

CHAIRMANS REPORT

Maresfield Conservation Group Annual General Meeting

3 May 2022

Over the past twelve months, despite the CoVid restrictions placed on all of us during the first half of the year, MCG has continued to be involved with a number of events and projects around the village.

These included:

- The reprinting of the history booklet 'Maresfield in 1840' by Clive Brooks on behalf of the Historical Society, currently on sale in the Post Office;
- Our autumn 'Clean Up Weekend' in October, ably supported by a host of volunteers, resulting in us collecting 16 bags of rubbish that we later sent off to Newhaven to be converted into energy;
- We worked together with the soldiers of the Royal Signals over Remembrance Weekend in November to cut back the annual growth on the Lampool Corner verge and, following our 'plea for plants', planted out more donated perennials on the bank there to add to the seasonal displays.
- In December, we put up a very special Christmas tree covered in fairy lights that, from its position at the heart of the village, twinkled its way through the Christmas and New Year celebrations;
- In February, we heard from the Headteacher at Bonners Church of England School that the new outdoor benches for their foundation class outdoor space had arrived, thanks to a generous donation from the MCG earlier in the year;
- With the eventual lifting of restrictions, we were delighted to host a successful quiz night in March, raising over £600 for the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal.

Our Footpaths Group has also been kept busy through the second half of the year, keeping our wonderful network of paths and trails accessible and clear of debris. The Group, amongst other things, has:

- Cleared blocked ditches following floods;
- Washed the winter traffic film from the Direction Posts within the Parish;
- Relocated stranded frog spawn from dry areas to deeper water; and
- After the February storms, carried out significant fallen tree clearance work on the Ashdown Forest paths that are designated by East Sussex County Council as 'Maresfield'.

The Committee itself has seen some changes during the year, including my appointment as Chairman. Following the retirement of our long-standing friend and colleague John Smith who has been part of the MCG for eight years, we have a newly co-opted Treasurer (Liz Lewis) nominated for the Executive Committee. John's other role as leader of the Footpaths Group will be filled by Bruce Milton from April 2022. Dick Thompson, one of the founding members of MCG and our longest

standing member of the current Executive Committee, has also decided to stand down with effect from May 2022. We are hugely grateful to Dick (and his wife Ann) for all their continued support and generosity over so many years.

When I took over as Chair in July 2021, it had not been possible to host a face-to-face Committee meeting for a number of months due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Our first 'in-person' meeting, held in August, was kindly hosted in John Smith's garage, a beautiful outdoor space more akin to a barn. It complied with CoVid guidelines and meant we could actually talk with each other in person. Quite a novelty at that time! Since then, we've continued to meet monthly using a meeting room at The Chequers. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank Romy (Chequers manager) and her team for being so supportive of the MCG.

One of our Committee objectives this year has been to raise awareness about the Conservation Group, to promote its aims and to highlight the benefits of membership. To that end, we have undertaken the following activities:

- As Chairman, I continue to write a short piece for inclusion in the monthly Parish Magazine highlighting forthcoming events and latest news;
- Last November, we met with the Headteacher and Friends of Bonners School to discuss how we might work together more closely in future conservation projects;
- Our Winter Newsletter, redesigned to look and feel like a Christmas card, gave us an opportunity to promote the stories behind each of the four symbols that go to make up our creative MCG logo;
- Our Summer edition is due for publication in May and, with the help of the Church, we will be delivering this edition to all the homes in the village via an insert in the June Parish Magazine. Our thanks go to Jessica Stopp and her group of distributors for their support with this.

Finally, on a personal note, I'd like to thank all the hard-working members of the Executive Committee, past and present, who have supported me in my first year in the role of Chair. They are all volunteers and have been extremely generous of their time over the past 12 months. I am very grateful and look forward to collaborating with them and many others in our community in the coming months, as we all work together to support and improve village life in Maresfield.

Future projects

Looking ahead to this financial year:

- We organised our annual Spring Clean Up day in April, collecting 15 bags of rubbish to send off for recycling into green energy;
- We're delighted to be part of the forthcoming Jubilee Fete taking place on the Recreation Ground in June, in partnership with the church;
- For July, we are planning a 'Summer Cheese and Wine Evening' for members and friends;

- In the autumn, we plan to host a special evening for our wonderful bank of volunteers (aka “Collectors” and other helpers);
- The Queen’s Green Canopy, a unique tree planting initiative in the autumn;
- Our annual Christmas Tree lighting up ceremony will take place in early December.

We have a number of longer-term projects under consideration, including:

- Further collaboration with the primary school;
- Maintaining an ongoing interest in the future of the Underhill Bridge over the Shortbridge Stream;
- The Footpaths Group will continue the work of keeping the Parish footpaths clear, as well as planning for the repainting and, where necessary, repairing of the iconic Sussex Direction Posts and village gates within the Parish;
- One of our members has asked us to consider a proposal to help create a ‘Maresfield Pictorial Footpaths Map’ that could be located at the centre of the village displaying all the footpaths that radiate out from the village;
- Having identified a potential environmental concern, another of our members has contacted us to suggest the MCG considers a proposal to preserve the Shortbridge Stream;
- We are in discussion with the Church regarding a proposal to support improvements to the Church car park - a project that has been on hold since the pandemic;
- A project to produce a display board map of historical sites around Maresfield is also ongoing and we hope to conclude this year.

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.

Jo Lawrance

May 2022