

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
of the Maresfield Conservation Group
3 May 2022, Maresfield Village Hall**

Present

The Committee Members present were:

Jo Lawrance, Chairman [JL]
John Smith, Treasurer (outgoing)
Stan Sadowski, Membership Secretary [SS]
Dick Thompson, President
Alex Clarke, Member [AC]
Bruce Milton, Member [BM]
Rob Penfold, Member [RP]
Jacqui Royal, Member [JR]
Ian Shaw, Member [IS]

In attendance were:

Liz Lewis, Stephany Reed-Perkins, Jean Smith, Cathy Shaw, Peta Penfold, Karen Tritton, Ted Mariner, Gillian Bullock, Anthony Myers, Marion Myers, Jennifer Allt, John Lewis, Ann Thompson, Ron Hayton, Pat Palmer, Terence Brady.

JL welcomed everyone to the Maresfield Conservation Group Annual General Meeting [AGM] and thanked those present for their attendance and support. She advised that the AGM was being held earlier this year as part of the changes to the MCG Constitution brought into effect last year.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephanie Bassett, Sheila Cumming, Adam Gibson-Brown, Brian & Wilma Porter, Alan Sallows, Ashley Welton, Clive Wilson and Brit Wing.

2. Approval of Previous AGM Minutes

The Minutes of the previous AGM held on 29th July 2021 were proposed by AC, seconded by JR, and approved.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report

JL advised that, despite the COVID restrictions, the MCG had been involved with a number of projects over the last 12-months which were illustrated by a series of photographs, including:

- Reprinting the 'Maresfield in 1840' booklet written by Clive Brooks, with all profits going to the Historical Society;
- Autumn Village Clean-Up in October when 16 bags of rubbish were collected and sent to Newhaven for recycling;
- Working with the Royal College of Signals to clear the verge at Lampool Corner;
- Village Christmas Tree – thanks were offered to the residents at The Lodge where the tree was erected, and to the family who donated the tree;
- Donation to Bonners School for the purchase of new benches (following a visit by JL and IS to Bonners, it was hoped that this represented the start of closer collaboration between the school and the MCG);
- March Quiz Night which raised over £600 which was donated to the Disaster Emergency Committee's Ukraine Appeal (JL apologised for the fact that her team won!);
- Footpaths Group work which involved clearing ditches after the floods, washing the direction posts, relocating stranded frog spawn, and tree clearance along the forest paths.

There have been a number of changes within the MCG Committee, including JL's own appointment as Chair. John Smith retired from the Committee in April following which Liz Lewis was appointed Treasurer and Bruce Milton took over as leader of the Footpaths Group. In addition, the MCG's longest serving Committee Member, Dick Thompson, was also standing down in May. Massive thanks were offered to both Dick and his wife Ann, and to John and his wife Jean, for their huge support over the years.

The first face-to-face meeting of the Committee was held in August 2021 in John Smith's garage in compliance with COVID guidance in place at that time. Since then, monthly meetings have been held at The Chequers in a room donated free of charge by the Manager, Rummy, so thanks were also offered to her for that helpful facility.

The objective of the MCG Committee moving forwards was to raise awareness of and promote the aims of the MCG, and to highlight the benefits of membership. JL writes an article about the MCG for the Parish Magazine and, as alluded to above, met with the Headmistress of Bonners School to discuss future collaboration. The Winter Newsletter was updated to contain an explanation of the MCG logo and what it did. The Summer Newsletter was due this month (May) and, with help from members of the congregation of St Bartholomew's Church, would this year be distributed to every household in Maresfield – thanks were offered to Jessica Stop and her team.

Finally, JL offered her personal thanks to the members of the MCG Executive Committee who were all volunteers but very generous with their time, expertise and support.

There were no questions arising.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report was given by the outgoing Treasurer, John Smith, who outlined the principal aspects of the audited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2022. Incoming funds included subscriptions of £2,737; Gift Aid of £500.17 (based on last year's subscriptions); a Village Maintenance Grant of £1,000; takings of £833 from the Quiz Night (which included a generous donation of £222); £92 from the sale of merchandise; and £72 from the sale of the 'Maresfield in 1840' booklets bringing the overall total to £5,456.95.

Outgoings totalled £4,576.32 and included £1,416.64 spent on administration, insurance, printing and the website; £407 for the reprinted 'Maresfield in 1840' booklets; £390.68 costs for Quiz Night; £1,280 donated to St Bartholomew's Church and Bonners School; £231 spent on village maintenance (including Maresfield in Bloom); and a £187 outlay for tools and expenses for the Footpaths Group (including the purchase of a new hedge trimmer). That resulted in a surplus of £880.63 for the year. The current bank balance as of 31st March 2022 was £9,846.58 (plus £500 Gift Aid).

After costs, the Quiz Night raised £664 which was donated to the DEC Ukraine appeal (doubled by HM Government).

John extended a big welcome to Liz Lewis as the incoming Treasurer who has already taken over. However, John was still waiting for the bank to change the signatories which, this far, has taken over a month.

There were no questions arising.

6. Website & Membership

SS gave a comprehensive update. In 2021 the website was visited 1,701 times by 1,269 individual users looking at 5,187 pages. 40% of those viewers were from the UK, 10% were from the USA, and the rest originated in 100 different countries worldwide, some of whom subsequently contacted the MCG. The website has been updated and now includes a 'search' function on every page.

Membership numbers dropped in 2021 to 140 households (from a high of 173 in 2020) which was thought to be a consequence of the pandemic. However, numbers were on the rise again and there were now 163 households who were members. Various initiatives were underway to improve understanding of the MCG, what we do, and the benefits.

57% of households now paid their annual subscription by standing order, but only 63% of households have ticked the box for Gift Aid (in 2021 it was 86%). The Collectors were a vital link to the MCG in collecting cash/cheque subscription payments and distributing the MCG Newsletters three times a year. New Collectors were always welcome – several were lost last year although JL has found replacements. Distribution of the newsletters by email was now being trialled.

7. Footpaths Group

Although John resigned from the Footpaths Group at the end of March and handed over the reins to BM, he gave his final update on the work of the Footpaths Group over the last year.

By way of background, John outlined some of the legislation impacting on footpaths within England and Wales (although, interestingly, not Scotland). The Highways Act 1835 deemed which footpaths would be designated as 'highways'. Any pedestrian route used for 20 years or more could be claimed as a footpath. During World War 2, footpaths were closed and took some time to reopen after the war. The National Parks & Access to Countryside Act 1949 required Country Councils to register each footpath, stile and bridge individually and they all have their own

reference number. This allows the Footpaths Group to approach East Sussex Country Council for funds for ongoing work to specified features.

There were 148,000 miles of footpaths in England & Wales of which 10,000 miles were currently impassable. Some footpaths have never been reopened due to their locations (e.g., those now crossing busy roads). In 2001 there was an epidemic of foot and mouth disease and footpaths crossing farmland were closed. Any that we do want to reopen must be registered by 2026 or the opportunity will be lost. Locally, John gave the example of the footpath which crossed the A22 to Powder Mill – the Footpaths Group realised that there was an underpass not far away and 7-8 years ago cut away the undergrowth alongside the road to expose an existing footpath joining the two together.

John first got involved with footpath maintenance when he moved to Barcombe 34 years ago. He was fascinated by the area and spent his weekends walking around and discovering local history, including wartime gun emplacements left behind by Canadian troops billeted in Lewes. A man called Sonny showed John squashed musket balls and bullets found on the cycle track running from Ringmer to Lewes which was once a rifle range, and also told him about a spitfire fight he had seen as a child – two planes went over but only one returned. During these walks John noticed that many routes were difficult to navigate with limited or no access, and no bridges or stiles. As a result, in the Royal Oak at Barcombe, four like-minded souls decided to form a Footpaths Group to carry out the necessary work to improve accessibility. The local farmers were on board and even provided essential materials! Sometime afterwards, on a busy commuter train to London, John met someone involved in another Footpaths Group who introduced him to Mary Moulton at East Sussex County Council [ESCC] and advised that ESCC were putting teams together to supply equipment for footpath maintenance all over the county. John and his team were therefore able to take advantage of tools and materials, such as stile kits, provided by ESCC.

In 2013 John moved to Maresfield and met Sheila Cumming who told him about the MCG. Following a discussion about his previous work, Sheila asked John to set up a Footpaths Group in the Parish and volunteered her husband Gill to assist! Eventually they had a team of four and have been able to take advantage of the same provisions supplied by ESCC to carry out the necessary footpath maintenance ever since.

John finished by showing photographs of the work carried out by the Footpaths Group over the years, including:

- Lampool Corner – when the unruly hedge was removed by ESCC Highways, and building works were carried out nearby, an unsightly mess was left on the verge which the Footpaths Group were able to sort out;
- Pound Gate footpath – cleared and hacked back so that it can now be used;
- School Hill footpath – having cut back the undergrowth, after many persistent approaches the Footpaths Group eventually persuaded ESCC Highways to repair the fence so that it no longer presented a hazard to the school children;
- 6 x fingerposts – in a process that began in 2019, and with assistance from a £500 grant from ESCC, these have all been stripped, repaired and repainted and were now subject to ongoing maintenance;
- Maresfield Cemetery – the entrance gate has been repaired and paving stones laid down;
- Bowbells Milestones – all refurbished within the Parish;
- Fete Storage Hut at the Pavilion – ESCC were asked to provide materials to concrete the floor but instead they actually completed the entire works (at a cost of £1600).

At the conclusion of his presentation, JL thanked John profusely for his hard work with the Footpaths Group over the years – he will be missed.

8. Future Projects

JL highlighted a number of events and projects that the MCG were involved in:

- Spring Village Clean Up – undertaken in April 2022. Although fewer people turned out to assist, a total of 15 bags of rubbish were collected for recycling;
- Village Fete – due to take place in June 2022;
- MCG Summer Cheese & Wine Evening – due to be held in July. Tickets were available from BM;
- Collector's Evening – scheduled for September;
- Queen's Green Canopy – a tree planting initiative with trees being made available. More details to follow;
- Maresfield Village Christmas Tree – to be erected as usual in December;
- Bonners School – the 7-9 year old students were doing a project to learn about the history of village life. Working with the Historical Society, JL has been invited to deliver a talk to them about the village and the work of the MCG;
- Underhill Bridge – a continued interest in the future of the bridge;
- Footpaths Group – will continue to maintain the local footpaths;
- Maresfield Village Footpaths Map Board – a member has written in to advise that funds have very generously been put in trust to create a map board detailing the walks around the village which the person making the bequest had greatly enjoyed using;
- Shortbridge Stream – another member has written in to request the assistance of the MCG in protecting this fish spawning site;
- Church Car Park – St Bartholomew's Church was looking for assistance with repairs to the car park;
- Display Board – showing the historical points of interest within the village.

JL thanked all members who continue to support the MCG and invited them to submit any suggestions for future projects to the Executive Committee for consideration.

9. Election of Executive Committee

JL advised that she had two nominations:

- Liz Lewis was nominated as Treasurer, seconded by IS, and duly elected to the Executive Committee.
- Stephany Reed-Perkins was nominated as a Member, seconded by RP, and duly elected.
- The existing members of the MCG Executive Committee indicated that they were all prepared to continue in their current roles.

10. Any Other Business

There was nothing raised before the AGM, but four questions were raised at the meeting:

- John Lewis, as a Parish Councillor, advised that the Parish had written to ESCC to raise safety concerns about the Underhill bridge. ESCC responded that the bridge conforms to safety standards so no work will be carried out. It also appears that the Parish Council and MCG can't change it, either. JL thanked him for the update. SS agreed that the railings were too widely spaced, and a child could fall through. SS has obtained a copy of the Safety Standards but hasn't had a chance to analyse them yet – this would be discussed at the next Committee Meeting.
- Karen Tritton asked whether the Footpaths Group maintain the stile at Powder Mill, and if there was any way to change it to an accessible gate, even a kissing gate? John advised that he has spoken to Rachel Solomons at ESCC (who took over from Mary Moulton) and has been advised that ESCC don't do gates anymore. Peter Wellings, the owner of Powder Mill, has sadly died but BM can speak to his wife to see if she will give permission for a gate to be installed. If yes, the MCG may be able to obtain and hang it.
- Anthony Myers noted that the Executive Committee had done well to achieve a high bank balance but asked whether there were any plans to spend it. JL highlighted that the proposal for work in the church car park and the historical map will both require funding, but the MCG Executive Committee was keen to ask members and people in the community what they would like to see done. Investment needs to be carried out wisely for the benefit of the whole community, and the MCG was currently looking for viable projects that require funding.
- Pat Palmer said that, during her tenure as Chair of MCG, she had been disappointed that they hadn't been able to form a Good Neighbourhood Scheme (an idea proposed by John Smith). The intention would have been for the MCG to initiate the scheme but for it subsequently to be self-sufficient. JL advised that the subject had been on the agenda last August, but the restrictions and other ongoing matters dropped it down the list. Now that it was possible to engage directly with vulnerable people, the Good Neighbourhood Scheme will be looked at again.

PP then thanked JL for the brilliant job that she was doing as Chair, and those thanks were also extended to everyone on the Executive Committee and to all members of the MCG.

11. Date of Next AGM

To be advised.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.