



Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons Preservation Society

DRAFT Minutes of the 55th Annual General Meeting Held at Cholesbury Village Hall At 8pm on Tuesday 9 May 2023

Present:

Mark Hobbs (Chairman) Lindsay Griffin (Vice Chairman), Philip Prettejohn (Treasurer).

Committee Members: Nick Brown, David Dennis, Janet Hopkinson, Christine Stott, Rebecca Walton.

Members:

Georgie Brown, Mike Wallis, Nick Bootiman, Eva Thorarinsdottir, James Jolliffe, Doreen Cooper, John Cooper, Paddy Thomas, Windsor Thomas, Liz Firth, Charles Firth, Joan Barnard, David Barnard, Chris Brown, David Tarn

Sufficient Members being present, the meeting was quorate.

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present and thanked John Morris for his excellent talk on the matter of Ash Dieback on the Commons.

Apologies for Absence from Committee

John Caple, Sarah Higgins and Tim Watts.

Minutes

The minutes of the fifty fourth annual general meeting had been placed on the HCCPS website and were approved. There were no matters arising.

Mark asked Philip Prettejohn, as Treasurer, to report on the financial accounts to 31 October 2022.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's full report is appended to these minutes together with the Accounts, which had been approved and signed by the Committee (both of which had been placed on the HCCPS website). Philip thanked the Examiner, Mike Fletcher for once again reviewing the accounts, which he had countersigned.

Philip referred in particular to the provision in the accounts of £3,000 to meet anticipated costs of tree work arising from ash dieback. No expense had yet been incurred as the contractor had been able to meet his costs by recovering firewood from the trees felled. However, it was possible that costs of future work could not be met that way.

There were no questions.

Philip proposed the accounts be adopted and the meeting confirmed agreement.

Chairman's Report

Mark Hobbs thanked Philip and reported that, after twenty-four years as Treasurer and eleven years as Examiner, Mike Fletcher had decided to retire. He was thanked by all for his long service to the HCCPS. Fortunately, Ben Lewis, who succeeded Mike as Treasurer, had agreed to be proposed as the Examiner and the Committee were very grateful for his offer.

Mark gave a detailed report of the activities since the last AGM in December 2021, there having been no meeting in 2022 due to the change of date. Mark's full report is appended to these minutes as a record.

Mark noted that all comments he received regarding the state of the Commons were very positive and thanked James Jolliffe for his work in maintaining the Commons in excellent condition during the period. In addition, he recognised the work of Janet and Peter Hopkinson and Duncan Colquhoun in helping with the smaller tasks that arise and they do when needed.

In addition to her usual supervision of the maintenance of the Commons with Janet Hopkinson and the myriad of other tasks she handles, Mark noted Christine Stott's engagement with BORG, the National Reptile Society and Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre and thanked her for all her work.

Mark repeated Philip's earlier thanks for Lindsay Griffin's fundraising work in relation to cards, calendars and cakes, all of which made a major contribution to the funds of the HCCPS, as well as her assistance in organising events.

Mark reported the decision of three long standing committee members to retire. Isobel Clark had done so in the spring of 2022 and both David Dennis and Sarah Higgins had decided to do so following the end of the meeting. A reception had taken place in June 2022 at which Isobel had been thanked for all her work on various flora and fauna. Both David and Sarah had contributed much to the running of the Society; Mark was very pleased that David had agreed to continue his work in respect of butterflies, moths, glow worms and other species. Sarah had recently taken charge of the reptile mats, a comparatively thankless task given the few discovered.

Appointment of the Committee:

The following members of the Committee were standing for re-appointment: Mark Hobbs (Chairman) Lindsay Griffin (Vice Chairman), Philip Prettejohn (Treasurer), Nick Brown, John Caple, Janet Hopkinson, Rebecca Walton, Tim Watts. (Christine Stott is an ex officio member).

The re-appointment for the above-named members was proposed by Joan Barnard, seconded Chris Brown and approved by the meeting.

The appointment of Ben Lewis as the Hon, Examiner was proposed by Philip Prettejohn, seconded by Lindsay Griffin and approved by the meeting.

There being no other business the meeting concluded at 8.45pm

Signed:

Date:

HCCPS - 2023 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Thank you, Philip. I wanted to start with picking up on the finances. We have benefitted from a positive and stable position for some years now. We appreciate the work of Philip and previous treasurers and the support they have had from our Honorary Examiner which has been Mike Fletcher for the last 11 years; before this Mike was our Treasurer for 24 years. So after this marathon stint' Mike has decided to stand down – we're extremely grateful for Mike's commitment and his careful examination of our accounts has always meant that the numbers have been scrupulously checked.

The good news is that previous treasurer Ben Lewis has agreed to pick up the gauntlet as Honorary Examiner so thanks Ben; good to have you back.

More widely our sound finances have enabled us to pursue our aims, generally speaking, without constantly worrying about the funds. Furthermore and because of this we have agreed to make an annual contribution towards Christine's tree work costs. These threaten to be substantial and, whilst we do not have the means to underwrite these entirely, we do feel that a contribution is relevant and appropriate use of funds.

The subscription rate has remained constant for many years and as costs rise around us the subscription represents increasingly excellent value for money. We may at a later date need to raise the subscription but we have no immediate plans to do so. Along with members subs our main income sources are card and calendar related. For the most part Lindsay should take the credit for this as she continues to lead with these initiatives and they make a significant difference to the Society. Our pre-Christmas fair held at the cricket club has become a popular occasion and has made a helpful contribution to funds; Lindsay's cakes selling out along with good card and calendar sales. Thanks to Janet, Nick Brown and his wife Georgie in particular for their help at this and, of course, to the Cricket Club for the use of their clubhouse.

This date marks the first of our new Spring AGM dates and despite slightly disappointing weather I hope it proves a better diary date in the future. It seems more appropriate to be focused on Commons matters given the new green leaves and emergence of life on the Commons at this time of the year, rather than gathering at the end of November. It's still raining but at least its light outside!

Turning to our activities; obviously since we haven't had an AGM for 18 months a great deal has happened in that time. We have been busy with a combination of annual and one-off initiatives; so, in no particular order.

County Wildlife Site Christine had confirmation from Fiona Everingham of the Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre that all of the Commons are now to be included as a County Wildlife Site. Previously, the Manorial Waste (the strip outside houses on the south side of the main road) was not included but, as more residents of these houses are now leaving the area outside their houses to nature in order to create a corridor for wild flowers to spread, this area is now to be included with the main area of the Commons. As elsewhere, the vegetation needs minimal care and should only be cut after the wildflowers have set seed in the autumn. We understand that more residents might be willing to leave theirs too but are concerned that they may not be able to carry out the annual cut when the vegetation is too long for a lawn mower. However, if this is a worry, please contact [HCCPS](#) or [Christine Stott](#). We would be happy to ask James to cut it when he does his annual cut around September. Christine's farmland at Hawridge Court Farm is also a County Wildlife Site and it is a tribute to her thoughtful management to have two such awards.

We have been grateful to James Jolliffe's work which has both kept the Commons tidy and accessible but also helped open up inaccessible areas to a greater extent. The capability of James' equipment far exceeds that which we had available to us when we used to try and manage with our tractor and although the change in approach has caused some concerns about the role of the society I do think the results speak for themselves. We are grateful that at a time when the cost of everything else has gone up James has continued to deliver effectively at 'Mates Rates'.

James and his team completed the winter work in late February which is just before such work has to stop to allow the birds to nest undisturbed. We hope the amazing work on Rays Hill will make it much safer for riders and walkers in that area. James has also carried out work on the rides to widen them and to make it safer to use the tractor in those areas. All tree work was approved by John Morris (formerly of Chiltern Woodlands), Christine's woodland advisor.

There are of course still some jobs which need to be done by individuals and we are grateful to Janet and Peter Hopkinson and their neighbour Duncan Colquhoun who are proactive in getting smaller jobs done when they see the need.

As there has been a shift in how maintenance work is organised and undertaken we regularly review how the role of the Society is best dovetailed with Christine's wider work and the future role of the Society. It is clear that we do not need to be as hands on as our predecessors. However, as Lindsay has said to me, we believe that if those who were involved in the setting up of the Society in 1967 were able to see what we can do now they would be impressed and in envy of the progress that has been made. As we move forward, we aim to continue to engage the community in fostering a love and engagement for our special environment and encourage people with the necessary skills to continue to contribute to efforts to raise awareness of issues both on a micro and macro level; maintain our website; update species records; liaise with the school and DofE's; raise money to pay for work done etc. As I said earlier on the Common, moving forwards we will look to hold more village events, especially linked to themes of education relating to **ecological value** and **biological diversity** and, in particular, issues that affect us on the Commons.

Species Reports: **BORG** Were here in mid-February when they found an adult male barn owl in one of the boxes on Christine's land and visited again just recently and found that all 3 owl boxes on the Commons were being used.

"The box by the top road had 1 large white warm egg, there was no adult in the box but we are confident that it is a Tawny Owl egg. This is the first time this box has been used by an owl. The pyramid box on the Common which has had Tawnies in before was looking very dilapidated and the perch had fallen off but this has clearly not put the birds off because inside was an adult tawny owl with two, possibly three, chicks; approximately a week old. We then checked the box along the bottom track and were very surprised to have a female Mandarin duck fly out! The hinge on the door has rusted and broken so we could not risk opening the door but we managed to put a camera in and counted 6 eggs. When we come back for the Tawnies we will repair the hinge. "

Reptiles and Amphibians: When you have been out on the Commons you may have seen several pieces of matting with numbers on. These were part of a National Reptile Study conducted here by Dr Claudia Bernardini, Environmental Project Officer, Bucks Council. The mats were being checked about every two weeks over the summer and two common lizards were recorded in different areas; so, we had limited but some success.

Claudia and two colleagues, Charley Scales, Newt Officer, Buckinghamshire Council and NatureSpace Partnership, and Emma Foster also visited in late April 2022 to survey amphibians in Pallett's Pond, Lindsay's garden pond and the Dew Pond. Happily, there were numerous toad tadpoles and a number of smooth newts in the first two. What is encouraging is that, despite all the problems with NZ Pygmy Weed, Pallett's Pond remains a breeding pond. Claudia was convinced that though they didn't find them it is almost certain that Great Crested Newts will still be found in the area.

Bucks Invertebrate Group Visit on Saturday 3rd September. Thanks to Fiona Everingham we were privileged to have a visit from members of Bucks Invertebrate Group who carried out two surveys on the Commons. The daytime session was led by Martin Harvey, from the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and the evening moth session by Neil Fletcher.

Results of daytime and evening are on the website and are a welcome addition to our records.

Moths/Butterflies: David Dennis and Peter Bygate have continued to monitor the moths on the Commons and, to date, have identified:

Macro moths	326	Micro moths	100	TOTAL	426.
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There will doubtless be many more Micro moths identified in the coming years as David only just started to include these relatively recently since they are a real challenge to identify.

Trees: Thanks to John Morris for his informative talk just now. Christine continues to walk the Commons a couple of times a year to inspect the trees with John and they decide on the necessary work, John's talk tonight will have clarified what has happened and why and some of the expected work to be undertaken over the coming years.

Thanks to Pete Leybourne and his team who continue to fell much of the trees in exchange for the wood. So far there has not been too much need for climbers or cherry pickers which would be much more expensive.

Committee: Since the last AGM we are sad to announce three resignations from the committee:

Isobel Clark: We were sorry to learn that after 22 years on our Committee, Isobel had decided to resign. She is sorely missed as an active member of the Committee and many of you will know of her commitment to maintaining the Commons in good order by organising the working parties on Sunday Mornings for many years. She also drove and helped maintain our little tractor and recruited and trained many other drivers over the years. She was also very heavily involved in maintaining the ponds and in extending the heather regeneration on each side of Horseblock Lane. In more recent times she used her acute observational skills in identifying and recording mosses and lichens found on our Commons and her photographs of these minute species are a joy to look at. Thank you very much, Isobel for all of your hard work and your outstanding commitment over all these years.

We had a gathering at the Velo Café in June 22 to celebrate Isobel's work and that of David Barnard. We also took the opportunity to congratulate David Dennis for the number of moth species identified which I think at the time was 300?

David Dennis: David has been a committee member for eight years and served as Chairman in 2017. He has played an important part in a number of initiatives on the Commons including his work on the ponds and the heathers; providing wonderful photographs for the cards and calendars; helping monitor DofE volunteers; looking for Glow worms; as well as surveying Moths and butterflies; holding Butterfly presentations; writing segments for the Hilltop News; and hosting popular annual moth release mornings. Fortunately, David has said that he will continue to monitor the Moths and Butterflies on the Commons with his colleague Peter Bygate and to help in other ways. We've asked David to give us a moths/butterfly talk in the Autumn so, fortunately, we've not seen the last of him!

Sarah Higgins: has also been an active member of the Committee for 5 years - she has supported work in a number of ways: with ride closures, checking reptile mats, keeping an eye on the frog spawn, bulb planting, etc. as well as watching vigilantly when she is riding or dog walking on the Commons. She too will continue some of these activities.

It is not our intention to fill all of the other vacancies at present but to co-opt individuals to specific roles during the year.

Thanks to all members of the Committee. Everybody makes a contribution in their own way. I won't get into a list of it all but its noted.

Community Support: Thanks to the many members of the wider community who continue to support us in a variety of ways which are vital to the smooth running of the Society -the many local photographers; Calendar sponsors; Calendar design Susie Bell; Orbit Press; Hilltop News. Thanks too to Veronica Mash for her technical support, mail chimp and invaluable website and newsletter work.

Thanks finally to Lindsay whose enduring enthusiasm, commitment and work for the Society and its positive impact on the villages is second to none.

And last but very much not least thanks to Christine who has to balance a great number of issues with the ultimate responsibility for the Commons. We hope our efforts are a help to her.

Hon. Treasurer's Report Accounts for the year to 31 October 2022

The Accounts for the year to 31 October 2022 have been approved by the Committee and reviewed by the Hon. Examiner, Mr Mike Fletcher, whom I would like to thank for his diligent work. A copy of the signed accounts can be found on the 'Commons' website. They will be proposed for adoption by the Members at the Annual General Meeting.

There was a small decrease in members to 150 (2020-21:155) who contributed, together with Members' donations, a sum of £1,820 (2019-20 £1,935). I do encourage all Members to 'sign up' their neighbours, especially those moving to the Hilltop villages who may know nothing of our activities. It really is amazing value! We really do need as many members as possible.

We received £279 in other donations (2019-20 £600), the main difference being the generous receipt last year of £350 from the 'Thomas the Tank Fund'. £125 was raised by Janet Hopkinson (£150 in 2019-20) with her 'Don't Scare the Horses' event. Thank you Janet.

I do want to thank Lindsay Griffin again for her amazing efforts in not only maintaining the sales of calendars and cards at such a high level but also generating a further £465 from the donation of the sale proceeds of her delicious cakes. She has asked that the cake proceeds be used to meet the costs of the 'Owl' film shown at last year's AGM (included in the AGM expenses) and at the School since.

The continuing contributions by several very talented photographers in the villages helps to maintain the sales of cards by refreshing the stock. These sources of income now exceed the subscriptions and donations from Members and are a vital part of our annual income. I have no doubt that if more Members were to assist with these or similar projects we could increase our revenue.

As you will have seen, substantial work is being undertaken on the Commons to deal with the significant damage being caused by ash die-back. In the normal course Christine Stott meets arboreal costs. However, the work that will be required over the next few years is exceptional and your Committee has decided that it should contribute to this. A provision of £3,000 has been made in the Accounts and the Committee will consider further contributions as the extent of the work becomes clearer.

If the two exceptional items of the tractor sale in 2020/21 and the tree work this year are disregarded, these Accounts show an improvement. Without these, the Accounts would show a surplus this year of £1,016 against a deficit last year of £1,340. However, this year was a 'light' one for Commons maintenance, with no pond work and other maintenance beyond mowing, bracken and path cutting. This will not be the case every year.

Otherwise, our expenditure was similar to recent years.

I think all will agree that the Commons continue to look better year by year. Our thanks go to Christine and Janet for their planning of the work, to James Jolliffe for his

execution of it and the strimmer operators who help to keep the paths clear in the summer.

At the end of the year the reserves of the Society were £15,322 (2020-21 £17,306). As I commented last year, the surplus is substantial compared to our annual income and costs. It means there are funds available for new projects and also to cover any significant expenditure such as the problem of ash die-back. Given the reserves and the anticipated level of annual costs I did not propose a change the present subscription this year, which has remained the same for more than a decade.

I or other members of the Committee will be happy to answer any questions on the accounts or other matters.

Philip Prettejohn

31 January 2023