



## FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

### 19<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SUNDAY 12 MARCH 2023

ASHENGROUND COMMUNITY CENTRE, 15:00

### AGM MINUTES

#### 1. Apologies for absence

Three members attended the AGM (even though they were unsure if the meeting would go ahead - the local area had a major power cut which began before and continued during the AGM). Two members had sent apologies for absence in advance.

#### 2. Approval of the draft minutes of the last AGM held on 13 March 2022

The AGM agreed the minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> AGM without comment.

#### 3. Chair's report

The Chair, Lorraine Maynard (LM) opened the AGM by thanking everyone on the conservation volunteer team and the Mid Sussex District Council ranger. As a result of everyone's efforts the woods looked lovely, however, the emerging bluebells are being trampled by people who do not keep to the paths. LM also thanked people who had taken photographs (especially Debbie and Jo) and had shared them and their reports with FOABW. It has been one of the best years for bird reports, with unusual sightings, perhaps due to the weather. This year's bird report was much better than the report that was compiled in 2011 after the Phase 2 survey had been completed.

Installations: a beautiful, engraved bench has been installed in the woods near Pond Meadow, but it is not in the best place, as it is very muddy in that area and due to seclusion open to vandalism. FOABW has paid for a new noticeboard which has been fixed by the bridge, unfortunately, due to French instructions, it was initially installed in portrait position rather than landscape, this has now been corrected by the Mid Sussex maintenance team.

There has been further vandalism, planks taken out of the fencing to put over the streams and tree branches have been broken to make dens. LM found a cache of unused vapes (20-30 boxes), they had been dumped and covered in leaves.

Wildlife this season appears to have been in overdrive, especially fungi, as well as the berries and nuts.

Chair thanked Hannah Sharpe (HS) for her help. Hannah has been Treasurer this past year and will now be stepping down due to other work commitments. Laura Maynard (Lorraine's daughter) who has been producing the newsletter has stepped up to take on the role of Treasurer and after 4 years without a Secretary, Michelle Thomasson (MT) has recently taken on that role.

**Call for volunteers with a spring event – Mid Sussex Marathon 30<sup>th</sup> April.** FOABW tries to marshal the route through the woodland, marshaling this year will begin at 10am and finish around 12:30. The runners will follow the route from Victoria Park down to Sunnywood Drive, across the bridge and into the woods, turning right to run along Cascade Path past Pond Meadow and out of the woods via Wealden Way to Beechurst Gardens, then back into the woods via the path (running parallel to Traunstein Way) and into Bolnore Village. After Bolnore Village the runners will pass through Weavers Meadow, this is where extra help will be required with clear signaling to point the way and protect the meadow.

#### **4. Treasurer's report and adoption of annual accounts**

HS summarised the published accounts. There is a £107 surplus from 2022. Membership numbers are down slightly (133 in 2021 to 117 in 2022). Insurance costs have increased, from £138 in 2021 to £541 in 2022. Increased liability insurance gives an additional cost of £56, the cover was £1m and is now £10m, though this cost will be reimbursed by Mid Sussex District Council. Post and printing costs have also increased, and more bat detectors have been acquired, however, the cash balance remains very healthy at almost £12,000, this is due in large part to a donation made in memory of a former member. Stuart Meier checked the accounts and was happy with them.

On the conclusion of the accounts Hannah was presented with a thank you card and flowers from FOABW.

#### **5. The AGM approved and agreed the accounts.**

#### **6. Planned events for 2023**

LM and MT - The events currently planned include a photography session (date TBC), a bat walk, bug hunt and bird of prey afternoon. Lorraine highlighted the Bat Walk as an event really enjoyed by both children and adults, as is the Bug Hunt. In previous years, FOABW had help and advice sourcing Bug Hunt equipment by Martin from the National History Museum. This equipment is still in use and will be available for this year's Bug Hunt, including magnifying glasses, nets and umbrellas (to tap the trees), Jo and Debbie will then be on hand to identify the bugs. This year there will be no pond dipping.

Days, dates and times were clarified for the planned events, they are:

**Sunday 13th August 2.30pm-4pm Children's Bug Hunt**, meet at Ashenground Railway Bridge.

**Saturday 19th August 2-pm-5pm Birds of Prey** with Falconry UK, Weavers Meadow.

**Friday 1st September 7.30pm – 9pm Bat walk**, Railway Bridge, Ashenground Road.

**Date and time still to be confirmed for the Photography session.**

#### **7. Conservation task leader's report**

Patrick Burke (PB) has written a concise report on the conservation group's activities over the past year, these activities are guided by the Conservation Management Plan, PB summarized the latest report for attendees. There were 12 sessions with good progress made on pollarding, mowing (Pond Meadow, Weavers Meadow and the buffer zones around Renfields, Trubwick Avenue and Quarry Hollow), path work with wood chippings, cutting back of brambles and the removal of holly in Ashenground Wood. On average the Saturday morning work sessions had 7 attendees, varying from 4 to 11 people in all, this resulted in over 200 hours of conservation work. During each session litter picking resulted in 1-2 bags of litter.

The bird sightings report is a testament to the work of the conservation volunteers, with other highlights such as 10 orchids found across the meadow and being given a Special Award by Hayward's Heath In Bloom, in recognition of the work the volunteers do to care and safeguard the woods. FOABW has also been entered into the South and South East Neighbourhood in Bloom competition, judging is during June and July. Patrick concluded by thanking Mid Sussex Council for their support and the volunteers, including Richard and Philippa who were present.

#### **8. Election of Committee**

Proposed: Lorraine Maynard - Chair; Laura Maynard - Treasurer; Michelle Thomasson - Secretary; Chris Jones; Patrick Burke. The AGM agreed the Committee.

#### **9. Any other business**

Philippa asked if it would be possible to arrange a walk to spot fungi? LM agreed that this would be a good idea as fungi walks had been held in the past and agreed to try and arrange one.

Richard Bates highlighted his concern about the damage due to trampling, how could the fencing be safely improved? Richard also asked if there could be an application for more trees under the Coronation Tree scheme, perhaps for Pond Meadow? Lorraine advised against planting in the meadow, proposing

the gap along the railway line as an alternative or with tree planting where the hedgerows had been pulled out.

Michelle asked if a new botanical survey could be undertaken? LM replied that the rangers kindly had volunteered to do this in the past, though Lorraine will enquire about the costs of a plant survey. The latest tree survey for the council had not yet been released as public information, so it was suggested that the new ranger Rudi who is a tree warden may know how to access this information.

Chris Jones emphasised the need for better access around Pond Meadow enabling the nearby residents who require disabled access to at least visit the meadow. Philippa pointed out that under the equality act disabled access should have been given consideration. This lack of access will be taken up with the council.

**The AGM closed and was followed by refreshments.**