

**Maresfield Conservation Group**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting**

**Held on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017 at the Village Hall, Maresfield**

**The Meeting commenced at 7.30pm**

**Present**

Mrs Sheila Cumming, Chairman [SC]

Mr Dick Thompson , President [DT]

Mr John Smith, Treasurer [JS]

Mr Ken Ogden, Secretary [KO]

Miss Gemma Hallin, Member [GH]

Mr Rob Penfold, Membership Secretary [RP]

Mr Stan Sadowski, Member [SS]

Mr Ian Shaw, Member [IS]

Mrs Peta Penfold, Minute Secretary [PP]

28 Ordinary Members and 8 Committee Members

**1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence received from Mr & Mrs Bob and Liz Brown; Mr & Mrs Michael and Beryl Clifton; Mr & Mrs Phil Trow; Mrs Cynthia Flittner; Mr & Mrs Dick and Barbara Waterson; Mr & Mrs John Mason; Mrs Marion Myers; Mrs Pole; and the Reverend Nick Cornell & Mrs Gillian Cornell.

The Secretary Mr Ken Ogden [KO] stood to advise the Members that he was retiring as Secretary due to his wife's illness and therefore a new Secretary will need to be voted in. He reminded those present that the current membership year ends this evening, subscriptions will fall due tomorrow, and anyone wishing to speak at the meeting or vote, must be an existing member. He finished by outlining two occasions when MCG had offered to pay for works only for East Sussex County Council [ESCC] to step in and provide funding, namely the pavement outside the shop, and, this year, the white posts outside the churchyard.

The Chairman, Mrs Sheila Cumming [SC], then stood to welcome everyone to the AGM, and outlined a change to the published agenda. Item 9 was placed on the agenda at the request of the Chairman of the Maresfield Village Meadows Trust [MVMT] Mr Michael Clifton [MC]. However, on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017 in her capacity as Chairman of the MCG, SC received a letter from MC which stated that, following the MVMT AGM held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017, the MVMT members felt that the MCG was not the best charity with which to merge and they wished to consider alternative partnerships. The Trustees of the MCG agreed that the objectives of the two charities are not compatible. Consequently, this matter is now considered closed. The order of business then commenced.

**2. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest**

SC advised that she is no longer a Trustee of the Village Hall.

### 3. Minutes of the Meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016

The Minutes of the last AGM held on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016, as published, were proposed by Mr Stan Sadowski [SS], seconded by Mrs Elizabeth Wylie, and carried unanimously.

### 4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 5. Questions to the Chairman on Published Chairman's Report

SC handed out additional copies of the newsletter, and then provided updates as follows:

5.1 **Grass Cutting:** SC explained that on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 control of the grass cutting contract for Maresfield was handed back to East Sussex County Council [ESCC], who have subcontracted Countryman Landscaping to carry out the works. ESCC have imposed new terms and conditions involving a re-designation of areas termed 'rural' and 'urban', and different cutting regimes. The centre of the village and the new 'urban' areas will be cut 6 times a year between March-October whereas previously only 5 cuts were carried out annually. Although the amount of work will rise, ESCC did not propose increasing the grant provided to MCG in line with their additional requirements. Having looked at funding, the Trustees of the MCG concluded that it is more cost effective for ESCC to manage the contract. KO pointed out that ESCC have also taken back other large grass cutting contracts within Wealden. The Treasurer Mr John Smith [JS] noted that Countryman seem to be doing a better job as they also take away the grass cuttings. SC added that cutting around the bulbs will always bring difficulties and lead to some patchiness, and weather conditions will dictate how much grass cutting will be required.

5.2 **White Rails:** SC pointed out that the white rails alongside the churchyard are now white posts which, ultimately, were funded and installed by ESCC. She explained that, for a long time, ESCC had refused to replace the rotten wooden posts and rails, claiming that they were street furniture. MCG therefore obtained quotes for installing new wooden rails which came in at around £5,000 for the materials, installation, painting, and the traffic lights specified as a requirement during the works. The MCG Trustees ultimately managed to convince ESCC that there was a safety element involved as well as aesthetic considerations. Subsequently a meeting was held, during which ESCC proposed three options for replacing the existing rails, being a) crash barriers b) chevrons or c) white posts. MCG had little option but to accept the third option. ESCC then agreed to not only pay for, but also install, the replacement posts, and they were erected in June. SC was happy to report that she and others have been pleasantly surprised by how well the new white posts have blended in.

5.3 **Maresfield in 1840:** SC said that, some 20 years ago, Mr Clive Brooks [CB] wrote a booklet called 'Maresfield in 1840'. This has been out of print for a long time, and some amendments are required, but SS has managed to obtain a pdf. copy of the pamphlet so that it can be reprinted in Uckfield. SS said that copies should be available by the end of July at a cost of approx. £4. In answer to a question from the floor, SC advised that they will be on sale in the Post Office. CB explained that he originally had 200 copies of the booklet published in Tunbridge Wells at his own expense, but that printer has now gone out of business so he has

been unable to get it republished himself. He thanked SS for his initiative, particularly since CB is still receiving lots of requests for copies of the pamphlet. SC added that there has also been a suggestion that an updated booklet called 'Maresfield in 2020' could be prepared.

## 6. Questions to the Treasurer on the published Treasurer's Report

- 6.1 Commenting on the Treasurer's Report published in the AGM newsletter, Mr John Smith [JS] noted that income was down on the previous year because there was no Christmas Fayre, and subscriptions dropped by £567. He pointed out that the Chairman's Report from 1998 suggested an annual subscription of £7, and his suggestion to the Members of the MCG is that the subscription is increased to £10 per annum – many people pay substantially more than that already. He added that Gift Aid rules allow the MCG to reclaim 25% of each eligible subscription, so encouraged those who had not already done so to complete a Gift Aid form.
- 6.2 Expenditure increased during 2016-2017 due to the purchase of road closure signs which cost £400 for the Christmas Tree Lighting ; the planters, which should last for several years and are maintained by local residents; the fact that the insurance costs are out of kilter due to a new policy being taken out which meant that two premiums were being paid for during the financial period 2016/2017; and village maintenance costs, predominantly grass cutting, which was undertaken through a contract by Barcombe Landscapes. Overall administration costs have been reduced since smaller printers are now being used (meaning the ink costs less), and external printing costs have been shown separately. Unfortunately, the picnic bench was trashed within a few weeks of installation at the new Children's Play Area. The Recreation Committee have reported that their insurance excess roughly equates to the cost of the original bench, so MCG are looking at other ways to replace the bench. Other expenses included a £500 donation to the Village Hall towards retiling the old part of the roof; £250 to the Lunch Club towards a new fridge and £250 towards grass cutting at the School Hill Cemetery. JS offered his thanks to Mr Bob Brown for examining the MCG Annual Accounts, copies of which were available for viewing.
- 6.3 Mrs Pat Palmer noted that the MCG accounts show a healthy bank balance, and enquired about plans for spending it in 2017-2018. JS responded with a list of proposals which include £500 towards replacing the gas cooker at the Village Hall with an electric one (following a recent incident where gas was left on overnight); £250 towards equipment for the Lunch Club; £350 to replace the picnic table in the Children's Play Area (which may be split 50-50 with the Parish Council); up to £500 towards Footpaths Group expenses; a continuing donation towards grass cutting at School Hill Cemetery; £500 towards repairing the Church clock; £200 for the Christmas Tree lighting; publication of the MCG newsletters; £180 website costs; the insurance premiums; up to £150 for reprinting 'Maresfield in 1840'; and £500 towards the Church Lighting project. MCG currently hold almost £7,000 with a projected spend of around £5,000. In answer to a query, KO confirmed that the Church Lighting proposals were still on the table, and comprised two more lights which have been tested but require planning permission before they are installed. He added that he wrote a letter two weeks ago in an attempt to circumvent the planning requirements for what is, essentially, a very small change.
- 6.4 A question was posed regarding the 20% downturn in subscriptions. JS had no explanation, although the situation is being monitored. He added that Gift Aid donations should balance out some of the shortfall. The Membership Secretary, Mr Robert Penfold [RP] said that membership numbers are slightly down, currently standing at circa 10% of the overall population of Maresfield. One of the reasons for this is that, whilst the Collectors are doing

their best, it is not an easy job and often residents are not at home. It would be seen as oppressive to visit a house three times, particularly since donations are voluntary. JS added his thanks to the Collectors, who do a 'rotten' job to raise funds to benefit the village. RP added that more Collectors are needed, and collection areas may also be amended to make the task easier.

- 6.5 A general discussion followed about how to rectify the subscription issue. Direct debit payments are an option, and RP agreed that this would be an excellent solution but is reliant upon people providing email addresses. Mrs Pat Palmer suggested that those present could leave their email contact details tonight. However, she pointed out that Members also need to be notified of collection week to make life easier for the Collectors. It was suggested that Facebook could be used, but the MCG does not yet have a Facebook page. Mr Brian Porter, who is a Collector, explained that he has drawn up a letter containing his details and those of the Treasurer which advises Members that they can either send electronic payment (most do) or he will collect a cheque if preferred. This idea was well received. Mr Graham Allt takes it a stage further and asks Members to come to him if they wish to continue their subscriptions, thereby putting the onus on them to avoid any sense of coercion. It was also suggested that putting a flyer in the Parish Magazine, which goes to every household in the village, will be worthwhile. There may be a minimal charge for this, but it would ensure that households on the new estates are reached.
- 6.6 Mrs Pat Palmer then asked whether there will be an MCG Christmas Faye in 2017. RP queried whether there was an appetite for one since the last event was poorly attended. SC advised that Ms Sarah Phoenix [SP], who currently assists with the Bonners School Christmas Fayre, has been invited to join the MCG Committee. Rather than duplicating effort, the opportunity exists for the two organisations to link up, with MCG supporting the Bonners Christmas event. It was agreed that the keys to success will be marketing, and attracting the right stallholders.
- 6.7 There followed a general discussion about the proposed subscription increase, with Mr Brian Porter confirming that rates have not risen since the MCG was first established. At that point, subscriptions were set at £1.50 for senior citizens, £5 for single membership, and £7 for families. It was suggested that the £1.50 subscription should be abolished, and the minimum subscriptions should change to £5 for single membership, and £10 for family membership. However, it was pointed out that subscriptions are voluntary, that some people cannot afford £10, and that, in any event, some Members pay substantially more than this with the average contribution being in excess of £10. Ultimately, consensus was reached that the MCG should concentrate on increasing membership numbers rather than raising subscription rates. The £1.50 rate will be removed from the literature and, if asked, Collectors will advise that suggested subscription rates are £5 for single membership, £10 for families, or whatever donations people wish to make.
- 6.8 Finally, Miss Gemma Hallin [GH] informed those present that she is working on a new, more user friendly MCG Website. A query was raised regarding whether other Societies within the village could pay for the privilege of 'piggy backing' onto the website. GH said that she would be happy to discuss that option, particularly with groups such as the Historical Society. The old website will be phased out as soon as the new one is up and running.
- 6.9 The Published Treasurer's Report was proposed by Mr Ian Shaw [IS], seconded by Mr Brian Porter, and unanimously carried.

## 7. Election of Executive Officers

Mrs Sheila Cumming advised that, following the resignation of KO from the position of Secretary, Miss Gemma Hallin has been nominated to fill this position. Mrs Cumming has been nominated to continue as Chairman, and Mr John Smith to continue as Treasurer. These nominations were duly voted on and carried unanimously.

## 8. Election of Executive Committee

SC informed those present that, after 4 years in post, Mr Michael Clifton has indicated that he is not seeking re-election to the MCG Executive Committee. However, the existing Committee Members in the form of Mr Dick Thompson, Mr Ken Ogden, Mr Robert Penfold, Mr Stan Sadowski and Mr Ian Shaw, have all indicated their willingness to continue. Following a vote, the Committee Members were all duly re-elected. In addition, Mrs Sarah Phoenix was also voted onto the Committee.

## 9. Any Other Business (previously notified in writing)

There was no other business to discuss.

## 10. Close of Meeting

The AGM closed at 8.35pm and the Committee Members took office. **The date of the next Annual General Meeting will be 3rd July 2018 in the Maresfield Village Hall.**