

2022 Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the 25th AGM held at Forest Row Community Centre on 8th April 2022.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:20 by welcoming members to this our 25th anniversary AGM for the Society. Members attending were asked to sign a sheet, so we had a record of those present. 27 Members attended the meeting.

For this AGM we had a screen projector which we used to show slides of the various Constitution Rules changes, Aims & Objectives, Membership figures & Accounts data as these items were being discussed. This was so the members were better informed, also some printed copies were available at the meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Peter Johnson (Committee), Darrin Madgin (Committee), Mark Roberts (member).

2. Approval of the 2021 AGM minutes

Copies of these AGM minutes had appeared in the spring and summer newsletters which had been sent to members and were also available to view on our website, plus there were printed copies available for members at the meeting.

The 2021 AGM minutes were accepted as a true record by a majority vote.

3. Matters Arising from the 2021 AGM minutes.

There were no matters arising from the last minutes.

4. Chairman's Report

by Bob Johnson

The Chairman started by dealing with the changes which he had outlined in the spring newsletter to members regarding the Aims & Objectives & Equal Opportunities statement. All of which had already been approved by the Committee.

The Aims & Objectives: These had been completely re-written to bring them up to date with our current working practices, and the direction we felt the Society and nature reserve should be moving. The 12 revised/updated Aims & Objectives were all shown on screen and the reasons explained where these were not self-explanatory.

Importantly many had to reflect the current position within the Society, namely that the Friends now managed the nature reserve for Southern Water with ESCC only involved with assisting and supplying our ranger support. (ESCC used to manage the reserve with FOWW assisting).

Until now contracts had been short term yearly contracts, but there was a possibility this would change with a five year contract between ESCC & SW being considered for the longer term. At time of writing a new contract had not yet been agreed and completed, but we were hopeful this would be forthcoming.

Equal Opportunities Statement: The word "irrelevant" was to be removed from near the end of the text on our statement to ensure there was no misunderstanding of meaning.

All the above changes were ratified and accepted by the membership by a majority show of hands.

The Chairman then went on to discuss the changes to the Constitution Rules. Again these were all shown on the projector screen and printed copies were available at the meeting. A copy of the Constitution Rules Amendment 7 that showed all the intended changes had been on our website since 3rd Jan 2022 and are listed below.

Constitution Rule Changes:

Item 10 - Committee Business – The Membership Secretary not the Treasurer will be responsible for maintaining the register of members. (Change in responsibility)

Item 22 – Dissolution - Removal of 2006 date fixture for description of local area.
(Removal of irrelevant date fixture for description of local area)

Digital Data ownership (New item 23) & Digital Photographic Rights (New item 24) are now necessary inclusions because of the more recent changes in the law regarding privacy and ownership of digital rights. The Society does not own its domain names, these are owned by Peter Johnson who set up the website originally. Peter also organises and runs our website on the technical side and everything is set up in his name. The domains have value and legality issues, and everything needs to be included within the Constitution. We received some legal advice to ensure we worded and covered everything correctly.

New Item 23 – Deals with “Data Rights”, including, websites, domain names, general personal data etc.

New item 24 – Deals specifically with Digital Photographs – Photograph ownership and privacy rights.

All the above Constitutional Rule changes were accepted and ratified by a majority show of hands.

The Chairman then went on to thank the work party volunteers, pointing out we now regularly get a good number of up to 15 people. They have been a helpful and willing group, and many were assigned regular routine tasks and responsibilities. This has meant we have been efficient and achieved our objectives and are now fairly up to date with our routine work, particularly at the western end, within the study areas and over at Whillet's. He then thanked our current ESCC rangers George and Stuart who were always helpful and did their best for us.

The ESCC Rangers no longer carried hand tools for our volunteers to use. We have therefore been purchasing tools for the Society from our funds so our volunteers have the tools we need to carry out our work – we cannot expect volunteers to supply and bring their own tools.

The Chairman finished by mentioning the heronry which was a popular subject amongst members, advising that the heronry survived the winter storms and was looking good. On Tuesday 5th April a survey counted 39 Heron nests with the first records of young, 8 young from 4 nests noted. Also 19 Cormorant nests (4 more than last year) of which 2 nests showed a total of 3 young so far.

5. Membership Secretary & Website Editor Report. By Tom Howard-Jones

Membership: The Membership Secretary started by advising we currently have 285 members and 94 have not yet renewed. He said if there were any members present who still needed to renew they should see him afterwards.

Tom noted the vast majority of our members now agreed to communicate by email and we were down to less than 40 on postal newsletters, which saved us time and costs. He said if any members were willing to change over to using email then please let him know.

We have kept our annual membership fee at £3 per person, which was so very cheap that most people also included a donation. We very much appreciated these voluntary donations that so many of our members made. Most people rounded up their fees. Some members had done much more than that and were most generous. As an indication, so far this year we had received £522 in membership fees and £1204 in donations. This money was essential for our conservation work, and Tom thanked all for their generosity.

For comparison at the end of last year we had 246 paid up members with £660 in fees and £1212 in donations.

The Membership Secretary invited members to come to him if they had any questions, concerns or suggestions as he would love to hear from them.

A question was raised by a member who asked how we were trying to get all our members to go over to electronic communication.

Tom replied that he sent out a request note with each newsletter, but it was up to individuals to decide to change.

Web Site: Tom advised that to the public the web site had been running ok, but behind the scenes we have had a nightmare with a whole host of problems. Peter Johnson had been manfully working hard to resolve these and had managed to keep it all running so far, although we were aware that more software update/renewal work will be needed. Tom thanked Peter for all his hard work.

Tom pointed out that the majority of the website postings were only from the same handful of people and wanted to encourage new contributors and get more people to participate. He went on to give an idea of the traffic. In March we had 1462 views, an average of 47 per day, so proving there was genuine interest in the website.

He finally asked if anyone had suggestions for improvements as we were always open to new ideas.

Facebook Group: Tom advised the Facebook group was running ok, with no spurious hacks or other problems. We have 252 members and he pointed out that interestingly there were more contributors on Facebook, and they covered a wider range of subjects than on the website.

FOWW 25th Anniversary Book – Tom gave a quick resume of the book content. He also covered the events from 2019 when we received membership approval to write the book through to a few weeks before Christmas of 2020 when the book first went on sale. It was completed with perfect timing for Christmas sales and ready for 2021, our Anniversary year.

Tom then went on to thank all the contributors and the volunteers who had agreed to hold some copies and could then do local hand deliveries of the book. (Apparently at one point our deliveries were quicker than Amazon!!!)

We had 300 copies printed, all sales had been at our set price of £6 each, and there were now only 35 copies left. Tom reminded people that if they wanted a copy we had copies at the meeting for sale.

6. Treasurers Report

by Bob Hastings

The Treasurer presented the audited accounts for 2021, with paper copies being available for those at the AGM, who were also able to view slides of all the audited account figures on the projector screen.

Bob thanked the auditor Doug Roberts, a retired Tax Inspector, for again doing a thorough audit in January of our 2021 Accounts. He was pleased that Mr Roberts had agreed to stand again as our auditor for the 2022 accounts.

He then went on to show all our bank and savings account balances and explain where our money comes from, noting that our total bank balance stood at a fairly healthy £9150.96. We have had a very good financial year, our members have again responded superbly, and after we had a £2000 outlay for the book in 2020, in 2021 we have been recouping a lot of that money back with book sales.

General Fund: This fund covers admin costs with member's subs for last year bringing in £648 which more than covered our admin costs of £280.49, due to cost effective measures introduced by the Membership Secretary giving a surplus of £367.51

Conservation Fund: Members donations of £1278.50 were added to our conservation fund as donations are used to fund the projects we undertake during the year, plus we receive £812 from SW through ESCC. Other donations received were £443 including £330 from East Grinstead Waitrose, which we spent on a new trail camera and nest boxes. We were one of the groups for local conservation selected for support that month by their charity fund. Proceeds of £949 from the anniversary book gave a total income of £3,482.50

Bob then gave an explanation of some of the expenditures. Grass cutting costs were £700. £739.22 was spent on general materials and equipment, £100.74 on Tern raft materials, £150.52 on bird food. Other costs such as internet/website, site security, open day, posters etc made up the rest resulting in £1925.93 in total.

This gave a surplus of £1556.57 on income to expenditure which was a healthy position.

The Treasurer then asked if there were any questions regarding the accounts, but none were raised.

The Accounts were then accepted, and Doug Roberts elected as our auditor for our 2022 Accounts by a majority show of hands.

7. Election of Committee and Officers

Two Committee Members had decided that they would not stand for re-election after serving for many years on the Committee.

Firstly, Glenn Tocher who joined the Friends as a volunteer only a few years after the Society was founded. He then joined the Committee as an officer, holding both Treasurer and Membership Secretary posts for 14 years from 2003 to 2016, before deciding to pass on these roles. The Treasurer mantle was taken by Bob Hastings, and Tom Howard-Jones took over as Membership Secretary. Glenn continued as a Committee Member but now felt it was time to stand down fully from Committee work and give some new younger blood a chance. Glenn said he still intended to come along and be involved with the Tuesday work parties.

Secondly, Alan Caulkett who has been a regular volunteer for over 16 years, joining the Committee as a member in 2007. By this time Alan was already heavily involved with assisting and monitoring the small nest boxes which he continued to do. However, like Glenn, Alan had decided the time is right for him to stand down from the Committee. Alan hoped to still come along as a volunteer while his health allowed it.

The Chairman personally thanked them both for all their hard work and commitment to both the Committee and the nature reserve over many years which had been very much appreciated. Appreciation was also shown by the members.

The Chairman then thanked the rest of the Committee for their hard work and dedication in managing and running our Society. They had all done an excellent job in their respective roles which had made for a good team spirit within the Committee.

There were no nominations put forward for any of the officer roles, but all standing Committee members were happy to continue.

Officer Election Result

Chairman - Bob Johnson

Treasurer - Bob Hastings

Membership Secretary - Tom Howard-Jones

Website & Facebook Editor - Tom Howard-Jones

Minute & General Secretary – Vacant. (Bob Johnson currently covers this role)

All above were re-elected by a majority show of hands

Committee Member Election Result

Committee Members: Peter Johnson, Shaun Taylor, Darrin Madgin,
Phil Holland, John Edwards.

All above were re-elected by a majority show of hands.

New Committee Members standing for election

There were two new nominations put forward by the Chairman to join the Committee. These were Richard Allan and Ian Hodgson who were both regular members of the work parties and had a keen interest in the wildlife of the reservoir. These nominations were mentioned in our winter newsletter and agreed by majority the by Committee.

New Committee Member – Richard Allan - Proposed by Chairman
Seconded by Phil Holland

New Committee Member – Ian Hodgson - Proposed by Chairman
Seconded by John Edwards

All above were elected by a majority show of hands.

8. AOB - Question & Answer session:

There were no questions, or Any Other Business raised.

9. Closure

The AGM meeting was formally closed at 19:55, with the Chairman thanking all who attended for giving their support.

There was then an interval break for tea followed by an illustrated talk by our guest speaker.

This year due to all the concerns regarding covid rules, and the need to book a speaker at short notice, we decided to stay in-house. Phil Holland, our bird ringer, has been running our nest box programme for many years. He agreed to give a talk on the nest boxes at Weir Wood entitled “What our nest boxes have taught us”.

He gave us a very interesting and informative talk about the species that use our bird nest boxes and what detailed examination and recording at the nest box can show you. This talk was very well received by all, and thanks was given to Phil.

Although not formally stated our thanks go to Judy, Marie & Joy who so ably manned our refreshments kitchen at the AGM.

Minutes by Bob Johnson
9th April 2022