



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

18TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

SUNDAY 13 MARCH 2022

ASHENGROUND COMMUNITY CENTRE, 15:00

AGM MINUTES

1. Apologies for absence

Eleven members and one non-member attended the AGM. Two members sent apologies for absence in advance.

2. Approval of the draft minutes of the last AGM held on 15 March 2020

The AGM agreed the minutes of the 17th AGM without comment.

3. Chair's report

The Chair, Lorraine Maynard (LM) noted that Peter McKerchar (PMcK) would shortly be standing down as Treasurer with Hannah Sharpe (HS) taking over. The Committee still had a long-standing Secretary vacancy.

LM said that the woods had seen drastic changes in the last couple of years with completion of the Network Rail works followed by COVID and increased footfall. Cyclists were using the track from High Bridge to Railway Path and there were lots of new paths through the woodland threatening the bluebells. All three ponds in Pond Meadow had been recently dredged. There was no sign of frogs or newts in the ponds yet although there had been frog sightings in Wett Meadow. Young trees had recently been planted on Railway Shaw and Railway Path. A bench and oak tree had been installed in memory of Kim Berry, whose photographs remained accessible. Others were sending in photos and wildlife sightings, a report of which is published quarterly.

LM thanked the FoABW members, the conservation volunteers and the Mid Sussex District Council ranger. She noted that events planned for 2022 included a photography day, a bat walk and a bug hunt.

4. Treasurer's report and adoption of annual accounts

PMcK summarised the published accounts. Subscriptions fell as these had not been pursued in 2021 due to COVID. Membership had dropped a couple of years ago but had remained stable since. Most members were in the

Ashenground area but there were now more from Bolnore. Mid Sussex District Council covered insurance costs. Crest no longer contributed. There had been income from the Lund Fund and some generous donations. Outgoings since the mower in 2019 had been modest apart for the pond work supported by the Lund Fund income. Overall, there was a healthy surplus for 2020 and 2021 with almost £11,000 in assets.

The AGM agreed the accounts,

5. Report on work on the ponds in Pond Meadow



A charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin



PMcK explained that by 2019, the three ponds in Pond Meadow had silted up meaning that they no longer functioned as balancing ponds or supported wildlife. FoABW bid successfully to the Lund Fund for a grant to dredge Pond 1. The work was carried out in January 2020 although in retrospect should have been deeper. A further bid for a second Lund Fund grant to dredge Ponds 2 and 3 was unsuccessful. However, the Lund Fund allowed FoABW to use underspend from the first grant. This, combined with Mid Sussex District Council funding, enabled dredging of all three ponds in October 2021.

6. Conservation task leader's report

Patrick Burke (PB) provided a report of the conservation group's activities over the past two years including mowing, path work, coppicing and tree-planting (Annex 1).

One member noted the importance of communicating this work and of attracting more volunteers. Another member noted the impressive display of wild daffodils in Ashenground Wood in 2022.

7. Proposal to add a section on data protection to the constitution

HS proposed adding some wording to the constitution to cover the UK General Data Protection Regulation requirements.

The AGM agreed the proposal.

8. Election of Committee

Proposed: Lorraine Maynard - Chair; Hannah Sharpe – Treasurer; Vacancy – Secretary; Chris Jones; Patrick Burke.

The AGM agreed the Committee.

9. Presentations showing the wildlife seen in the woods and the threats to the woods

LM gave a presentation on the flora and fauna spotted in the woods.

PB gave a presentation on the threats to the woods including high footfall, parties, cycle ramps, littering, fires, vandalism, invasive species, lack of management, plant pests and diseases and climate change.

A member and Sunnywood Drive Neighbourhood Watch coordinator asked whether the fence vandalism was the work of one or more individuals.

10. Any other business

The Sunnywood Drive Neighbourhood Watch coordinator noted that he had flagged concerns about increased train horn noise nuisance at Ashenground Bridge. This issue had escalated since COVID and resulted from drivers hooting at children on the bridge waving at the trains.

Another member suggested that people visiting the woods water a newly planted tree.

The AGM closed with refreshments.

ANNEX 1 - FOABW CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES REPORT, AGM 2022

Our conservation activities are guided by the FoABW Conservation Management Plan. The aim of the Plan is to:

- Improve biodiversity by creating a more varied age structure among standard trees in the woodland by means of coppicing and restoring the meadows through a mowing regime.
- Encourage appropriate recreational use of the woods and 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.

Over the last couple of years, we have made good progress delivering the Plan in the face of COVID challenges.

We started to experience COVID impacts in March 2020 (e.g., social distancing and supply issues). We suspended sessions from April to June due to the first lockdown in late March. However, this coincided with our switch to our lighter spring/ summer programme.

The government gradually eased restrictions from June 2020. In July 2020, Mid Sussex District Council signalled that we could resume sessions provided we had a method statement and complied with the 'rule of six'.

We started sessions in late July 2020 and made good progress until October 2020. September marks the switch to our busier autumn/winter programme. The 'rule of six' limited the number of volunteers per session and we missed several of our regulars.

The second lockdown came into force in November 2020 and the Council asked us to suspend sessions again. The replacement of lockdown with Tier 2 restrictions in December 2020 enabled us to resume with the 'rule of six' in place.

The government then introduced a further lockdown and we suspended sessions until July 2021. Since then, activities have largely returned to normal. Most of our regular volunteers have returned and we have been joined by some new ones. We probably average around half a dozen volunteers per session, sometimes as many as ten.

In normal times we run 18 sessions / 36 hours per year meeting twice monthly from October to March and monthly the rest of the year.

- In 2020, we delivered 12 sessions/ 24 hours of work including 18 hours of mowing – around 144 person hours.

- In 2021, we delivered 8 sessions/ 18 hours of work including 18 hours of mowing – around 108 person hours
- So far in 2022, we've already delivered 5 sessions/ 10 hours of work.

Since the start of COVID we have prioritised the mowing of the meadows and the buffer zones, keeping paths clear and litter picking. We have put a lot of effort into bearing down on the brambles and encouraging a diversity of wildflowers, so we were keen not to lose momentum. We typically remove a couple of rubbish bags of litter per session – up to 36 bags in a normal year.

The impact of COVID meant that we had less time for other routine management activities such as coppicing. However, with this season's mowing completed by the end of 2021, we have been able to spend quite a bit of time in 2022 coppicing chestnut and hazel and thinning out trees in one of the buffer zones.

In October 2021, we oversaw the dredging of the ponds in Pond Meadow funded via the Lund Fund grant and co-funded by Mid Sussex District Council. In March 2022 we were delighted to help the Council with tree planting as part of the Queen's Green Canopy Jubilee initiative.

We would like to thank all our hard-working and dedicated volunteers for their time and Mid Sussex District Council for its support.

Patrick Burke, FoABW Conservation Leader - March 2022

ANNEX – TASKS UNDERTAKEN, JANUARY 2020 - MARCH 2022 (PLUS LITTER PICKING)

January 2020 (2 sessions)

- Mowed
 - Railway Path in Pierces Wood
 - Quarry Hollow Buffer
- Removed some precarious trees in Four Acre Wood
- [Dredging of Pond 1 funded via Lund Fund grant/ TCV]

February 2020 (2 sessions)

- 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 3]

March 2020 (2 sessions)

- Woodchipped path in Pond Meadow
- Cut back some of the vegetation alongside western end of bridlepath

COVID Pause

July 2020 (1 session - Rule of Six)

- Mowed Pond Meadow and cut back overgrowth alongside Yellow Path

August 2020 (4 sessions - Rule of Six)

- Raked Pond Meadow
- Removed alder from Pond 2
- Cut back overgrowth alongside yellow path
- Mowed Bolnore Ride and Weavers Meadow/ cut back overgrown paths
- Cut back overgrowth and overhanging branches on Middle Path
- Scythed paths in King Street Copse buffer zone

September 2020 (1 session - Rule of Six)

- Mowed King Street Copse buffer zone

October 2020 (2 sessions - Rule of Six)

- Mowed Quarry Hollow buffer zone and Renfields east buffer zone
- Tidied up Renfields east buffer zone

COVID Pause

December 2020 (2 sessions - Rule of Six)

- Mowed Weavers Meadow/buffer, Wiggly Path and Pierces Wood
- Tidied up Quarry Hollow buffer zone
- Mowed Four Acre Meadow and Pond Meadow

COVID Pause

July 2021 (1 session)

- Mowed Weavers Meadow and Bolnore Ride

August 2021 (1 session)

- Mowed east side of Pond Meadow

September 2021 (1 session)

- Mowed west side of Pond Meadow

October 2021 (2 sessions)

- Mowed more of west side of Pond Meadow. Also Four Acre Meadow. Removed some of alder from Pond 2.
- Mowed Quarry Hollow buffer zone
- [Dredging of Ponds 1, 2 and 3 funded via Lund Fund grant/co-funded by MSDC]

November 2021 (2 sessions)

- Mowed
 - Renfields east buffer zone
 - King Street Copse buffer zone

December 2021 (2 sessions)

- Finished off tidying up in King Street Copse buffer zone and mowed Weavers Meadow and adjacent buffer zone
- Mowed along Railway Path, the end of Middle Path, Pierces Wood and Wiggly Path
- Cut back overgrowth along Pierces Wood path

January 2022 (2 sessions)

- Coppiced chestnuts in Catts Wood and cut back around Pond 3

February 2022 (2 sessions)

- Coppiced chestnuts in Catts Wood and cut back around Pond 1
- Thinned trees in Renfields east buffer zone. Cleared storm damage branch from Bridleway. Started hazel coppice by container.

March 2022 (2 sessions planned)

- Tree planting on Railway Path and South Railway Shaw with MSDC. Continued hazel coppice by container.