

2024 Friends of Weir Wood Society AGM Minutes

These are the Minutes for the Society's 27th Annual General Meeting held at Forest Row Community Centre on 22nd March 2024.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:15 by welcoming all. He then reminded everyone of the AGM agenda and that copies of the 2023 Audited Accounts & 2023 AGM minutes had been emailed to all members.

He then advised that the accounts will also be displayed on a projector screen when they are discussed by the Treasurer. Paper copies of the 2023 AGM Minutes were also available at the meeting for anyone wishing to refer to a copy. Members were also asked to sign in, so there would be a record of those present. (30 members attended)

AGM Business

1. Apologies for absence:

Doug Roberts (Auditor), Peter Johnson (Committee), Richard Allan (Committee), Members - Shaun Taylor, Tony Paine, David Nichol, Lesley Berry, Mark Roberts.

2. Approval of the 2023 AGM minutes.

The 2023 AGM minutes were accepted as a true record by a majority vote.

3. Matters arising from the Previous 2023 AGM minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report by Bob Johnson.

The chairman started by thanking his group of volunteers and Rangers pointing out they were a helpful, happy group willing to get involved with any of the tasks required for the management of the reserve. Reminding that the reserve would not be here without them. The members showing their appreciation with a round of applause.

The work parties had had a very productive 12 months and went on to tell the members about some of the larger project work more recently completed which included:

A new silt trap on the feed stream to meadow pond. The rangers after building us a new dipping platform also built a picnic table with 2 benches.

The rangers recently re-decked a footbridge and built a raised deck path where a stream was flooding the access path through to Pintail Bank.

The new recently built Tern raft was discussed.

A lot of work was carried out at the North Bank picnic area with repairs to seats and picnic table, cutting hedges and cutting back vegetation generally to give better water views from the picnic area.

On South Bank directly opposite the picnic area, work was carried out to improve water edge marsh plants around the enclosures, also in the trees behind, glades had

been made with scrub cut back and trees had their canopy raised to encourage more wild flowers and grasses.

Whilst work on maintaining the reserve still continued with cutting hedges, mowing meadows, controlling scrub, wildlife monitoring and generally maintaining the reserve in line with our 5-year contract and 2022 – 2027 management plan.

Mention was made of the worsening pot holes in the hide Car Park, and that we intend to do some remedial work once we get a reliable period of dry weather.

He finished by talking about the newsletter where we have been moving towards all electronic newsletters like many other Societies due to postage & printing costs.

This will now finally change, starting with our next newsletter due out in April. All electronic means the newsletter format can change, include colour pictures, no space restraints etc. Bob advised he had been writing the same format newsletter with 4 sides in black & white designed for printing for many years. Agreed the format needed updating but was not a job he felt qualified or wanted to do.

John Edwards has kindly volunteered to take on the newsletter role. John has had some experience of writing for the electronic side for newsletters etc. and will now formally become Newsletter Editor, which Bob is very pleased about.

5. Membership Secretary Report by John Edwards

John started by thanking his predecessor Tom Howard Jones for such an immaculate set of records that he received on the hand over last year, and all the helpful advice he had received from Tom since.

He then went on to talk about the membership advising that we started 2023 with 241 paid up members and we carried forward 66 members who had not renewed in 2022 in the hope that they might renew in 2023. Sadly the majority of these did not renew and we removed them from our records during the year. Additionally we lost a handful of members during the year for a variety of reasons so in all we lost 78 members in total during the year. However, we finished 2023 with 262 paid up members, a slight increase on last year. We were able to welcome 23 new members during the year, most of whom joined either at our annual Open Day or at our Spring Walk.

John then spoke about communications advising that most of our members have now agreed to communicate by our preferred option of email just 15 still receive postal communications and these have paid an increased contribution to cover the costs.

Finally he thanked everyone who has paid their subs for 2024 – 50% have done so far, and also thanked their generosity with most members also giving us an additional donation above the £3 fee.

6. Website & Facebook Editor Report by Tom Howard-Jones.

Tom advised that on 29 December last year our website vanished from the internet without warning. Later we discovered that the problem lay with the company that hosted our site.

Fortunately, Peter Johnson was alert and was monitoring both the company and our site. Over the next few days the site became active again briefly. By 2nd January Peter had managed to download all of our data before the site disappeared again. We have now changed the company that we use to host our website.

The move meant that Peter had to rebuild our site from scratch. This has been a big job.

Our site went live again on 29th January and he was again able to post sightings reports and news. We have caught up and posted all the reports that were sent in during that shut down period.

There are still several loose ends that need to be tidied up. We are working our way through our list of actions.

Tom asked that if they spot any problems to please let him know.

He apologised for the loss of service, and that we expected that the new setup which is more expensive, but importantly should be more reliable and robust.

FaceBook Group

Our Facebook group is working okay.

We now have 344 members an increase on the 277 we had a year ago.

FOWW 25th Anniversary Book

Tom gave a quick resume of the book history advising that of the 300 we had printed, we only had 10 left. (could now be collector's items!!). He reminded people that we still had some available at the AGM for sale at £6.

7. Treasurers Report by Ian Hodgson.

The Treasurer thanked his predecessor, Bob Hastings, for his excellent work over many years and for helping to make the handover such a smooth process.

The Treasurer presented the audited accounts for 2023, with all the figures being projected onto a screen, then talked through all of the audited account figures explaining the various income and expenditures.

The General fund is where membership fees are paid and basically covers all of our admin costs. In 2023 we received £857.10 and after various admin costs newsletters, postage, stationery, and insurance costs etc. there was a surplus of £476.78, however Ian pointed out that some significant website costs were spent in early January just after our financial year ended so that surplus is artificially high.

The Conservation fund is where all members donations and a grant from Southern Water are based which paid for our all projects and general conservation work, including any work party tools, bird food, grass cutting, tractor hire etc. In 2023 we received £2755.29 and spent £3,277.62 resulting in a deficit of £522.33

Ian then went on to show all our bank and savings account balances and explained the movement of funds over the financial year. The 2023 bank balance sheet at year end showed a healthy total balance of £9,744.11 with 844.71 in our current account, and £8,899.40 in our savings account to make good use of the current high interest rates. Money can easily be transferred between the accounts when needed, and the year end

financial position means we are able to quickly respond to any major conservation work needed or hide repairs etc, as required.

Mention was made of one important post year end event, being our change of bank from Santander to Metro Bank, which had become necessary because Santander were treating us as a business and were asking us to comply with impossible requirements to meet their anti-money laundering protection rules or they would block our account. Metro Bank had an account especially designed for Societies like us, they still had anti-money laundering rules we had to comply with, but they were achievable by us, Santander's were not.

He thanked our auditor Doug Roberts, a retired Tax Inspector, for again doing a thorough audit in January of our 2023 Accounts. He was also pleased that Mr Roberts had agreed to stand as our auditor for the 2024 accounts.

The Treasurer then went on to ask if there were any questions: No questions were raised.

Acceptance of the accounts & auditor.

The Treasurer report now finished we asked for a majority vote by a show of hands for acceptance of the Accounts, and then acceptance of Doug Roberts as our 2024 Auditor. Both were accepted by a majority vote.

8. Election of Committee and Officers

The Chairman thanked all his 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. The members gave the Committee their appreciation with a round of applause.

Election of Officers: We have no new Officer nominations put forward, and the existing Officers are all standing for re-election and wish to continue.

Chairman - Bob Johnson

Treasurer - Ian Hodgson

Membership Secretary - John Edwards

Website & Facebook Editor - Tom Howard-Jones

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

All the above were accepted with a majority show of hands approval. No objections.

Committee Members standing for election:

Shaun Taylor has decided not to stand for re-election to the Committee due to his long term serious ill health. I would therefore like to thank Shaun for his many years of

service on the Committee and all the work he has done and achieved being our projects and main man at work parties for many years, building tern rafts and the like.

The members showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

There were no new nominations for Committee members.

All the rest of the Committee members all wished to stand for re-election.

Committee Member – Richard Allan

Committee Member – Phil Holland

Committee Member – Peter Johnson

All the above were duly elected on a majority show of hands vote.

9. Any Other Business - Any Questions:

The Chairman asked if there were any questions or other business anyone would like to raise?

Sue Greig asked if we had any information about the work being carried out at the Southern Water Weir Wood Reservoir Water Treatment Works which has been out of operation for some time, and seems to be undergoing major construction work:

The Chairman replied, explaining that the work was to upgrade the equipment to meet the latest UK standards now required for water quality. Some attempts were made by Southern Water 2 years ago to upgrade the standard but their work failed. The station was found to be of an unacceptable quality by the government water inspectorate and will now be out of commission until the work they recommend to meet the standard is satisfactorily completed. The work is not expected to be completed before 2025.

No further questions were raised. The AGM meeting was therefore formally closed at 19:50.

The Chairman gave thanks to the refreshment ladies Judy, Joy & Marie who would be serving the refreshments at the interval before our Guest Speaker.

At approx. 20:15 with the refreshment break over, The Chairman introduced our guest speaker Lydia Baxter who is the Sussex Wildlife Trust Project Officer for the “Wilder Ouse Project” who gave us an illustrated talk about a new partnership project which aims to restore the wildlife around the catchment areas of the River Ouse.

The talk was very well received, with the members being actively involved and asking questions.