

Minutes of annual general meeting of Greenham and Crookham Conservation Volunteers

15 July 2012

Members present: Jonathan Alsop, Derek Cutt, Ewan Davies, Derek Emes, Jim O'Donoghue, Pam Pickett, Neil Rickman, Linda Sharpe.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Dean Pawlyn, Dave Kenning, Carol Austin, Judith Qualtrough, Alessio Falino and John Parker.

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous AGM on 17 July 2011 were approved and the Chairman signed a file copy as a true record of the meeting.

Actions from the previous AGM minutes

DC to inform Paul Hendry at WBC that Derek Emes remains our nominated Commissioner. **Completed.**

JP to ask Simon Barnett of WBC to close the Co-op bank account. **Completed.**

DE to continue liaising with ChrisAustin (Chairman of the CGCA) re transfer of funds. **Ongoing.** Derek has spoken to Chris but the funds have not yet been transferred.

ACTION: DE to continue liaise with Chris Austin to obtain these funds.

Election of officers for year 2012-13

Derek Emes resigned as Chairman to clear the way for any alternative nominations. Before nominations were called for, Derek made the following statement:

"As I explained at last years AGM I am not standing again as your Chairman as it is time for me to make way for the next generation. I want to express my great appreciation for the support you all have given in making my term in office so worthwhile and satisfying. I know the next incumbent will receive the same support and I wish him as much pleasure as I have had in helping to raise the common to a place of natural beauty and habitat .I would like to add that should you like me to still represent us on the Commission then I would be happy to do so"

John Parker had previously said he would be willing to stand as Chairman. John was proposed, seconded and unanimously elected. The outgoing Chairman made a further statement recognizing the support of the Secretary, other Committee members and the volunteers over the past 14 years.

This left the post of Treasurer vacant. Neil Rickman was proposed, seconded and unanimously elected.

Derek Cutt was unanimously re-elected as Secretary.

Dave Kenning had e-mailed the Secretary to say that other commitments might continue to prevent him fulfilling his duties as Tools Officer. Jim O'Donoghue was therefore proposed, seconded and unanimously elected to serve jointly with Dave.

Officers for the coming year therefore are...

Chairman: John Parker
Secretary: Derek Cutt
Treasurer: Neil Rickman
Tools Officers: Dave Kenning and Jim O'Donoghue

Action: DE and JP to liaise re transfer of Chairman's responsibilities.

Action: NR and JP to liaise re transfer Treasurer's responsibilities.

Action: J O'D and DK to liaise re sharing of Tools Officers' responsibilities.

Derek Emes had offered to continue to serve as our appointee on the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission. Again, there being no alternative nomination, Derek was proposed, seconded and unanimously re-elected. Derek Emes therefore remains our appointed Commissioner.

Action: Derek Cutt to inform Paul Hendry of WBC that DE remains our nominated Commissioner.

The meeting recorded a heartfelt and unanimous vote of thanks to Derek for his commitment and effort since becoming our founding Chairman (and, as such, our public face) at the first official business meeting in April 1998. We are also most grateful for his willingness to stay on as Chairman in recent years, despite having made at least one previous attempt to make way for new blood.

Chairman's report on activities since the previous AGM

We started in July last pulling balsam in the area across Thornford Road from Martindale Heath. The next five tasks were scrub bashing. This took place in the following Crookham areas; south of the eastern cattle grid Bury's Bank Road; Goldfinch Bottom; Birch Coppice and Brushwood Gulley. The Greenham Areas included Bishop's Green and Sandleford Heath. In January there was Hazel Coppicing near Goldfinch Bottom. Then the Spring tasks included dead hedging, and repairing fencing at Sandleford Heath. May saw more scrub bashing and the latest task was board walk repairs way marking and footpath clearance.

Scrub bashing is a necessary and satisfying task and that natural heath land is benefitting makes it worthwhile. Other works such as repairing boardwalks and fences, clearing footpaths, way marking give some variety to our work.

In addition to the pleasure of knowing what we do gives benefit to the ecology and pleasant interesting public access, the camaraderie and repartee creates a close efficient bond between us. May long it continue to do so.

Report from the Greenham & Crookham Commons Commission

The main topic has been regarding grazing rights and gorse control. I can give more details verbally but in short it was agreed that gorse growth in the open areas is too much and should be reduced. The nub of many discussions has been whether to burn or cut and if to cut, how to dispose of the cuttings. No agreement on whether to burn has been reached but in the meantime it is planned to go ahead with cutting. I have made application to New Greenham Trust for funds to purchase a flail collector on behalf of the Commission. This will remove cuttings from the common. A decision on the grant application is expected in November 2012.

Over grazing has also been discussed particularly over the winter period. Most stock are removed at winter but special permission can be granted to lay out feed as necessary. Feeding generally is not allowed but a resident is using borrowed rights and does feed illegally. The situation however is being addressed.

Sale of surplus rights is not settled but it is now known that there are 13 surplus rights of which 5 include grazing. It is considered that sale of these grazing rights should be held back for the interim as they would cause overgrazing.

The next topic which created some heated arguments was a presentation by Natural England on "Heathland Habitat". This gave a detailed explanation on management targets for lowland heaths and how within the Higher Level Stewardship scheme, funding could probably be obtained. Rebecca Hart of N.E. who gave the paper was supported by Sue Everette an ecologist which who elaborated her reasons, which were bluntly challenged by Bob Milton of the Council for Physical recreation. This ended in an ill mannered dispute.

A green space near Greenham Church was agreed to be added to the Common and is called Audrey's Meadow in remembrance of Audrey Appleby, an honoured member of Greenham parish council.

The Management Plan Committee has met on four occasions and has monitored the progress of the Plan's production. There have been several problems to overcome but it is now approaching completion. Details can be given verbally if asked, or view the plan online at www.westcombe.org.uk.

The problem of spread of New Zealand Stonecrop was raised. There is no clear method of controlling this invasive water borne weed. The possible methods that might be available are being investigated.

Fenceline walks have been taken and fence conditions reported. In places there is urgent need for repair which is taking place now.

The Planning Review Committee, contacting by email, have had little to do apart from the GAMA Silos site. Flying A Services made an application to extend their Planning approval (for car storage) indefinitely. This was rejected by the Council, but Flying A Services went to Appeal. Since the last Commission meeting the appeal has approved a three year start extension.

I requested the status of the release of the surplus G.&C. Association wind up funds. I was told that a plaque had been waited to be fitted to the memorial bench. It was thought that it now had been done. However no money has yet been received by John.

A weekly Park run event (established tracks only) was approved to be held on the Common on Saturday mornings starting at 8 a.m. This has been taking place without interference to either the public or wild life.

Commission objected (along with Greenham Parish Council) to a proposal to site the "Swings & Smiles" facility near the control tower.

If members want anything raised at any future Commission meeting, please let Derek Emes know.

Treasurer's report and financial matters

John Parker was not present, but had provided a financial report and accounts. Derek Cutt presented these on John's behalf. In summary, we have had no income since the last AGM, and have spent very little (web hosting, and charcoal for the Westonbirt barbecue). Nevertheless, our funds remain sufficient for several years' worth of expenditure at current rates.

The new Barclays bank account is proving to be much more convenient to use than the previous account with the Co-operative Bank, especially since the debit card allows easy online purchasing. All funds have been transferred to Barclays and the Co-op account now has been closed.

The Treasurer's report and the accounts were accepted, with thanks to John.

Other business

The meeting recorded a vote of thanks to Pam for all her work providing photographs for the website. These provide a valuable record of our work on the commons, allow absent members to enjoy seeing what the others have done, and help prospective new volunteers see what their experience will be like. We have also had requests from magazines and academic journals to reproduce some of the pictures.