

2026 Friends of Weir Wood Society AGM Minutes

The Society's 29th Annual General Meeting was held at Forest Row Community Centre on 13th March 2026.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:15 by welcoming all, reminding that copies of the AGM agenda and the 2025 Audited Accounts & 2025 AGM Minutes had been emailed to all members. We also displayed the financial account figures on a projector screen during the Treasurers report and likewise some information slides for the Website Editors report. Some paper copies of the 2025 AGM Minutes and Audited Accounts were available at the meeting for anyone wishing to refer to a copy. Members were also asked to sign in, so we had a record of those present. (44 members in total attended)

AGM Business

1. Apologies for absence:

Doug Roberts (Auditor), Andy Clews, Edward Paxton, Penny & Barrie Dickens, Pete & Terriss Bacon.

2. Approval of the 2025 AGM minutes.

The 2025 AGM minutes were accepted as a true record by a majority vote.

3. Matters arising from the Previous 2025 AGM minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report by Bob Johnson.

The Chairman updated all with the position regarding Southern Water (SW) building works at the reservoir plus a few of our own projects and items of interest, starting with matters at the dam end.

The Chairman advised that Government Water Inspectorate plan for the Southern Water works rebuilding was as follows - All the revised planning and approval stages should be completed by April 2026 when Phase 1 of the construction should start. There were 3 phases to the building construction programme with completion of all the construction stages by January 2031. Also, that low water levels at other local reservoirs due to Weir Wood Reservoir water being unavailable meant several local water companies needed to issue drought orders and hose pipe bans that caused a lot of public uproar. An emergency pipeline from Weir Wood to Ardingly was suggested by South East Water at one point but nothing actually happened and heavy rainfall since had given full reservoirs, so that scheme was probably dead for now.

It had been asked and hoped that SW would do some lowering of reservoir water levels in the summer which they could easily do. That would give some much needed mud edge for the benefit of wildlife generally and waders in particular while the water cannot be treated and used. Any lowering of water levels last year was due to evaporation and lack of rainfall not any intentional lowering by SW.

Bob stated that the members should all now be aware that the Clubhouse building and car park as far as the fishing lodge was a public area. The Clubhouse was now directly under Weir Wood Sports & Leisure management and included a café located upstairs which was open daily and sold drinks and snacks to the public.

Regarding our own projects – Bob spoke about the South Bank reed-bed area opposite the picnic area where our management with controlling bramble and willow had finally started to pay off with some reed plants now established which he hoped would now increase in number and spread. Also behind the reeds was a nice and increasing number of flowering marsh plants which attracted a lot of insects. Behind the reed-bed some tree thinning and canopy raising work had been carried out to create some open glade areas and ground machinery was used to clear the bramble to allow light in and encourage new grasses and flora.

At the picnic area we repaired seats and carried out a lot of general maintenance, cutting hedges etc. In September using a contractor we cut all the North Bank meadows from the dam wall right up to the picnic area for necessary habitat management for the flora. Bob advised that grass cutting was a major cost to us, but it was very necessary that we maintain the habitat for our wildflowers and insects by periodical cutting of these meadows, otherwise they quickly revert to scrub and this important habitat would be lost.

At Whillet's we brought in an excavator and dug out a dragonfly pondlet in the back meadow within the glade. We arranged a contractor to cut all three meadows and collect the arisings and stack them as part of our habitat management. A lot of work was also carried out at and around the reed-bed including work on the island.

At the West End – In the summer we purchased and installed a new information board with artwork at the car park and painted the outside of the bird hide. We lowered the height of the viewing area hedge at the car park.

In July we got in a contractor with machinery to lower the boundary hedge at the back of Pintail Bank which was too big for us to handle with hand tools.

We have also just completed installing an artificial Sand Martin bank opposite the car park on North bank.

In the background we continued maintaining and monitoring the site generally on a weekly basis. Checking nest boxes and carrying out wildlife surveys etc.

The Chairman ended by thanking all our volunteers and ESCC Rangers for the fine work they do. He noted that they were a friendly and willing group that made for a happy working environment, and asked the members to put their hands together to show their appreciation

5. Membership Secretary Report by John Edwards

John began by giving the membership figures. We started 2025 with 246 members. At the year-end on 31 December 2025 we had 243 members. It had been a year when numbers of new members roughly matched those not renewing.

Starting with the good news, we gained **24** new members during the year. Most joined on line using the information on our website and there was a slight but noticeable

uptick in membership applications after the new interpretation board was installed in the car park at the end of May.

During 2025 we lost 27 members – 22 did not renew by the year end, 3 resigned having moved out of the area and sadly 2 members passed away.

So far this year we have gained 4 new members and there have been no resignations.

He then went on to speak about membership renewals. Membership fees were due on 1st January and a reminder went out in early January with the winter newsletter.

To date 174 members had renewed which was 71% of the membership. He thanked everyone who had renewed promptly which was much appreciated. Noting we were ahead of where we were this time last year.

He also noted members had been very generous with their donations over and above the membership fee, stating that we do appreciate the loyal support from our members, we couldn't do it without them!

Ending with an advisory that if anyone still needed to renew their membership, it was never too late and he would be available to deal with it.

6. Website & Facebook Editor Report by Linsey Gooding

Linsey started by explaining the position regarding the website. He had recommended and the Committee had agreed to change the host as much of the old website software was out of date, not running reliably, and not very secure. The old website pages all had to be transferred to the new host and then updated so the website ran more reliably, this was carried out over the Christmas period. Part of this work was to organise the page layouts so they would also be able to be read on a mobile phone. We have since also carried out some domestic changes to the website look, this included adding the logo and we intended to do further improvements and update the home page image soon.

Linsey then went on to talk about the current website content and usage, displaying some slides showing the website statistics such as the pages that people were most interested in, also where they were located. Interestingly we had more hits from America than the UK, but there was a Weir Wood in America which might explain it.

From a Facebook point of view, we have changed the group from public to private, this was in order to protect ourselves from un-necessary ads and we now had greater control over random posts from people not interested in the FoWW. We had 468 people signed up of which 222 were active, and we averaged a post every couple of days.

A Weir Wood Rare & News private WhatsApp group was managed by Ed Paxton, this currently had 17 members. Anyone who wished to join should contact Linsey or Ed who could then action it. All reports from the Whatsapp group, the Facebook Group and those sent directly to the website at sightings@weirwood.me.uk were all transferred onto the website sightings page.

Linsey asked for more people to send in their wildlife sightings or photos, currently it was only the same few, this would then give a more rounded view of what was being seen. He finished by asking the audience for ideas on what they would like to see from their website, do they still want a website? What would they like to see in it?

Please send him your feed back or suggestions.

7. Treasurers Report by Ian Hodgson.

Ian used a projector with slides to show the audited accounts. Copies of the audited accounts had already been sent out to all members prior to the meeting, Ian also put out printed copies of the audited accounts on chairs at the AGM for members to refer to in case the figures on the screen were too small.

He started by viewing the Society's financial position for Y/E 31/12/25 and went on to explain the Financial Statement which is split into 3 parts – General Fund, Conservation Fund and the Balances.

He started by explaining the balances. The Starting Bank Balance - £9,545.05
Closing Bank Balance – £8,507.41 and although this had dropped it had been expected and Ian then went on to explain the reasons for that movement.

General Fund: Covered general and administrative expenditure primarily funded by members subscriptions:

On the Income side the subscriptions were similar to 2024. The Expenditure side which largely covered printing, stationery, postage, insurance, and website costs actually fell in 2025 but was largely due to higher website costs in 2024 when we changed our website provider.

As a result the General Fund generated a surplus of £104.05

Conservation Fund: Covers expenditure incurred for our conservation work and management of the reserve/SSSI, including various projects, and these were primarily funded by members' and other donations plus the annual contribution from ESCC.

On the Income side our contributions came from donations (slightly lower than the 2024 level), and the annual contribution from ESCC.

Ian advised that members donations alone contributed to 40% of our total income, generating a significant difference to the conservation work carried out by our volunteers and he gave a massive thankyou to all who added a donation on top of their usual subs.

On the Expenditure side our more major project costs were for:

A new information board (included under Equipment & Materials) at the hide car-park and grass and hedge cutting costs. We had larger costs in 2025 for grass and hedge cutting due to the fact in 2024 we were unable to carry out our usual late summer grass cutting due to the extremely wet conditions in the meadows that year. Thus, as expected in 2025 it was necessary to undertake more grass cutting than usual as part of the catch-up programme. In addition we also paid out for necessary hedge lowering along the reserve boundary on Pintail Bank but this would make it easier and less costly to maintain that hedge in the future.

Net position – Conservation Fund deficit of £1,227.00

In Summary: whilst our bank balance reduced to £8,507.41 it was still at a healthy level, providing a good contingency reserve for future needs.

Ian then asked the members if there were any questions regarding the accounts, but none were raised.

Ian finally thanked Doug Roberts our regular auditor, for ensuring all our financial records and accounts were in order, advising that Doug had kindly agreed to stand again as our auditor for our 2026 accounts.

Acceptance of the accounts and auditor.

The Treasurers report now finished, the Chairman and Treasurer asked for a majority vote by a show of hands for acceptance of the Accounts, and then acceptance of Doug Roberts as our 2026 Auditor.

Both were accepted by a majority vote with no objections.

8. Election of Committee and Officers

The Chairman thanked all 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.

The existing Committee Officers below were all standing for re-election with no new nominations.

Chairman	-	Bob Johnson
Treasurer	-	Ian Hodgson
Membership Secretary	-	John Edwards
Website & Facebook Editor	-	Linsey Gooding

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

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

Committee Members standing for election.

The Committee members below were all standing for re-election. No new nominations.

Committee Member – Richard Allan
Committee Member – Phil Holland

The above were duly elected on a majority show of hands vote. With no objections.

9. Any Other Business - Any Questions:

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

Q1 - asked by Matilda Bird - whether it might be possible to put a blog on the website setting out briefly the activities of the work party in terms of habitat management etc.

Answer: The Chairman replied this should be possible and he would look into how best we could organise and do this.

Q2 - Asked by Richard Woods - Could the Sightings page on the website be updated more frequently.

Answer: Linsey explained that he was the only person able to do the updating and he, unlike his predecessor who was retired, was still employed and often working away, but he did try to carry out updating when he could.

Q3 - Asked by Matilda Bird - Had we any big projects in the pipeline where we could use our funds to good effect as our two bank balances were healthy.

Answer: The Chairman explained that we had no major project planned currently, but we liked to maintain a financial back-up as we had a hide and other major wildlife structures that we were responsible for, and needed to ensure we had some funds available to meet those needs. But we were still open to spending if a justifiable new project was needed and then we would have funds available to put towards it.

The Treasurer then also explained the reason for having a current account and a separate savings account, which was to allow us to earn interest on money not needed immediately, but that money remained available to us if a need arose.

With no further questions the AGM meeting formally closed at 19:50.

There was then a refreshments break with the Chairman thanking the refreshment ladies of Judy, Joy and Jane who served the refreshments prior to our Guest Speaker's talk.

At approx. 20:10 the Chairman introduced our guest speaker - Mark Mallalieu who gave us a very interesting and informative illustrated talk on the Honey Buzzards & Goshawks of Sussex. A talk which was very well received ending with members actively involved in asking questions.

The Chairman finally thanked Mark for his talk which all agreed was excellent, with Mark receiving a nice round of enthusiastic applause from all.