

## Chairman's Report

### HCCPS AGM 2020

I need hardly say that this has been a very strange and in some ways a very challenging year on the Commons. Because people were desperate to get out into the fresh air and into the countryside during the period of lockdown from March to July we had unprecedented numbers of visitors to the Commons and because the Full Moon was only able to offer take away meals due to Covid 19 restrictions the Commons became an obvious place to picnic in the warm weather. Initially we had concerns about the additional rubbish which was generated and the extra cars. However it was very encouraging that many local people stepped up to the challenge and helped keep the area clear of rubbish. The funding last year from TKMaxx and Homesense was useful in producing more signs to keep the Commons free of litter and in helping inform visitors to the Commons of our regulations. Generally, given the numbers of extra visitors, they were well behaved and it was encouraging that so many people took pleasure in being on the Commons when life for many was very challenging indeed.

I am also very pleased to report that our continued use of James Jolliffe as our contractor has again proven successful and manageable within our budget. For the third successive year James has carried out most of the routine maintenance as well as a number of other jobs on a one off basis such as clearing invasive weeds from the ponds and removing fallen or low-hanging branches. We have continued to be able to fund this through subs, contributions and calendar and card sales. As Philip will demonstrate in his Treasurer's report the Society is currently in a financially sound position and we should be able to weather unforeseen additional expenditure for some time in the future. For this reason the Committee is again recommending that we do not raise the subscriptions which have remained at a low level for 11 years. If necessary in the future we believe that we could raise the required revenue by raising subscriptions, seeking one off donations, applying for grants or fundraising in some other way.

James's ability to take on these jobs has been timely because last year Isobel was unable to take on much of the work that she had done in the past whilst caring for her mother. Over the years Isobel has contributed a huge amount to the maintenance work both personally and by recruiting other tractor drivers and organising Conservation Group activities. Her

inability to continue this work to the same extent has been compounded by the fact that for most of this year Conservation Group activities have been ruled out because of Covid 19 restrictions. These restrictions seem likely to continue for some time but, fortunately, we have volunteers who have been willing to undertake jobs when needed. These include some of the Conservation Group and, as always on her daily walks on the Commons, Janet has kept an eye on any problems and she and others have reported concerns when they have arisen. Janet and Peter have removed several fallen branches and so on. We have also been fortunate in having 2 Duke of Edinburgh Awards students Jack Hill and Jonty Thornborrow who worked throughout their summer holidays clearing birch and gorse saplings from the heather beds and helping Janet by using the wheeled strimmer to keep the smaller paths open. (Jack was very proud when someone at the CC mentioned how nice it was that the small paths were kept open, knowing that he had done it himself!) My thanks to all concerned.

Once again, I have had no complaints about allowing the grassy areas to grow long to allow the wildflowers and fine grasses to set seed and we have had many compliments from the community about how well the Commons are looking. For these reasons it has been agreed that we should continue to use James to carry out most of the maintenance and to sell our tractor since he has the necessary equipment and the tractor has cost us approximately £1000 per annum to run and maintain.

The tractor has served us well over a great many years when we didn't have the luxury of a contractor who could carry out so much of the maintenance and it has been lovingly cared for and maintained largely by Windsor and Isobel. It was the second tractor owned by Society. In the early stages Peter Knowles-Brown and Ron How used their own tractors and sometime in the 1980s the Society bought a little grey Massey Ferguson. By 1990 the Society had built up sufficient funds to buy the current one which I believe was about 15 years old at the time. I haven't been able to establish what it cost the Society but it made a lasting impression and for many years the Society's savings account was always referred to as 'the tractor fund' in anticipation of the time when we would need to replace it.

In the early days the tractor was maintained by Windsor and housed at his home at Cherry Orchards where he was sometimes helped by Martin Barber. As well as driving it, Windsor trained others such as Mike Wallis and, we think, Mike Fletcher. He also kept meticulous records of

its use, repairs and so on until 2003 when he handed over this responsibility to Isobel. Isobel continued Windsor's work in driving it, training others and record keeping. Others who have cared for it in the last 17 years have included Mike Wallis, Steve Cheeld, Ian Eld, Martin Barber, Duncan Mitchell, Dave Cox, George Browns, as well as Windsor and Isobel. The drivers during Isobel's stewardship have included Steve Cheeld, Brian Harris, Clare Muir, David Collett, David Tarn, Bill Waller, Nick Brown, as well as Windsor and Isobel. The fact that so many people have been involved in the care, maintenance and use of the tractor is a shining example of the community spirit which has been a driving force of our Society from its inception.

We do hope that though we may not have to work so hard on the physical maintenance of the Commons the community will continue to be involved in other projects which contribute to the wellbeing of everything that lives here.

In the presentations after the formal part of the meeting we will be showing you some of the activities that have gone on and ways in which members and the Committee have been involved. However, there are a great many others who continue to contribute in a variety of ways. These include Veronica Mash who maintains the website and is sorting out problems with using MailChimp; Mike Wallis who restored the Bug Hotel after it was vandalised; Susie Bell who has just designed our lovely calendar for the 7<sup>th</sup> year at no charge to us; the many photographers who contribute to the calendars and card images; Orbitpress who continue to provide us with excellent service and who have continued to print the calendar at the same cost throughout; the sponsors of the calendar, most of whom have also supported us throughout this time. 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.

We are also grateful to the experts who are happy to share their knowledge about local flora and fauna. Unfortunately, some of our species surveys have been curtailed due to the virus but we have been fortunate that David Dennis and Peter Bygate have been able to continue their moth trapping throughout the year and have recorded nearly 300 macro moths on our Commons – an amazing increase from 230 reported last year.

Mammals: We have also been fortunate that Lizzie Every has been able to carry out some small mammal trapping and the Society has purchased

10 small mammal traps which we hope to use with the school children in the school grounds as well as on the Commons. Lizzie has also done some preliminary work on surveying the Dewpond and Pallett's Pond for newts, frogs, toads etc. She will continue to do this in the spring.

Duke of Edinburgh Awards: As well as Jack and Jonty we currently have 3 other students working on the volunteering section of their Bronze awards. We are trying to give them a variety of tasks so that they have a clear picture of the sorts of things that we do. As well as working on the heather and in keeping the paths open, Zach Weaver and his mother have also been documenting the location of the 40 veteran trees identified in 2013 as well as clearing the debris around the dewpond. More recently George Hill and Ben Morris have planted 200 Snakes head fritillary bulbs in 2 of 4 locations where we are trialling them.

Wildflowers: Janet and Sarah have each planted further Snakes head fritillaries and Janet is attempting to grow harebells from seed since they are now very rare here on the Commons.

School involvement: Recently we had 4 Environmental Prefects from the school plant a further 200 native daffodils near to the bug hotel and on the edge of the wooded area near to last year's planting.

Glow worms: Rebecca Walton is trying to establish why Glow worms have disappeared from the area and if it is possible to re-establish them.

Committee: Due to the restrictions we have only had 2 'normal' meetings and a Zoom meeting with many communications by email and written reports in lieu of the meetings we were unable to hold. However the Committee Members continued to carry out important work for the Society individually or in pairs. Some of these activities will be addressed in the Presentations after the formal business has been completed.

One major change to the Committee is that after an amazing 41 years David Barnard is standing down. David's contribution to the Society has been outstanding both on the Committee as Chairman (3 years) and Vice-Chairman (12 years) and for many more years on Working Parties and helping monitor the work needing to be done by the volunteers. In recognition of all of the work that David has done for the Commons and the work that both he and Joan have carried out for the community, a bench will be erected - probably near to the Village Hall and as soon as we are able to do so we will have a social gathering to celebrate the work that David has done.

As I step down as Chairman I would like to thank Christine, the Committee and many others for their help and support. I believe that we should be proud of the Society's achievements in fulfilling our original aim of helping Christine, as the owner, to maintain the Commons for the benefit of all species which live here including man.

Although there is always more that could or should be done, we are now in a position to enjoy the Commons without always having to worry about the vegetation taking over. Generally we have thriving and diverse species which indicate that our management strategies are largely paying off and we have the support of the wider community. I do hope that we can continue to work with the younger generation so that they too will learn to protect our very important environment which will be their legacy.