

Minutes of annual general meeting 20 July 2014

Members present: Derek Cutt, Derek Emes, Jim O'Donoghue, Pam Pickett, Judith Qualtrough, Neil Rickman.

Also present: Ade Wallington, BBOWT Greenham Common Ranger.

Apologies

Apologies were received by e-mail from Phil Hill, Olly Hinton, John Parker and Dean Pawlyn.

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous AGM on 21 July 2013 were approved as a true record of the meeting.

Actions from the previous AGM minutes

DE to continue liaising with Chris Austin (Chairman of the now wound-up CGCA) re transfer of funds.
Ongoing. Derek has spoken again to Chris but the funds have not yet been transferred.

Action: NR to provide DE with bank account details to be passed on to Chris Austin to make payment.
Action: DE to raise it with Chris Austin again, as soon as convenient.

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

NR to contact Barclays to ensure they recognise him as Treasurer and primary contact.
Completed. Barclays are now sending communications to Neil's address, but still addressed to John. Neil reports no point in trying any further – this is good enough.

DC to e-mail the web address for the control tower petition to all members.
Completed. Whether the petition was influential is unknown, but the control tower is now in community (Greenham Parish Council) ownership.

DC to e-mail all members about Laurence's offer to provide training or refresher training in chainsaw use, and/or in tree-felling using hand tools.
Completed. However, there was only a moderate level of interest and no training was taken up.

DC to check with Simon Barnett whether BBOWT will pay (as WBC did in the past) for our insurance.
Completed. We are now insured by BBOWT.

DC to check with Simon Barnett whether BBOWT will pay (as WBC did in the past) for first aid training.
Completed. BBOWT will pay, however nobody has taken first aid training since the change of management on 06 January 2014.

Election of officers for year 2014-15

The current officers all indicated their willingness to stand again. There being no alternative nominations, all were unanimously re-elected. Officers for the coming year therefore remain...

Chairman: John Parker
Secretary: Derek Cutt
Treasurer: Neil Rickman
Tools Officer: Jim O'Donoghue

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

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

Chairman's report on activities since the previous AGM

John had e-mailed his report beforehand. It is reproduced below:

The tasks over the last year have again taken us to all corners of the common. We have undertaken scrub clearance at Sandleford and along the southern areas of the common and removed sycamores and Italian alder from other areas. The Himalayan balsam east of the Thornford Road got its annual attention and is now much reduced from when we first started work on this area four years ago. More recently we have been in "maintenance mode" clearing and repairing several sections of the commons fencing and painting one of the barrier gates. Our Christmas event in December was a success again with the construction of the usual "wooden" BBQ.

Our numbers have average around 12 for each task varying from 4 up to 18.

In January the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) took over management of the Commons from West Berks Council (WBC) and GCCV became a BBOWT Volunteer Group. BBOWT required a member of GCCV to become a "Key Volunteer" and Derek Cutt kindly volunteered to take up this role. Being a BBOWT Group has opened opportunities for GCCV members to undertake training in various conservation tasks. Apart from some initial additional paperwork the transition from working with WBC to being a BBOWT Group has been largely transparent.

I would like to thank the following for their support during the year:

- Derek Cutt as Secretary and Neil Rickman as Treasurer.
- Ade and the WBC / BBOWT Ranger team for their support and providing us with a range of tasks and the materials required to carry them out.
- Derek Cutt for keeping our web site up to date and Pam Pickett for being our "chief photographer".
- Jim O'Donoghue for looking after our tools.
- All the members who have turned up to provide the "elbow grease".
- Derek Emes as our elected representative on the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission.

Again we have also been able to provide tasks to support the West Berkshire Youth Offending Team and hope that some of our "visitors" have benefited from the fresh air, exercise and the opportunity to contribute something to supporting the environment.

Here's looking forward to another year in which we can help to improve the Commons for the benefit of all its users.

John Parker
Chairman
12 July 2014

Treasurer's report and financial matters

Neil presented the latest financial position. Part of his report is reproduced below:

In the year just passed we've purchased some silky blades, two new saws, a tarpaulin and a log lever, plus renewal of the domain name and web hosting.

At the current level of expenditure we have enough funds to last three years.

I did look at putting some of this money on deposit, but given that we've got a community account the interest rates are minimal.

Neil Rickman
Treasurer
14 July 2014

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

Report from the Greenham & Crookham Commons Commission

Derek Emes presented his report, the text of which is reproduced below:

1. This last year was one of much change and some contention. The biggest change was the transfer of control and management of the Common to BBOWT. This led to the need to identify our position as are under the auspices of West Berks. Council. It was agreed we would work alongside BBOWT as "semi autonomous"
2. The Commission is set up by Act of Parliament and so Commissioners are elected/appointed according to the Act. Accordingly a representative of BBOWT attends meetings only in an observer and advisory position. Paul Hendry the Countryside officer attends in a similar position.
3. Due to recent local elections the West Berks. Council representative, Dominic Boeck, a Conservative, was appointed. The sale and use of the Control Tower became a disputatious topic. The Chairman of the Commission at the time, Tony Ferguson, is a known Liberal Democrat. Mr Boeck unjustly accused Mr Ferguson of being political. As a result of this Mr Ferguson considered his position and handed in his resignation following the next meeting.
4. The next Chairman elected was Chris Tufnell who decided to take control of the meetings, which would stray away from topics under discussion by certain members ,who would have their own concerns, "better knowledge" and such drawn in. Subjects for agenda now have to be in at least a week before next meeting. This took place too late however for our efficient and knowledgeable Clerk who had had enough of the disputed ramblings and resigned. It is hope things will run more efficiently but an equally qualified Clerk is required.
5. June 2013 TB was suspected in the cattle and tests showed one with lesions. This required herds to go into quarantine and not allowed off the Common. Subsequent tests showed a few cows (I think 3) positive. So quarantine had to be extended for more tests later. Grazing became very bad and Ponies had to be removed. This took a long time as they became clever at avoiding roundup. They were eventually taken off and feeding was allowed on for cattle. The final tests were satisfactory and now all is back to normal and Ponies are back.
6. The Grazing committee were not organised enough to hold regular meetings and a proposal was raised that the committee should be disbanded. A second proposal was put up before a vote put up, that the committee should meet at least twice a year 2 weeks before a regular Commission Meeting. This was carried.

7. Paul Hendry raised the matter of number of rights being exercised by every Grazier. He recommended that this be a regular item on the agenda. The Council as landowner will not allow Commoners to exercise rights to which they have not established their entitlement. The register of rights has still to be drawn up after several years of debate.
8. Gorse cutting which had been finally agreed is now underway.
9. A Charity for handicapped children, Swings and Smiles, gave a presentation for setting up a secure play area in part of the Control Tower land and adjacent car park. After much discussion it was not supported due to lack of detail and the context not at all clear.
10. A proposal was made that that the Commission should reaffirm its support for the eventual use of the Control Tower and curtilage being for the benefit of the Community. It was passed 6 to 2 with 3 abstentions. (see 3 above.)
11. Planning review Committee does not meet formally as it only occasionally has a planning application relevant to the Common boundary areas , it will be discussed by phone and email then. Notifications from WBC are not always received as agreed, so we keep a regular eye open to ensure nothing slips through. Frank Huxtable is Chairman and keeps in touch with us. At present there is a continuing saga regarding planning permission granted for a container storage depot at the eastern end of New Greenham Park. (I can give a verbal description of the long story if required)
12. Management Plan Committee have regular meetings. For a variety of reasons the plan has taken a long time to get as far as it now is but work has been continuously ongoing. Derek Cutt, Simon Barnett and Adrian Wallington are the lead members of the committee. Finalising the Compartments is complete. In completing this aspect, one compartment 5F was apparently not on the common but the owner is not known. It is just a small compartment between NGP and the A339, so letting go its own way is not a disaster and a haven for small wildlife. Another compartment 17H has also been identified and now included in the plan.
13. Species listing and action plan for each sub compartment is getting close to finalising. Ground truthing is well ahead and it has shown up many areas where the Common/ private land boundary is not clear and these boundaries need clarifying properly.
14. Co-ordinating with BBOWT's management scheme has taken time, and the Higher Level Stewardship scheme is also now taken into account. BAP species have been reviewed and edited. About 150 photos are now downloaded into the plan website.
15. Melanie Hurdley the former clerk maintained the website, this has now been taken over by Julian Swift Hook.

Derek Emes 19 July 2014

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

Change of management of WBC's countryside estate

(Some of the following was mentioned at the meeting, some has been added to these minutes for extra information.)

Although WBC remains the landowner, BBOWT took over the management of the common, and eight other WBC countryside sites, on 06 January 2014. We are therefore now a BBOWT volunteer group, and all regular attenders have completed forms etc. and are on BBOWT's volunteer database.

The chairman and the secretary had met with Simon Barnett and Neil Fletcher (BBOWT's volunteer coordinator) before the transition. The point was made that we differ from BBOWT's many other volunteer groups in that we are specifically named in the G&CC Act 2002 as a body entitled to nominate a Commissioner. It is therefore important that we retain sufficient autonomy to fulfil that duty. (In fact it is the main reason why we have a formal AGM). BBOWT recognises this.

BBOWT require one "Key Volunteer" for each of their volunteer groups. For the GCCV this is Derek Cutt since he is more generally available than John Parker for meetings, site visits etc.

Ade and Simon are now BBOWT employees, and Simon is our official BBOWT liaison. Members with any concerns or queries should ask DC to raise them with Simon, either immediately or at one of our twice-yearly progress meetings. Day-to-day activities and working relationships have not changed noticeably. The only material change has been that the BBOWT insurance requires under-18s to be accompanied by an adult, whereas with our previous insurer (BTCV) it was under-16s.

Pam pointed out that Duke of Edinburgh trainees, several of whom have worked with us in the past, are all under eighteen.

Action: DC to ask Simon Barnett about the insurance position and any other implications of taking DoE volunteers.

The meeting with Neil Fletcher had also touched on WBC's Youth Offending Team and their working alongside us. Since we work on a non-school day we are a useful resource for them, and the relationship has continued over the change of management. It has been made clear to BBOWT that we are happy to host, and work alongside, YOT clients and staff but the GCCV is not responsible for them. Following an accident (minor, but requiring a visit to A&E) we have insisted that a Ranger or someone else from BBOWT be present whenever YOT join us for tasks.

Other business

John had asked that storage for our equipment should be raised at the meeting.

Action: JO'D to liaise with Ade to ensure we have adequate secure storage in the workshop.

John had asked that training opportunities, and how members can find out about them, should be raised at the meeting.

Action: DC to ask Simon Barnett about training, and let members know by e-mail how best to access information on what's available.

DC mentioned BBOWT's West Berkshire Living Landscape volunteers group which meets every Wednesday and is coordinated by Roger Stace. Roger sends an e-mail out to regulars every week. Members interested in volunteering on Wednesdays should e-mail Roger (rogerstace@bbowt.org.uk) and ask to be added to the list.

Web addresses

Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission: www.greenhamccc.org.uk

Management plan: www.westcombe.org.uk