



Hawridge & Cholesbury Commons Preservation Society

Annual General Meeting 2nd December 2021

Chairman's Report

It has, of course been two years since we held the AGM meeting in person, with last year's event on the dreaded Zoom! This worked reasonably well and we got through it but hopefully it'll not need to be repeated, although Covid seems to be doing its best to make life difficult. Along with the wider world the Committee soldiered on with Zoom meetings through the first part of the year and this enabled us to conduct the necessary communications that go towards the upkeep of the Commons but it was the summer before we could meet face to face outside.

As with many outside spaces, the Commons experienced periods of intense use during the lock-down or post locks down periods. At one time, back in 2020 we had masses of cars parked along from the Full Moon right up to and past the cricket pitch and many small groups walking and sitting in the main open areas as people were allowed, at that time, to meet outside in small groups. For a short period this was quite startling and the numbers looked like that they might cause us some problems with parking, litter etc. but as it turned out the really busy days were fairly few in number and, as other alternative activities opened up, people dissipated and use of the Commons moved back to normal. It seems certain that the Commons have supported people in many positive ways during the pandemic and this is a reminder to those of us that are fortunate to live around it how lucky we are to benefit from the green space it offers, the flora and fauna and wildlife.

Contract work: Much of the reason that the Commons are so well kept and accessible to all is due to the fact that we continue to contract James to keep them in order. I'd like to thank him for all the work he has done and for his support, flexibility and can-do approach. Being able to rely on his skills and machinery enables us to realistically achieve things that would not otherwise be possible under our own steam. In addition to cutting the grassland and keeping the rides and paths clear, James has carried out a number of further useful activities this last year. One of the most effective was the widening of the Bottom Ride as part



of last Winter's works. This should make it easier to dry out as well as providing a clearer view for riders and walkers and also making it easier for future work by a large tractor. Low hanging branches and bottlenecks were also removed on other rides. James has also cleared fallen limbs from the rides such as the enormous beech on the Top Ride.

After clearing the pond of the invasive New Zealand Pygmy Weed James buried the spoil near the Bottom Ride since NZPY cannot survive to spread further when buried deep enough. Sadly it can survive in just about any other circumstance! Mechanical control of the weed is currently our only method of managing this species though we hope there may be a biological solution one of these days.

James also created channels for water to run off down Stoney and Pound Lanes. This has proven highly effective in reducing the amount of water which poured down these lanes especially when we had problems with burst water mains a month or two ago.

Expert Views: We are very proud of the fact that visiting experts in their fields also approve of the way the Commons are being managed. When she visited Fiona Everingham (Local Wildlife Sites Surveyor) commented favourably on the fact that a number of local residents are now leaving all or part of the Manorial Waste outside their homes to nature, thus providing an important corridor for wild life and pollinators. The Manorial Waste is the strip of land to the south of the road from the main Commons. This is one of the reasons why Fiona is keen that ALL of the Commons should now be designated as a County Wildlife Site. We were also delighted that Neil Jackson of Chilterns Conservation Board, who used to advise us and who returned to the Commons after about 20 years, told us that our Commons were the best managed small Commons that he has visited.

There are of course differences of opinion between member of the Committee and members of the community from time to time but in my first year as Chairman I've been delighted to receive no negative comments from members of the local community which is amazing; so we must be doing something right.

Committee works: The fact that James is able to manage the Commons so



effectively with all of his knowledge, expertise and equipment has meant that the Committee can now concentrate on other endeavours and I'd like to thank the Committee for the work they have done and the many contributions made across a wide variety of areas of work and interest:

- **Moth species:-** David Dennis and his colleague Peter Bygate continued to trap moths throughout the year and have now recorded 309 macro moths with an additional 23 found this year. David and Peter also held another moth release on the Commons. This is always a thoroughly enjoyable event and participants of all ages enjoy seeing and handling creatures that are around us but rarely seen.
- **Lichen studies:-** Isobel has identified three main groups of lichen and is monitoring those most sensitive to pollution which should allow tracking of pollution levels over time. Isobel has spent considerable amounts of time learning about these species for which we are very grateful.
- **Heather regeneration:-** It is pleasing to note that the area where heather seed was scattered is showing signs of new growth. The major job now is in clearing all patches of birch saplings, bracken and gorse.
- **Ponds:-** On-going management of the weed continues.
- **Wildflowers:-** Dof E candidates and a number of volunteers have undertaken the planting of fritillary bulbs and snowdrops and a small group of school children have planted native daffodils opposite the school with Christine and Lindsay.
- **Glow worm surveys:-** We did a walk with expert John Tyler in May but as yet we have been without luck. However last year was an unusual year for glow worms apparently and so this survey will continue and if possible we may be able to reintroduce some if they are not present here already.

Volunteers: Whilst we have not had regular working parties on the Commons for the past year we have had several volunteers who have worked on an ad hoc basis and we have been fortunate to have a steady stream of DofE candidates



who have undertaken a variety of different tasks such as wheel strimming the smaller paths, weeding saplings from the heathers, identifying and plotting the location of the veteran trees, planting wildflowers, testing the pH of soil in various places on the Commons and helping at our fundraising event at the Cricket Club. Just a couple of weeks ago Nick Brown and his daughter Sophie unveiled the lower boundary stone between the Hawridge and Cholesbury sides of the Commons in support of Sophie's DofE Award.

We are also fortunate to have regular visits from Bucks Owl and Raptor Group (BORG) who continue to monitor our nesting boxes and to ring any chicks found. They will return next week to check the boxes to ensure that the chicks fledged safely and will clear out the boxes for next year. Later you will be able to see our little video of some of the work done in collaboration with BORG. Our thanks to Michelle Storm for helping Christine and Lindsay put it together.

Ecologist Lizzie Every has also shared her expertise with small groups and shown DofE candidates how to bait, trap and safely release small mammals.

Awards: In order to foster our work with children the Village Train fund awarded us £350 to continue planting native species on the Commons with the School children, as well as giving us a trail camera and a little Thomas trophy which we will award to classes and individuals at the School who do exceptional work for the environment.

Fundraising: Janet organised a “**Don't Frighten the Horses**” workshop on 4th September to give local dog owners the opportunity for their dogs to meet horses in a safe and managed environment with the welcome help of locals Judy Bullock and Kate Ballingall who rode their horses at various speeds around the fields whilst Janet was on hand to assist with any dog that was anxious or over excited. We are also grateful to George and Sarah Humphreys for kindly enabling this event to take place on their land and to all those who donated their time and effort free of charge. The morning raised £150 for HCCPS.

Most recently, Janet and Lindsay held a fundraising event at the cricket club where they sold fruitcakes and Katharine Dallas's History of Dundridge as well as



calendars and cards. It was particularly good to be able to hold this event in the pavilion, and we were fortunate to have had so much help from the Cricket Club in arranging it and to have had so much support from the local community. The weather was also kind and so people were able to sit outside to enjoy their mince pie and coffee whilst meeting their friends in the open air. We took just over £1000 much of which was profit.

Lindsay, of course deserves particular mention. Lindsay continues to write the HTN report for HCCPS and Newsletters. She co-ordinates the production and sale of cards and calendars and is mainstay of fundraising efforts. Beyond these practical matters she remains a guiding light for the Societies activities and its raison d'être. It is worth noting that on average the yearly sale of cards and calendars together with sponsorship of the calendar raises more than membership subscriptions.

We are really grateful to all of the local photographers who continue to send wonderful images for our cards and calendars and to Susie Bell who continues to design our calendar again at no charge to us. I'd also like to thank the sponsors of the calendar most of whom have sponsored us from the beginning: WE Black; Chiltern Motors; Chiltern Velo; Cholesbury- cum- St Leonards Horticultural Society; Christmas Tree Farm; George Brown's; Full Moon Pub; HG Matthews; James Jolliffe; MT Loos; Orbitpress; Philip Matthews; St John's Vet's practice. Orbit Press deserve a special mention for their help with our printing work for cards and calendars.

I'd also like to especially thank Veronica Mash for the extensive work that she does behind the scenes supporting the Society with MailChimp Newsletter updates and the website. These are time-consuming tasks and we very much appreciate her help.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank Christine of course. We should all be aware that Christine, as the landowner, constantly carries out survey work on the health and safety of the trees on the Commons with experts such as John Morris. She has become increasingly aware of the threat that ash dieback poses to the Commons.



At this stage we are not clear on the impact that it might have but it is likely to be a theme of the next couple of years. The Society will look to support Christine with this challenge and we will be discussing how we might best do this in the New Year.

We were saddened to hear of the deaths of Ron How, a committee member for 27 years and twice Chairman of the Society and of long-term member Joan Matthews this year.

We are proposing that this will be the last late Autumn AGM; with a motion to be tabled shortly to move the AGM, on a future annual basis, until May rather than this late November/December slot. We have found in recent years that the dark evenings and often bad weather have deterred Members and interested parties from attending. We also feel linking the AGM to the late Spring will join the Society's activities more naturally with the opening up of the Spring/Summer seasons when the Commons come into their own. There will therefore a slightly longer time period between this and our next AGM if the motion is passed.

I look forward to 2022 with confidence that the Society is well placed to continue to fulfill its aims. This is aided by our sound financial status which Philip will elaborate upon shortly in his Treasurer's Report. I'd like to thank Philip for his work and Mike Fletcher for his support too in keeping us on a sound financial footing.

Our solid financial base enables us for another year to retain subs at the level they have now been at for many years.

As we are just into December I think it is acceptable to say a Merry Christmas. Many thanks for attending and for your interest in the HCCPS.

Mark Hobbs