and the subsequent set of minutes on our website.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, project ideas include:

- Restoring a booklet, currently out of publication, of local walks and footpaths in the parish of Maresfield
- Annual cheese and wine evening
- Annual fundraising quiz
- Lighting up of the Christmas tree
- Finger post restoration
- Litter picking

It had been my intention to stand down from the role of Chair of the MCG at the AGM in June. In the absence of someone to take over from me and in order to ensure continuity, I am proposing to remain as Chair until the end of December 2025. I really do encourage someone to take on this fulfilling role as I will need to step back after Christmas, due to other commitments.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I would like to thank all our members who have continued to support the MCG over the past year, be that through donations and/or volunteering their time. It is your support and generosity that makes it possible to deliver these projects. If you have an idea for a project or an event that you think may be of interest to the wider community, please pass this on to us for consideration at one of our monthly meetings.

6. Constitution Update [RW]

RW noted that this item was just for information to the members and no action is needed but it required explanation to be provided.

During the year we have reviewed and updated our filings with the Charity Commission.

Whilst doing so we realised that the Commission did not hold a current copy of the Group's constitution.

When we filed the latest version - 2024 - of that Constitution, the Commission subsequently informed us that an amendment to our Aims made (but also not filed) back in in 2019, was invalid, as it did not meet the requirement of being a charitable purpose. This amendment had attempted to add a sentence stating that an additional Aim of the Group is "TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT VILLAGE LIFE AND ITS AMENITIES".

So our original stated Aims will therefore simply remain as being –
 'TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND
 IMPROVEMENT OF THE PHYSICAL AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

IN MARESFIELD AND SURROUNDING AREA’.

As said, there is no action for members to take – this is just for information.

7. Treasurer’s Report –Terence Brady [TB]

RW noted that TB had sent his apologies but the Income and Expenditure Report for the year 2024/25 was available and shown by slide to the meeting, with a comparison to 2023/24.

JL noted that the bank balance had increased considerably. This was due to a legacy donation received during the year from the Joan Grace Bailey Memorial Fund. With our best endeavours we try to come up with projects and we continue to ask the community for ideas to improve or conserve our environment

We will be writing out to members in due course about the about the existence of the legacy fund and we have been thinking about the governance of that money and how to manage any applications that people would like to make.

There was a comment from the floor that this was a huge amount for a charity to be holding and it seemed that we don’t need the money. JL emphasised we need the members for help and advocacy more than the money; and noted that the money is being kept in a separate account.

JL asked that if anyone has any ideas on legacy monies spending please contact the Committee. We will have an application process around managing the money.

ACTION: Communicate to members concerning the legacy fund.

8. Membership – Tracie Coe [TC]

TC introduced herself and as the sender of member emails and spoke to the slide shown.

TC noted that membership has remained pretty static over the last year or so. The slide showed sole membership just over 100 and joint of around 50.

We also have a MCG Facebook page which is managed by CS and which has some 76 members, some of whom are also members of the MCG directly.

To streamline our membership going forward we will move to a new admin system - called membermojo. The system will improve our ability to communicate with members and send our reminders about fees etc. Existing

members do not need to do anything as we will be in touch with you further using the new system.

We have also discussed as a Committee sending out information and news of what we have discussed at our meeting using this new system.

9. Footpaths Group – Bruce Milton [BM]

BM reported in the Footpath Group activity as follows, with some accompanying slides:

As you can see from the photos here and on the MCG facebook page the footpath's group continues to be busy. We continue to clear paths around Maresfield whether they are official paths or unadopted.

We have also erected a fine map of the area by The Chequers, cleaned the white posts by the church and replaced the rotten posts and rails by the steps of the footpath running down to Nursery Lane.

During the winter the group undertook a series of walks featured in the Maresfield Parish booklet "The Millennium Walk and 8 circular walks with the intention of updating the information contained, with a view of re-publishing it, we also aim to add these walks to our website for you to download and use.

We are in the process of commissioning a local company to maintain the existing 5 heritage wooden finger direction signs dotted around the parish, to ensure they remain in place for many years to come. Also, with co-operation with the local parish council we are applying to the Highways Department to replace the 2 missing posts at Duddleswell and Cackle Street.

Over 10 years ago the group cleared a path from the underpass, running parallel with the A22 ending at Rabitty Lane, this path is currently unadopted and I would like to apply for it to be adopted and made official. For this to happen the local council would need proof that it has been used constantly over the 10 years. I would be grateful if those of you who use it to let me know in writing. I will be putting the details of the path on our website and facebook page for you to identify where it is and kindly let me know

BM also noted that as the Maresfield Historical Society has essentially been decommissioned we would seek to try to carry on the historical talks that we have been supporting in the past.

BM also noted that MHS has essentially been decommissioned and we can try to carry on the historical talks.

A question from the floor asked for there to be clearer guidance on how we refer to footpaths – in particular the one we are seeking to get adopted, near the underpass. BM agreed to provide the grid reference. [Post meeting note: This is now supplied - OS grid references for the path - west end TQ46291 2346 east end TQ464792333 centre point TQ46638 23395]. We may also look to put some further references on our Facebook site and website.

There was a follow-up question as to whether we have to use a path as part of any adoption attempt and BM said he believed it had to show use for at least 10 years.

10. Election of Executive Committee – Richard Wane [RW]

RW noted that during the year he had been co-opted as a Committee Member, Secretary and Trustee and Rob Penfold stepped down.

RW reported that all the current Committee have expressed their willingness to continue in their existing capacities – with the exception of one, who will be stepping down.

No other nominations have been received so the current Committee will continue to serve in their existing capacities but we were always looking for new members.

11. Any Other Business

JL noted that Ian Shaw was stepping down and we were really sorry to see him go. Ian and his wife Cathy have been fabulous supporters of the MCG.

A presentation was made to IS as an appreciation of his years with the MCG with our gratitude and Kathy's support.

A question from the floor was raised about the need for a cover to be put on the map now displayed by the Chequers.

ACTION: We agreed we would look at this in the normal course of our work around the village.

There was a question about the proposal for the road changes to the Park Farm Lane and Recreation Ground area. We noted that this would be covered in the Q&A with the councillors which was to be held immediately after the formal AGM had been completed.

As there was no other business, the meeting was declared closed at 19.36.

12. Date of next AGM

To be advised.