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**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of
the Maresfield Conservation Group
Held at 8pm on 29th July 2021 in the Maresfield Village Hall**

Present

The Committee Members were introduced:

Pat Palmer, Chairman [PP]
John Smith, Treasurer [JS]
Dick Thompson, President
Alex Clarke, Member [AC]
Rob Penfold, Member [RP]
Jacqui Royal, Member [JR]
Ian Shaw, Member [IS]

In attendance were:

Cathy Shaw, Jean Smith, Peta Penfold, Jo Lawrance, Stephany Reed-Perkins, Bruce Milton, Kim Milton, David Guckenheim, Angie Welton, Janette Parks, Ken Parks, Jennifer Allt, Brian Porter, Wilma Porter, Ann Thompson, Ron Hayton, Ron Warren (non-member) and Linda Warren (non-member).

PP welcomed everyone to the Maresfield Conservation Group Annual General Meeting and thanked those present for their attendance and support. She advised that the AGM will follow the agenda published in the July 2021 AGM Edition Newsletter.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Stan Sadowski (Membership Secretary), Karen Tritton, Stephanie Bassett and Carol Wheeler.

2. Approval of Previous AGM Minutes

The Minutes of the previous AGM held on 2nd July 2019 were proposed by RP, seconded by Cathy Shaw, and approved.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Questions on the Published Chairman's Report

The Chairman's Report as published in the MCG July 2021 AGM Newsletter summarised what had been done since PP's tenure as Chairman began, in advance of stepping down from this role. There were no questions arising.

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5. Questions on the Published Treasurer's Report

There were no questions.

6. Website & Membership

PP read out a report prepared by Stan Sadowski, Membership Secretary [SS] who was not in attendance. In the year to 23 July 2021 the MCG website was visited 1,349 times by 1,021 individual users from 83 different countries, although the majority were, of course, from East Sussex. Whilst the Committee members try to keep the website up to date and relevant, they are open to any questions, comments, suggestions and corrections from any visitors to the website.

The past, problematic, 18 months have adversely impacted on the ability to keep in touch with MCG members. Whilst the fine cadre of collectors would, in normal times make personal contact with members who do not have standing orders for their subscriptions, it would have been wrong to ask them to knock on doors during the pandemic. Therefore, a couple of mail shots were made to members not subscribing by standing order which has been partially successful in collecting subscriptions. In the year to 31 March 2019 fully paid MCG membership stood at 175 compared to 167 in the previous year. Based on this, SS set himself an informal target to increase this to 200 fully paid members over the next couple of years. By end-March 2020 membership stood at 185, but, thanks to Covid-19, this came down to 140 by end-March this year. However, many members switched from making their subscriptions in cash to bank standing orders. As of 29th July 2021, 110 subscriptions have been received and more are coming in by post. Given that subscriptions paid by standing order only come through later in the year, it is not unreasonable to expect paid up membership to be at least back to last year's level, or even better if the collectors can safely do their rounds again at some point.

7. Footpaths Group

JS advised that the pandemic had grounded the Footpaths Group [FG] for a year following Central Government and East Sussex Country Council [ESCC] advice to stay at home where possible. Where trees fell, the FG did venture out to chainsaw them up in the forest to make the footpaths safe to use, but there was little opportunity to carry out work more locally. The FG did lose 2-3 active members, but these have now been replaced and 2 ladies are also assisting, meaning that, as restrictions ease, the FG will be able to carry out more work.

JS summarised the work that, more latterly, the FG has been able to carry out:

- Two months ago, a request was made to the FG to repair dangerous stiles within the parish. ESCC had no stiles available but JS did manage to locate two stiles kits and ESCC (exceptionally) gave permission for the work to go ahead, much to the delight of local residents.
- Clearance along the Weald Way from Duddleswell to Browns Brook;
- Removal of a fallen tree;
- Tree clearance and hedge trimming at Powder Mill (which resulted in a lovely letter to PP);
- Clearance around the Church footpath and within the Cemetery;
- Clearance along the footpath parallel to the A22 from the underpass;

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- Washing of the fingerposts within the Parish including the derestriction signs;
- Straightening, repair and repainting of the fingerpost at The Chequers after it was hit by a lorry;
- Repainting of the Nutley 2000 sign, including the gold lettering; and
- Mowing of the verges at Lampool Corner during Maresfield in Bloom (except for the flowers around the bus stop which were left in situ).

PP concluded by offering the 'massive thanks' of the MCG and local residents for the excellent work carried out by the FG.

8. Future Projects and Plans

The published Chairman's Report outlined the various projects and events that the MCG has been involved in over the past three years, but PP highlighted some of the less obvious things that have been done:

- The Committee have designed and produced a **Welcome Note** which is delivered to new people moving into Maresfield. If they decide to join the MCG, this is followed up with a Welcome Letter. This has proved very successful - a total of 76 welcome notes have been delivered resulting in 17 new members giving a 22.4% success rate.
- All forms used by the MCG have been redesigned and re-worded. For instance, the Membership Application Form now includes all methods of paying the annual subscription, together with sections for gift aid and email addresses. This means that, instead of four separate forms, everything is included on just one form providing maximum information as soon as new members join. In August 2018 email addresses were held for only 58% of members whereas today it's 79%. This is really important as it enables the MCG to keep in contact with and fully inform those members. Any member who is not currently receiving emails from the MCG is asked to contact Stan Sadowski who will check to see the reason for this.
- MCG activities and projects are publicised via monthly updates in the Parish Magazine which allows residents to contact the MCG with their concerns or respond when the MCG asks for help (such as notification when new people arrived in Maresfield so that a welcome note can be sent). PP emphasised that the MCG can achieve a lot when people pull together.

MCG Constitution: proposed changes to the Constitution were outlined in a leaflet attached to the AGM Newsletter. PP advised that the Constitution was re-designed in 2019 (pre-pandemic) to update it, respond to modern day working practices, and make it more user friendly. The changes essentially comprising re-wording and a new layout, and a proposal to move the date of the AGM forwards from July (where it clash with existing events such as Wimbledon) to May or June. As there were no questions, PP invited the members present to vote on the proposed changes to the Constitution, advising that she had already received 21 proxy forms signed by members (whom she thanked accordingly). **Carried unanimously.**

Whilst it may not be possible to carry all of these initiatives forwards, PP highlighted a number of forthcoming plans and events:

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- **Maresfield Good Neighbour Scheme:** Just prior to the lockdown, the Committee had seriously looked into setting up a Good Neighbour scheme. Several forms had been already been devised and the project was about to be launched. It isn't necessarily intended to be part MCG but could come under the MCG umbrella with its own committee. The committee remain keen to assess the merit of this venture.
- The **Climate Change Interest Group** recently contacted the MCG Committee regarding the possibility of planting trees in designated areas in the village. The Committee responded positively and are awaiting further details of their initial proposals.
- **Display board of historical sites around Maresfield:** A possible pictorial map of historical sites around Maresfield was discussed at the MCG committee meeting in July 2020, possibly to be sited near The Chequers fingerpost. This will possibly be a long-term project. An artist will be needed (who could be expensive) along with a display board which would need to be of good quality in order to survive all weather conditions.
- **Parapet at Underhill:** This is quite a new development and relates to a bridge which crosses the Shortbridge Stream and was originally topped by a curved metal railing that fell into disrepair. This was replaced by ESCC Highways with a utilitarian structure comprising concrete posts and heavy duty galvanised metal rails which led to appeals by Underhill residents to a local councillor to replace the unsightly structure and reinstate the original. These have not met with any success, there is considerable local anger, and the structure has been since been daubed with paint. Local residents are investigating the option of replacing the railings with a replica of the original - a sketch design and quotation have been obtained from Thorne Civil Engineering of Uckfield. The MCG have agreed to support this action in principle and will consider any further action MCG might take as and when the situation evolves.
- **Bee Project:** This was initiated by JR and intended to be a recruitment drive in association with Bonners School. Bees are an essential part of our food chain and a fun questionnaire on bees had been devised for the schoolchildren with a prize for the best entry. This was due to be carried out in the spring of this year but is now planned for the spring of 2022.

9. Election of Executive Committee

PP advised that she had received two new nomination forms:

- Bruce Milton (an existing member of the Footpaths Group) was nominated by AC, seconded by JR, and, following a vote, was duly elected to the Executive Committee.
- Jo Lawrance (also a member of the Footpaths Group) was nominated by AC, seconded by IS and, following a vote, was duly elected as the new Chairman of the MCG. Jo then stood to say a few words. She advised that she had moved to Maresfield in February 2020 having been a previous resident of the parish. She has been extremely pleased to help out the FG since then and is happy to expand her role to that of Chairman of the MCG which she looks forwards to carrying out with everyone's help.

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- The existing members of the MCG Executive Committee indicated that they are all prepared to continue in their current roles. This was approved and, following a vote, the Executive Committee was duly elected.

10. Any Other Business

- Angie Welton, in her role as St Bartholomew's Church Administrator, stood to say a few words (advising that unfortunately, Vicar Ben was unable to attend the AGM). Richard, the Church Warden, had already sent a note to the Footpaths Group to thank them for the excellent assistance given in respect of the grass cutting in the lower cemetery in June which, to that point, had been looking very unloved. Seven members of the FG and two volunteers from the Church set about the rewarding task of cutting the wet grass with strimmers, then raking and swiftly removing it. Their sheer enthusiasm was a joy to behold and huge thanks were offered to the FG and the MCG as a whole. Angie offered further thanks for the work done on the gates and lamps in St Bartholomew's, and the MCG donation to the Church Project, an initiative to build two toilets (including disabled facilities) and a kitchen. Angie advised that final permission came in February after a 10year wait and there are currently sufficient funds (£50,000) to start the works in September in a phased approach.
- PP stood to advise that Karen Tritton, who was unable to attend the AGM for health reasons, had asked her to pass on her thanks to the Footpaths Group who have continued to do wonderful work within the village, despite the restrictions.
- Bruce Milton then raised the issue of the marquees bought for the fete which were examined recently and found to be damaged and covered in rat droppings. A dry day is needed so that the marquees can be cleaned and patched where possible. PP added that one of them cost £800 when purchased. There was obviously no fete in 2020 and there won't be one in 2021 as there is no-one to run it. However, one lady has expressed an interest in re-instating the fete but will need significant help. The MCG is holding £1,900 for the Fete Committee until March 2023 after which, if the Fete Committee does not reform, the monies will be distributed between the Recreation Ground, the MCG and the Village Hall.
- A question was raised about the Underhill Bridge. ESCC Highways clearly have to consider safety – will the proposed replica bridge meet current safety regulations? PP responded that the MCG will not support the initiative 'at any cost' and it will not be possible to replace the current structure without permission from ESCC Highways who will obviously factor safety concerns into any decisions made.
- PP then stood to voice her appreciation to her fellow MCG Committee members for their support during her tenure as Chairman, which is now ending. Whilst there have been differences of opinion over the years, it has all been carried out in good fun, and she wished Jo Lawrance and the newly formed Committee great success and happy times ahead. Finally, she offered thanks to Ian and Cathy Shaw for the refreshments which those attending were invited to now enjoy.

11. Date of Next AGM

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To be advised.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Presentation to the outgoing Chairman: JS stood to give a short speech and present PP with flowers and a gift in recognition of her valuable contribution over the last three years as Chairman of the MCG, for which he offered the thanks of the MCG Executive Committee and the Membership.