

**Minutes of annual general meeting 17 July 2016**

Members present: Derek Cutt, Ewan Davies, Derek Emes, Jim O'Donoghue, John Parker, Pam Pickett, Neil Rickman, Nigel Williamson.

**Apologies**

Sheila Berry, Cathy Daisy, Kevin Daisy, Alessio Falino, Philp Jagoe, Sam Jagoe, Simon Lewis, Laurence Parker, Matt Parker, Dean Pawlyn, Judith Qualtrough, Nicole Rorie, Joe Wrigley.

**Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous AGM on 21 June 2015 were approved as a true record of that meeting.

**Actions from the previous AGM minutes**

DE to continue liaising with the former officers of the now wound-up CGCA re transfer of funds.  
**Completed.** However...

On 22 June 2015 Derek spoke yet again to Chris Austin and to John Gale (who administers the CGCA bank account) but the funds were not transferred. We now regard this money as a lost cause and will no longer expect it. Alternative funding will have to be sought, see Treasurer's report below.

JO'D to arrange with Ade to gain access to clean the store, refurbish as necessary, obtain and distribute keys.  
**Completed.**

DC to inform Paul Hendry at WBC that Derek Emes is our nominated Commissioner for 2015-16.  
**Completed.**

JP to point out particular areas of footpath erosion, and two trees fallen across footpaths, to Ade.  
**Completed.**

## **Election of officers for year 2016-17**

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 also offered to continue to serve as our appointee on the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission. There being no alternative nomination, he was 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:

During the last year we have undertaken the usual tasks of scrub clearance, removing non-native species, coppicing and repair and maintenance activities.

Over successive months we worked at Bishop's Green to remove birch scrub and create heather "scrapes". This pattern of working at the same area on 2 consecutive months enabled us to make a visible and lasting impact to the habitats in those areas.

Our maintenance tasks have included fence clearance, gate repair, refurbishment of the container store, the replacing of the weld mesh on the boardwalk we built in 2009, the repair and clearance of the accumulated mud from our 2003 boardwalk, removing old signage and the installation of new waymark posts on both Greenham and Crookham Commons.

Our Christmas event in December was again a success with the construction of the usual "wooden" BBQ (making good use of the felled birch at Bishop's Green!).

Our numbers have averaged around 13 for each task (4 up on last year), varying from 10 up to 19 (not surprisingly for the Christmas BBQ!). Over the year we have contributed over 900 man hours of effort to help maintain the Commons.

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

- Derek Cutt as Secretary, Neil Rickman as Treasurer and Jim O'Donoghue as Tools Officer.
- Ade and the BBOWT Ranger team for their support by providing us with a range of tasks, the materials required to carry them out and transport out to the work sites.
- Derek Cutt for keeping our web site up to date and Pam Pickett for being our "chief photographer".
- 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.

We have also had young people work with us to undertake the service element of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme which often has the benefit of them bringing along a parent to help as well.

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

John Parker  
Chairman  
30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

## **Treasurer's report**

Neil presented the latest financial position, having previously circulated the detailed accounts, expenditure records, and his observations on our financial position to the Chairman and the Secretary.

In summary, after a year with zero income we have enough funds for about two years of normal operational expenditure.

There was a general discussion of possible sources of funding. One of our largest recurring expenses is website hosting. DC offered to approach BBOWT for a contribution towards this, but the feeling of the meeting was that this would not be appropriate. Despite being a BBOWT volunteer group, we operate our website independently of BBOWT's own online presence, as one way of maintaining our status (unique among BBOWT's volunteer groups) of being specifically named in the G&CC Act 2002 as a group which nominates a GCCC Commissioner.

There was a suggestion of approaching companies (Vodafone for example) whose staff attend corporate volunteering events on the common. However it was felt that if these companies are minded to support the common financially it would be more appropriate for them to give money to BBOWT rather than to another volunteer group which, generally, is not involved in their corporate volunteering programmes.

We have previously had a gift from AWE, and it was pointed out that this might be repeatable.

**Action: NR to investigate whether AWE still have a mechanism for grants to local community groups.**

The financial situation is not yet desperate, but nevertheless all members should be on the lookout for funding opportunities.

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:

This year has been one of rather turbulence and change. To keep this report as concise as possible I shall deal with the topics mostly discussed and their final or still current situation. There are obviously many matters of non-disputatious general management dealt with.

The main matters have been:-

- a) Commoners' rights
- b) Over-winter grazing
- c) Gorse control
- d) Long winded discussions over topics raised without prior knowledge or warning
- e) Change in operating committees agenda
- f) Official Commission members.

a) Commoners' grazing rights have had to be clearly identified as some are duplicated. There are commoners with grazing rights not used and some of them "rent out" those rights to operating graziers. This naturally increases their numbers. The West Berkshire Council has ended up with non-allocated rights from the old Newbury District Council from the time the Commons were sold to them for £1.00. During the Cold War the Ministry of Defence annulled all Greenham Commoners rights within the security fencing and offered £1,000 compensation. Most commoners accepted this but 2 did not. When the Council obtained the common they offered these rights back on the receipt of £1,000 and several ex-commoners did not take up this offer. Consequently W.B.C. has a surplus of grazing rights in their control. Each year the condition of the grazing is assessed and if there is good enough available to take additional cattle some of these rights can be leased. At present numbers are being restricted as much as possible due to the T.B. infection.

b) Due to the T.B. difficulty it was agreed that cattle could be left out over the winter and be fed. This led to some problems. One was overgrazing harming the heathland ecology. Another was the obnoxious mess arising at the feeding locations. There is no requirement for the Graziers to have registered land to take their cattle off the Commons, so the increase in numbers with so many unweaned calves makes this difficult, and one grazier was obliged to get some land as he did not have any available. This can be seen to be a re-occurring problem. During the winter the Commission was

approached by two nearby residents unhappy with the situation. The letter pages of the NWN also carried some adverse comments about the number of cattle and mess. The Commission has endorsed a BBOWT proposal to institute formal monitoring of grazing pressure. The BBOWT attendee at Commission meetings recommended that no future winter grazing be allowed this was agreed by vote.

c) Gorse control has been a regular point of dispute. The method of control, burning or cutting, the amount to be cut back, and the locations of reduction all have been argued over. With some pressure it was finally agreed to cut, not burn, 50 Ha a year reduction, and parcels of gorse, not swathes to be cut. This did not overfeed the soil spoiling the heathland growth, it was considered 50 Ha would provide about a 10 year cycle of regrowth, and lozenges of gorse will not affect ground nesting birds.

d) Meetings used to run on, veering across topics as individuals came up with matters that were particular to their own interests or views. One individual could be exceedingly irritating in that he would raise points, often hardly relevant, that showed he had superior understanding of procedure or law. The Chairman has taken a grip on the situation now by demanding reports, papers or questions are submitted two weeks latest before a meeting. There have been two occasions when someone tried to cross this line and each person was informed to keep it for the following meeting. Any minor point or critical matter can still be raised under a.o.b.

e) Matters as in a, b, and c above plus others such as conservation, access, public information, and such general requirements have had to be managed.. Of the 3 original committees, Management Plan, Grazing, and Planning, 2 were no longer relevant. The Management Plan was up and running, Grazing matters were under review divorced from other considerations and it was decided that different agenda needed reviewing. Grazing and ecology matters clearly can affect each other, Public information, ease of access, path identity and upkeep all need careful control, as a result, the original committees were disbanded and 2 new ones set up; Conservation Management and Governance and Amenity. The CMC consists of members of the previous MPC and GC plus BBOWT, and NE Rep.s. and is chaired by Derek C. The GAC committee is chaired by John Thorogood. I am not up to date of others but certain one of the Sport and Recreation persons are on it. It was decided that each Chair should attend the meetings of the other committee to understand each other's business and no cross purposes or conflicting decisions should arise.

f) The Commission should consist of 20 members, 10 appointees and 10 elected Commoners. The appointees are; Representatives of the following Councils, 3 West Berkshire and 1 from Newbury Town. Greenham Parish and Thatcham. Then there are 2 from Sports and Recreation Council, and 1 from Greenham Common Trust and Natural England. Resulting from last years elections, several changes in Council rep.s have taken place with 2 new members but some others have changed their representation. This has been a trifle confusing. There is an election for Commoners' representatives every three years and the last one was last year. Only 7 persons got nominations and as a result they all were returned. However 3 graziers omitted to get a nomination and subsequently realised their situation. They requested if they could possibly be co-opted to the Commission. One elected commoner and grazier resigned for personal reasons. This was agreed as minimal grazier representation would be unworkable. Finally one of the Sports and Recreation members was replaced. All this means that there has been a degree of reintegration required.

Derek Emes  
Commissioner  
July 2016

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

### **Other business**

None raised.