

MARESFIELD CONSERVATION GROUP

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 14th May 2024 at 19.30 in Maresfield Village Hall

Present:

Committee:

Jo Lawrance, Chair [JL]
Terence Brady, Treasurer [TB]
Stan Sadowski, Membership Secretary [SS]
Bruce Milton, [BM]
Rob Penfold, [RP]
Ian Shaw, [IS]
Stephany Reed-Perkins [SRP]
Tom Merchant [TM]
Caro Shaw [CS]

Members [20]

Stephanie Bassett (Minutes), Karen Tritton, Anthony Myers, Alex Clarke, Ann Thompson, Naomi Forbes, Tracie Coe, Pat Palmer, Peta Penfold, Cathy Shaw, Kim Milton, Geoff Coe

Despite the poor attendance, JL assured members that the meeting was quorate and thanked those present for coming.

1. Welcome

SRP welcomed everyone to the Maresfield Conservation Group Annual General Meeting and asked Stephanie Bassett to read out the Apologies received.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Sheila Cumming, Mike and Ruby Spanswick, Sally Edwards, Pat Langridge, Peter Bassett, and Marion Myers.

3. Approval of Previous AGM Minutes

The Minutes of the AGM held on 16th May 2023 were approved.

4. Matters Arising

There were two action points from the last AGM:

Weight restrictions on Underhill Bridge

JL is in contact with Highways and will discuss our concerns with the engineers once work has begun.

Box Hedging

JL asked Cathy Shaw to explain the 2 diseases affecting box hedging:

Box blight: The plant might be saved by removing the dead parts but the disease is often terminal.

Box moth caterpillar: An infestation resembles knitting while at the cocoon stage. The caterpillars have black and green stripes and are killed by spraying with pesticide.

5. Chair's Report – Jo Lawrance [JL]

[Errata: Please note that the report should read 2023/24 and not 2022/23, and the trees in the churchyard are lime and not elm.]

JL read from her report, which had been circulated with the AGM documents before the meeting. She thanked those members who gave their time in helping with litter picking and those who supported our February quiz, which raised £1,000 for Uckfield Foodbank. She also thanked the manager of the Chequers, Rummy, and her team for their support during the year and for supplying a monthly meeting space. She also took the opportunity to advise members that she would be standing down as Chair at the next AGM and asked anyone interested in taking on the role to contact her in good time so that she can ensure a smooth transition and handover.

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

The Income and Expenditure Report for the year 2023/24 was circulated before the meeting. A slide comparing the bank balances of 2022/23 and 2023/24 was shown. At the start of this current financial year the balance stood at £12,014.83 and has increased by £961.85 to £12,014.83.

6. Membership – Stan Sadowski [SS]

Referring to his slide presentation SS said that membership numbers have remained static over the past few years (currently 162), and that a wider spread of members from different parts of the village would be desirable.

The year 2024 shows 69% of subscriptions are being paid by Standing Order but as not every member has yet paid for this year this figure may increase. It is hoped to persuade more members to pay by Standing Order.

75% of members are now contactable by email and we are making every effort to persuade more members to allow us to reach them in this way.

SS said that he was standing down from the Committee but would continue to act as Membership Secretary. Maintenance of the website has transferred to Tom Merchant.

7. Website [TM]

A slide giving website statistics from Autumn 2018 to 30th April 2023 showed that there were 7,173 visits by 4,582 different people from 140 different countries. Usage of the website since 2019 has risen to 3,109 views, with 1,998 users.

A new website, which will be more mobile-device friendly, was launched last month and members were invited to make suggestions for improvement. There are separate topic areas including a section for Committee meeting agendas and Minutes. TM drew attention to the Future Events section, and the photo competition. Conditions of entry are as follows: free of charge to enter and open to anyone. Multiple entries will be accepted. The subject is "Maresfield Through the Seasons" and all photographs must be in landscape format. Winning photographs will be used to produce a calendar, which should be available for purchase just before Christmas.

8. Footpaths Group – Bruce Milton [BM]

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

- The overgrowth of the lime trees in the churchyard is under the control of the Parish Council but the MCG is allowed to tackle any epicormic growth and lower branches;
- A new Notice Board outside the Village Shop has been produced by John Lazenby and is now in use;
- Traffic bollards and wooden signs around the village have been cleaned.

In conclusion, BM said that the undergrowth has not yet grown very much due to the wet weather but the Footpaths Group will be tackling it soon. He welcomed any suggestions from members for future projects or areas to tidy but made a plea to dog walkers to clean up after their pets and take it home.

Pat Palmer asked if the MCG could improve the appearance of the area around the Village Shop.

ACTION: BM to write to the shop and flat owners requesting permission.

In response to a request by Karen Tritton for a disabled accessible stile to be installed at Powdermill BM said that the MCG is no longer allowed to repair bridges or stiles but is the responsibility of the Parish Council.

9. Future Projects – Ian Shaw [IS]

A list of projects for 2024/25 was outlined in the Chair's Report. IS gave an update on the following items from last year's Minutes:

- Entrance to Parklands – Plans to replace the tree at the entrance to Parklands have stalled as there are difficulties with the line of sight and underground utilities;
- Wellington Gate allotments – The Parish Council has recently taken over ownership now that difficulties, including a water supply, have been resolved. The new surface on the pathways is much better and it is hoped a couple of benches will be installed;
- Pictorial Map - This is near completion and will be sited near The Chequers.

Our next social event will be the Cheese and Wine event taking place on 27th July. Posters will be on display soon but details are already available on the website.

10. Planning – Rob Penfold

A total of 1000 houses are expected to be built within 2 to 3 miles of the village within the next year or so. Since the last AGM, the village of Maresfield has in the region of 80 planning permissions already applied for, that have either been granted or are awaiting consideration by Planning. There are others in the pipeline, which could mean the total number of house applications for the village is set to rise to 300: which equates to an approximate 40% increase in properties. The Draft Local Plan also has allowed for 46 windfall applications under the SHELAA scheme. If these were all to be built then that would mean we have increased the housing in Maresfield by nearly 50%.

A major factor in this increase in building is the parish's proximity to Ashdown Forest which precludes most development in Nutley and Fairwarp and means that Maresfield is having to absorb the quota imposed on us by Wealden District Council.

RP stressed that individual letters of objection or support from residents carry as much weight with the Council as does one such letter from the MCG written on behalf of members.

Our new website will highlight any large scale development applications, showing the relevant Wealden reference number plus the link to the WDC Planning Portal. RP said that the Wealden Planning Portal can be daunting for some and advised, if in doubt, sending in comments via email will suffice. He stressed the email must contain the WDC reference number and the sender's name and address. He reminded members that only specific criteria will be considered (light or noise pollution, or damage to ecology etc. but not loss of view or lack of infrastructure) and offered the MCG's advice in writing letters of objection, adding that a list of potential criteria with which to object was on the website.

11. Resolution to Increase the Size of the Committee [JL]

It was proposed by JL and seconded by BM that the number of Committee members be increased to 8 and this was AGREED nem com.

JL also announced a request from the Parish Council to stand as councillors.

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

All the current Committee members are willing to stand again, with the exception of Stan Sadowski who will be standing down after serving with the MCG for 12 years. He will continue to act as Membership Secretary.

There was only nomination. Consequently JL proposed and IS seconded that Tracie Coe be elected to the Committee. This was AGREED nem con and she was invited to attend the next Committee meeting on June 17th at The Chequers .

In response to a question from Pat Palmer, JL said that despite advertising on the website there is no official Secretary but Stephanie Bassett has taken responsibility for producing the Agenda and the Minutes.

13. Any Other Business

A presentation was made to SS as an appreciation of his years with the MCG.

RP said that Site A has now been handed over to the Parish Council and is soon to receive a name.

RP also said that a number of trees were felled in the churchyard and that he has asked the Church's permission to use the chippings on the footpaths.

Peta Penfold asked whether the village could have signs to deter HGVs from entering.

ACTION: RP

Tracie Coe mentioned the lack of dog waste bins, and that dog waste is ending up in the bins at the bus stop and The Chequers. RP said that MCG has already approached the Parish Council offering to purchase one (cost £500) and to sponsor the cost of maintenance for the first year (£250). It is scheduled for discussion by the Environmental Committee in June.

After some discussion it was agreed that RP should check the WDC website to check the correct procedure for disposing of dog waste and write an article for the Parish Magazine.

ACTION: RP

[ADDENDUM: The correct procedure is that dog waste may either be placed in the designated dog waste bins or in public bins, or placed in the normal household refuse bin. It must not be placed in household recycling or green garden waste bins.]

As there was no other business, SRP declared the meeting closed at 20.31

14. Date of next AGM

To be advised.

Date of next Committee meeting: 17th June at 7pm in The Chequers.

DRAFT