

Minutes of The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Thursday 22th January 2025
7:30pm, Sackville College**

Attending

There were 7 members present:

Louise Collet, Elaine Griffiths, Brian Auker, Neil Hancock, Katherine Meade, Stephen Metcalfe, Brian Akehurst.

Also in attendance: Caroline Metcalfe

Apologies for absence

Mike Funnel, Lloyd Richards, Michael Diebel.

Minutes of last meeting

The Chairman updated the group on actions arising from the last minutes:

- ACTION: No need to change bank, only one signature needed for cheques.
- ACTION: Outreach to youth groups for tech projects. No action taken.
- ACTION: Posts to library. Nothing currently in library but NH will ask again if posters are accepted or take some leaflets.
- ACTION: One article to East Grinstead Living, Town Crier – no interest.
- ACTION: Task list is current on container. Others need updating. Some poster signposts have been removed.
- ACTION: Mailing list is encrypted with back-ups so GDPR compliant

Dormouse tunnels are progressing.

Bat and Newt spotting evenings didn't produce many sightings. Common Newts and Pipistrelle were observed in and above Cranston. None were observed in the lake area.

The members did not raise any further questions. The minutes were approved by the meeting.

Chairman's Report

The chairman circulated his report before the meeting. Rhododendron pulling task was very effective and the pulling tool was helpful. Bonfire Society has been very helpful boosting numbers with the coppicing tasks.

Thanks were given to Brian, Steve, and Louise.

Two iNaturalist based surveys were undertaken in the year. The Meadow survey, and an October Fungi survey. iNaturalist identification followup on fungi seems rare, perhaps we need to contact a Fungi society.

ACTION - Research advice on improving Fungi identifications in field surveys.

Treasurer's Report

Account balance for Oct 2024-Oct 2025 is £1853.72

Expenses slightly down to less than £100.

Purchases were: post rammer, refreshments, dormouse supplies, and a 1st Aid kit refresh.

Insurance is up 17% at £520.

Closure of account – 2 outstanding items – cheque to NH and reimbursement for insurance still outstanding. This was paid in Dec so is now all OK.

Treasurer handover has been smooth and the Barclays account is working OK.

EGMEL donated £25 for Christmas . Not spent so suggestions needed for how to spend.

No definite ideas but a small event in the summer was suggested.

ACTION - NWH Arrange treats (for about £25) for an evening survey.

Election of Committee

Neil Hancock offered to remain as chairman, proposed by Steve Metcalfe seconded by Louise Collet and is duly elected.

No proposals for secretary – Neil Hancock will continue covering this role.

Brian Akehurst offered to remain as treasurer, proposed by Neil Hancock, seconded by Steve Metcalfe and is duly elected.

Stephen Metcalfe, Louise Collet and Elaine Griffiths offered to stand as committee members and were duly elected.

Recruitment of new Volunteers

Volunteer recruitment – EG Volunteers Fair on January 31st. Display options were discussed, new posters can be made and leaflets printed. Chairman suggested leafleting in estates near the woods.

ACTION - Prepare a leaflet campaign for August. (Secretary)

Steve M noted that EGMEL are looking at having a pop-up display for events in EG.

Gravetye Manor do a lot of social media, before and after tasks. This is a significant commitment in time. They regularly attract 20 volunteers to a task and also host corporate volunteers. The benefits of having a good reputation and infrastructure for volunteers plays a major role in volunteer retention.

ACTION - Steve M and Brian Akehurst to enquire why Gravetye volunteers don't come to Ashplats.

ACTION - NWH To arrange Library poster.

New signage gone back to MSDC so will be installed soon.

It was noted that it is not possible to cover the whole site during walk-about with Glendale/MSDC/EGMEL

Brian Akehurst noted: Children and dog walkers are the main two user groups. Perhaps targeting those to groups specifically might engage them if we find tasks that are well managed and fun. It is rare to see people just walking. Elaine – young families venture in.

ACTION – Identify someone to take this on. What would we do? Safeguarding and insurance?

Task Suggestions and discussion

Summer meadow survey (eventually mown and collected) continue to monitor in case mowing regime is not right

Scoutland – Scyamore removal in coppiced area (Feb)

Rhododendron control – A nice Xmas task, repeat this in December.

Owl path is now safe to work but nothing scheduled. Scalloped edges and bramble clearance were the previous plan.

ACTION – NWH and SM brushcutter certification needed.

ACTION – NWH Purchase brushcutter – battery operated rather than petrol.

Coppicing – Protecting hazel stools seems to work. (March)

Butterfly populations not as good as they should be – more ride management (Elaine)
Butterfly transect disappointing when it was a good year for them.

ACTION - NWH to talk to rangers about ride scalloping and where to do it. ACG need advice.

Ponds – ACG would need resources to do this now. Current volunteer turnout would be insufficient for a successful task.

ACTION - Liasise with Glendale to see if they can help. Silt clearing is a bit beyond the group.

ACTION - Get advice on what could be done with the ponds.

Litterpick – no litter pick this year due to fewer volunteers and less litter

NH asked if anyone else wants to supervise the tasks. Elaine, Steve and Louise offered.
ACTION - Look for guidance/training on how to run a task (NWH)

The Glendale Weekday group started 22nd January. Notices were put up around the estate the week before, letters were sent to local residents in November. 200 properties were leafleted. Initial task was dead-hedging along Badgers to block access to the badger sett. Four volunteers (2 from EG and 2 from HH). Greenspace Action Team is run by MSDC Rangers. We should align our work with this new group.

Brian Auker commented that local residents are unhappy with the work of MSDC and how they manage the woods. Disparity with decisions about removing trees behind houses

along Holtye Track/Fulmar drive are a point of tension. MSDC letters in response to requests for tree removals are noted to contain threats of fines for any unsanctioned work.

Surveys & Environmental monitoring

Steve reported on the Dormice monitoring project. The best option so far is 3D printed Flex walkover pads with charcoal powder/oil ink. Another ink option was being eaten by mice. Advice from experts is to think like a dormouse – survey in connected patches of scrub rather than isolated trees. The next deployment will be in different locations – smaller groups and closer together. The area south of Scoutland has been decided upon.

Bats & Newts – another evening to be organised in May

ACTION - May Newt and Bat Survey (NWH)

Should we try water sampling? A DNA test to determine if newts are present is £200 iish for a single sample. Need to do it the right time of year.#

ACTION - Investigate sampling in lake and Alfreds (NWH).

Butterfly transects – Started in 2024 but focussed on woodland in 2025. Survey a transect April – Sept weekly depending on the weather. The area around the football club was discussed. It is current very good for butterflies, but as it evolves to woodland this will disappear.

ACTION - Elaine to finalise route and share route and data.

Butterfly habitat is being mowed out on the woodland edges next to the football pitches. The Blue flag wild area mowed as there is not an increase in pollinators.

ACTION - Campaign to MSDC about mowing regime around playing field. No transitional habitat for butterflies. Biodiversity loss.

ACTION - Elaine to arrange for EGME to visit Lingfield nature reserve. Could he also come to Ashplats and advise us?

Meadow Survey – keep monitoring to see if mowing is effective.

ACTION - Arrange a summer survey in the meadow (NWH)

iNaturalist

Fungi survey – records uploaded but not many have been verified. Are our photos not good enough? Or do we need to share them with Sussex fungi group. Elaine – could we invite Sussex fungi group

ACTION - Arrange for the autumn (September? Check with fungi group).

ACTION - Can we pull reports from iNaturalist for fungi in case it can be shared with Sussex fungi group

Any other business

Chestnut coppice is now very tall and not being coppiced so some residents are concerned about light etc.

The Chestnut coppice is now overstood and issues with access to woods to get the logs out. EGMEL are looking at coppicing the Chestnut, Glendale found someone but MSDC are refusing to fund.

Elaine noted that Glendales communication with stakeholders is not great.

ACTION - Inform committee and wider group of Glendale walk-arounds and updates

Decision to have quarterly committee meetings during the year. These could be held after a task.

ACTION - NWH to organise dates and venue for quarterly meetings.

ACTION - Take more interest in what is happening in the woods and how the work ACG fits in with management plan. Important to consider new group and the work they are doing too.

Steve Metcalfe reported: MSDC outsourcing to Glendale is under contract for specific tasks which is mostly playing fields and not really woodland management. Rangers doing work outside of contract will have to ask MSDC for funds which MSDC do not have.

EGMEL is aware of the issue and are looking for someone to co-ordinate volunteer management, outreach, contractors and other tasks not in the Glendale contract. They will work with MSDC and Glendale to get stuff done.

HWNL (High Weald National Landscape) came to Ashplats to advise about grants but as East Court is managed by a local authority the estate is not eligible.

EGMEL are nagging MSDC about improving Holtie and some other paths. Poly-deck for holtie, pines, badgers, etc is prohibitively expensive and not in keeping with the woodland setting. A local contractor could do some pathing for £25k.

Brian Akehurst mentioned we could have a task to cut back along paths, scalloping edges.

The Glendale Weekday group started 22nd Jan. Notices were put up around local houses the week before, letters sent to local residents in November. 200 properties were leafleted in the weeks before. The first task was dead hedging along Badgers to block access to the badger sett. Four volunteers (2 from EG and 2 from HH) attended. The Greenspace Action Team is run by MSDC/Glendale Rangers.

The meeting closed at 9:30pm

Minutes taken by Katherine Meade