

MARESFIELD CONSERVATION GROUP

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 16th May 2023 at 19.30 in Maresfield Village Hall

Present:

Committee:

Jo Lawrance, Chair [JL]
Terence Brady, Treasurer [TB]
Stan Sadowski, Membership Secretary [SS]
Alex Clarke, [AC]
Bruce Milton, [BM]
Rob Penfold, [RP]
Jacqui Royal, [JR]
Ian Shaw, [IS]
Stephany Reed-Perkins

Members [20]

Stephanie Bassett (Minutes), D. Watson, J. Watson, Anthony Myers, Marion Myers, Ann Thompson, Jean Smith, Caroline Shaw, Martin Rees, Lee Rodrigues, Tom Merchant, Elaine Wilson, Jeanette Chalkley, Cathy Shaw, Karen Tritton, Janette Parks, Ken Parks, Anne Eden-Green, Ten Mariner, Carol Jeffree, Bernadette Reed.

JL welcomed everyone to the Maresfield Conservation Group Annual General Meeting and thanked those present for their attendance and support.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Graham Shaw, Sheila Cumming, Laura Stevens-Smith, Pat Palmer, Mike and Ruby Spanswick, Brian and Wilma Porter, Stephen and Caroline Mack, Angie and Ashley Welton, and Clive Wilson

2. Approval of Previous AGM Minutes

The Minutes of the AGM held on 3rd May 2022 were approved. [proposed by RP, seconded by SRP]

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Chair's Report – Jo Lawrance [JL]

JL read her Chair's Report, which was circulated with the AGM documents before the meeting. She said that anyone wishing to receive communication by email in future should let us know their details.

She began by saying that Liz Lewis, who had replaced John Smith as Treasurer, has had to step down and that Terence Brady was co-opted to the role as of last month.

The following additional comments were made to her Report:

The year 2022/23 was a very busy one and a number of activities and social events took place. She thanked the litter pickers for their help in tidying the village in April and October, and the Footpaths Group for their work in delivering over 100 saplings and shrubs to Maresfield residents as part of the Queen's Green Canopy tree planning initiative.

She referred to the Planning Sub-Committee which was formed during the year to strengthen our original aim of preserving and protecting our village from over-development, and thanked RP for his work. She said that MCG is available to give practical and financial help to residents in their objections to large developments.

She thanked members for their support of our February Quiz Night which raised a sum of £750 for the Uckfield Foodbank, an organization which helps not only the residents of Uckfield but those of Maresfield as well.

The Footpaths group has had a full programme this year and JL thanked residents for their suggestions for work to be carried out. More volunteers are needed for this work to continue.

JL thanked Ashdown Forest for granting free parking permits for the times when the Footpaths Group is working on the Forest.

She thanked SRP for her work to organize the Summer Fete as well as Romy and her team at The Chequers for their support during the year.

5. Treasurer's Report –Terence Brady [TB]

TB confirmed that the end of year accounts have been signed off by an independent auditor and will be available on our website. A slide presentation of the Income and Expenditure compared to 2020/21 was shown.

There are currently no debtors, and no creditors.

Our Bank Balance at 31st March stands at £12,014.83, which is a surplus of £2,168.25 income over expenditure. Given such a healthy balance, TB appealed to members for ideas for future projects.

6. Website & Membership – Stan Sadowski [SS]

Website:

Referring to his slide presentation SS said that from Autumn 2018 to 30th April 2023, the website has been visited 7,173 times by 4,582 individuals from 140 different countries. In 2019 there were 888 views by 447 users, rising in 2022 to 3,109 views by 1,998 users.

Membership:

In 2017 there were 167 members, increasing to 175 in 2018. From 2019 to 2021 the membership stood at a static 140, possibly as a result of the pandemic, and now stands at 162.

We continue to try to raise awareness of the MCG and hope to encourage membership among the under-represented areas of the village.

The percentage of annual subscriptions paid by standing order has risen from 28% in 2019 to 70% for 2023.

7. Footpaths Group – Bruce Milton [BM]

The Footpaths Group is continuing John Smith's legacy of keeping the village clean and tidy and BM thanked those volunteers who help each week.

Much of the work carried out during the year was covered in the Chair's Report but BM highlighted the following:

- Wooden Fingerposts - in addition to cleaning, some will need to be replaced. BM is in talks with East Sussex Highways for permission to use like for like;
- Ashdown Forest – work is regularly undertaken to clear the footpaths;
- Leaf clearance – East Sussex Highways undertakes this work less frequently now, so the Footpaths Group has stepped in.

In conclusion, BM said that it is sometimes challenging to find time to address all the areas which need it, but he is grateful for the suggestions from members.

8. Future Projects – Ian Shaw [IS]

IS highlighted a number of events and projects that the MCG are involved in:

- Underhill Bridge – We continue to lobby ESCC to get the bridge replaced with something more sympathetic to the local environment;
- Road/Twitten to Underhill from The Chequers – We will take forward a suggestion to install a post to stop cars going up the hill which has no way out;
- Pictorial Map – RP has been liaising with the donor to commission a pictorial map of the village for siting next to The Chequers. JL asked members to suggest other locations;
- Heritage List – In conjunction with the Maresfield Historical Society, we are in the process of drawing up heritage sites around the village. So far we have identified Shortbridge Stream, and an area of ancient woodland;
- Wellington Gate – We are lobbying the Council to maintain the land awaiting allotments as currently it is very untidy;
- Oak tree at the entrance to Parklands – We are lobbying the Council to replace the fallen oak tree.
- Future development – The MCG Future Development Sub-Committee is collaborating with a large team from outside the area to monitor and act upon large-scale developments.

Our next social event will be a Cheese and Wine evening in Ann Thompson's garden on 1st July.

9. Guest Speaker – Carol Jeffree, Maresfield Historical Society

Carol gave a short overview of the history of Maresfield [named Meresfield in 1234 meaning 'body of water'] .

The area of Maresfield has known centuries of occupation. There are signs of a Bronze Age settlement, traces of a Roman road at The Wilderness in Maresfield Park and a 17th century coach road which stretched from London to Lewes and Brighton with coaches stopping daily at the Chequers.

In the 16th century Maresfield became a major area for the iron industry and there is evidence in the church records of French workers coming to the area to make cannon. The church itself dates from Saxon times.

Underhill is a very old part of the village, and at one time had a forge, tanyard and brewery.

Carol covered the history of Maresfield Park from its ownership by the Shelleys and Count Munster to its sequestration during WW1 and formation of the Royal Corps of Signals in 1920.

She urged MCG members who are interested in learning more about the history of Maresfield and the local area to join the Historical Society, and to look out for a book [now out of print] by Betty Turner.

SS reminded members that there is a page dedicated to the Historical Society's events on our website.

10. Election of Executive Committee – Jo Lawrance [JL]

Retiring:

Presentations were made to two members who are standing down, Alex Clarke and Jacqui Royal, in recognition of their many years of service to the MCG.

JL expressed her thanks to Liz Lewis for being the most patient of Treasurers who battled for 12 months to get our online banking arrangements sorted.

Elected:

Terence Brady [TB] was co-opted during their year and was elected [proposed by RP, seconded by AC]

There were two nominations and both were elected to the Committee:

Tom Merchant [proposed by SS, seconded by IS] – with specific brief to work with SS on the issue of Underhill Bridge, which has now fallen over.

Caroline Shaw [proposed by RP, seconded by SS]

11. Any Other Business

- Ben [Bernadette] Reed thanked the MCG for its help and support in producing and delivering flyers for the proposed development of 420 homes at Downlands Farm. The developers have now lodged an appeal against its refusal.

She thanked the Footpaths Group for their continued work to clear the footpaths.

She suggested Shortbridge Stream as a future project and outlined its vital importance as a spawning ground for sea trout and European eels. She requested the MCG monitor the water quality of the Batts Bridge and Shortbridge streams and keep records of the eel and sea trout numbers to ensure their protection.

She also suggested undertaking an ecological survey of the sandstone rock outcrops which are an important habitat for rare mosses and lichens.

- Karen Tritton asked if there is a weight restriction for the Underhill Bridge.
ACTION: JL to raise with East Sussex Highways.
- Elaine Wilson advised that box blight has arrived at RollingMill and that Haslow Housing Association has been informed.
ACTION: BM/Footpaths Group.

As there was no other business, JL thanked members for attending.

12. Date of Next AGM

To be advised.

The meeting closed at 8.53 pm and was followed by refreshments.