



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

17TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

SUNDAY, 15 MARCH 2020

ASHENGROUND COMMUNITY CENTRE, 15.00

AGM MINUTES

1. Apologies

The Chair, Lorraine Maynard (LM) had received apologies from Richard Bates and Stuart and Drusilla Meier.

2. Minutes of the last AGM, held on Sunday 17 March 2019

The AGM agreed the minutes with a correction of the date of the 2018 AGM at item 2.

3. Chair's report

LM thanked those present for attending in the face of Covid-19 concerns.

LM noted the impact of the Network Rail works but was confident that the area would regenerate. She also noted the exceptionally wet weather and that several trees had been lost throughout the wood. Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) had been quick to clear obstructions to paths.

There had been a few incidents of camping and dumping. There was also an issue with drug dealing from a bench at the entrance to the wood. The Police were aware and LM encouraged members to report suspicious behaviour.

LM noted the heavy footfall in the wood, in particular people straying off designated paths, which threatened the bluebells. Work was ongoing to improve the path in Pond Meadow.

MSDC had been installing new noticeboards and LM was hopeful of two more, in Catts Wood and Bolnore Wood in the coming year.

One of the ponds in Pond Meadow had been dredged and the intention was to do the other two in the future.

LM thanked the following:

- Bolnore Village Residents Association for use of Woodside for committee meetings
- Kim Berry and Debby Martell for photographs
- The conservation group volunteers
- MSDC for supplying woodchip for the paths.
- The Mid Sussex Marathon marshals from FoABW.

LM also thanked FoABW members for their continuing support. Membership had fallen in the last year. She hoped that people enjoyed the newsletters.

LM noted a successful 2019 nature photography day. There had been a huge turnout for the 2019 bat walk with the detectors a great success. Similarly there was a really good turnout for the 2019 children's bug hunt.

Planned events for 2020 included a nature photography day, a children's bug hunt, a bat walk and a fungus foray. All events are free with donations welcome. Cuckfield News had proved to be a successful forum for advertising events.

LM thanked those reporting sightings of flora and fauna. These included merlin, red kite, buzzard, stoats, foxes and badgers. LM noted sightings of newts and wagtails making use of the cascade installed by Network Rail.

4. Treasurer's report

Peter McKerchar (PMcK) thanked members for paying their subscriptions, the volunteers who deliver newsletters and Stuart Meier for auditing the accounts.

There had been a fall in membership last year so subscriptions income was down. FoABW had also received the final (2018) payment from Crest Nicholson in lieu of Bolnore Village Phase 5 membership. So income was expected to fall in 2020.

Expenditure last year had been higher, largely due to purchase of a new mower match-funded by MSDC. There had also been some other equipment purchased e.g. bat detectors.

The current balance was healthy and FoABW had received a generous grant from the Lund Trust for enhancing and preserving the High Weald countryside. This grant was specifically for restoring the ponds in Pond Meadow. That work had been delayed due to the bad weather.

The AGM agreed the accounts.

5. Membership

PMcK noted that membership was down at just over 130, the number of members resigning/ lapsing, moving or passing away (23) partially offset by new members (6).

6. Conservation during 2019/20

Patrick Burke (PB) thanked FoABW's conservation volunteers. Over the last twelve months the group had made excellent progress in delivering FoABW's

Conservation Management Plan. They had run 20 weekend sessions and put in around 50 hours of voluntary work (around 300 person hours). In the first eight months since purchasing the mower in May 2019, the group had clocked up around 21 hours mowing. They had removed 2-3 bags of litter each session which worked out at around 50 bags in total a year. Additionally, FoABW had overseen the dredging of Pond 1 funded by the Lund Trust grant, and led by the Trust Conservation Volunteers (TVC). TCV had also removed invasive weed from Pond 3.

The aim of the FoABW Conservation Management Plan is to:

- improve biodiversity by creating a more varied age structure among standard trees in the woodland by means of coppicing and by restoring the meadows through a mowing regime;
- encourage appropriate recreational use of the wood & meadows, by creating open places, paths with wide scallops and seats;
- maintain paths to counter erosion and path-widening, and to discourage the creation of ad hoc paths.

The Annex provides details of conservation activities over the last year.

In Pond Meadow, the conservation group has been waging a war with the brambles for several years. Currently it seemed to be winning and it was great to see two different species of orchid – Common Spotted & Southern Marsh – in there last year along with a range of other wild flowers.

The purchase of the mower in May 2019 had made the work much more efficient and the group had made much faster progress than in 2018 when it was doing everything manually.

PB thanked MSDC for its support including on purchase and maintenance of the mower and for supplying woodchip for the paths.

7. Network Rail drainage works update

PB noted that if we travelled back in time nearly 200 years to the late 1830s we would have found an army of navvies excavating the Folly Hill railway tunnel and the associated cutting. The Folly Hill tunnel sits under what is now the Muster Green one-way system and the cutting to the south forms the eastern boundary of the Ashenground and Bolnore Woods nature reserve.

When the Victorians built all this they severed existing watercourses, which discharged onto the railway. In the modern era flooding from these watercourses had been responsible for delays, for example through damage to signalling equipment or even submersion of the track.

Work to address this near Folly Hill started in 2017/18 with the diversion of water from Brodford Ghyll behind Climping Close and run-off from Wealden Way, via a new channel and cascade into Pond Meadow.

Then, last year saw a much bigger project as part of the £67 million Brighton Mainline Railway Improvement Project. This ambitious major project aimed to

tackle delay hotspots and Network Rail expects it to reduce delays by up to 15%. It was part of a wider £300m investment in the railway in the South East.

The project focussed on the line from Three Bridges to Brighton and Lewes, in particular the Victorian tunnels at Balcombe, Haywards Heath, Clayton and Patcham. It involved a nine day line closure in February 2019 and fifteen weekend closures.

Closer to home, it involved path closures in Ashenground Woods and other local disturbance as Network Rail's contractors BAM Nuttall installed over 600 metres of drainage tunnel and ten concrete injection shafts alongside the railway. BAM Nuttall invited FoABW to name one of the boring drills and we came up with the name "Ashengrinder".

It was a great relief for everyone that the work had now been successfully completed.

BAM Nuttall had reinstated the land with

- 200 trees planted on the Railway Shaw protected by a new post and rail fence.
- Repairs to Jeremy's Bridge over Foundry Brook and maintenance of the banks of the stream.
- Reinstatement and widening of the footpath running south alongside the railway from Ashenground Bridge.

PB noted that BAM Nuttall and Network Rail had expressed thanks to those affected for their patience and understanding. FoABW was also grateful to the contractors for their cooperation and considerate behaviour.

Local resident, Neighbourhood Watch coordinator and non-member, David Charrington, requested the floor to express concerns about inconsiderate behaviour by Network Rail and BAM Nuttall. He noted that the local MP had intervened in order to convene a meeting between Network Rail, BAM Nuttall, MSDC and local residents. Residents' concerns included lack of prior consultation, 24/7 noise and disruption and the delayed completion. Residents were also concerned about potential future works. Mr Charrington was keen to work with FoABW in considering any future similar proposals and this was agreed.

8. Mid Sussex Marathon Weekend update

Michael Bradley (MB) said that given the fast-moving situation with Covid-19, there were uncertainties about whether the Marathon would go ahead. He felt that if it did, it was important that FoABW should continue to have a role in terms of marshalling within the woods. MB was unsure of the route through the woods and agreed to follow up with the organisers on this point.

9. AOB

None

Election of Committee

The following members were willing to stand on the Committee:

Incumbents: Lorraine Maynard (Chair); Peter McKerchar (Treasurer and Membership), Patrick Burke and Chris Jones

One member resigned from the Committee: Gill Rogers. LM thanked Gill on behalf of FoABW, for her valuable contribution.

The AGM agreed the Committee.

The AGM closed with refreshments and was followed by an interesting and informative presentation by Professor Alan Aylward from the Woodland Trust. This highlighted the importance of trees and woodland and summarised the work of the Woodland Trust.

Annex – Details of conservation activities in 2019/20

Jan – March 2019

- Woodchip Pond Meadow
- Manually cut back King Street Copse buffer beside bridleway

April 2019

- Manually cut back Renfields & Quarry Hollow buffers

May – September 2019

- Mowed Four Acre Meadow and Pond Meadow (x2) and remove arisings
- Removed logs from Four Acre Meadow
- Maintained the path near cascade, cutting back brambles/nettles
- Removed invasive Himalayan balsam in Pierces Wood

Oct – December 2019

- Mowed
 - King Street Copse buffer beside bridleway
 - Weavers Meadow
 - Bolnore Ride
- Coppiced chestnuts in Catts Wood

January 2020

- Mowed
 - Railway Path in Pierces Wood
 - Quarry Hollow Buffer
- Removed some precarious trees in Four Acre Wood
- [Dredging of Pond One funded via Lund Trust grant/ TCV]

February 2020

- Cut back holly in Ashenground Wood and created dead hedge opposite School Path twitten to block off unofficial path

- Started woodchipping Pond Meadow path after dredging works
- [TCV removed invasive weed from Pond Three]