

**HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY COMMONS  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

**MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7<sup>th</sup> 2010**

The AGM commenced at 8.00pm, chaired by Linden Bevan-Pritchard, Chairman, and was the 43<sup>rd</sup> in the Society's history.

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

John Caple, Paddy Thomas.

**2 WELCOME**

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, especially any newcomers to the villages. She particularly welcomed John Morris, the guest speaker for the evening, and David Dennis who had brought cards of butterflies for the sale, the proceeds of which would go to the Society.

**3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM (8<sup>th</sup> December 2009)**

The minutes were agreed by the meeting and signed by the Chairman as being a true and correct record of that meeting.

**4 MATTERS ARISING**

The issues of the Commons' Woodland and the Summer Social would be dealt with in the Chairman's report.

**5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The Chairman opened her report by saying that, in order to speed the proceedings, a note of her thanks to those who had helped or been involved with the Society during the year had been distributed with the evening's agendas. A copy of this note is attached as an Annex to these minutes.

The main points of the Chairman's report were:

- The very successful snow sculpture competition in January – an idea of Sarah Clark.
- The social event for the year which took the form of an orienteering day. A change from the more usual party had been thought necessary because of the deteriorating economic situation which, it was felt, would make sponsorship harder to find. The orienteering idea had originated with Sue Phillips who had put in a lot of effort to bring it to fruition. Thames Valley Orienteering Club had been very generous with the provision of equipment and personnel for the event and the Chairman expressed her gratitude to the Club.  
For 2011 the Committee had decided to revert to a party format. Careful planning would be required to ensure that the event did not lose money, but two generous financial offers had already been received.
- The Chairman touched upon some of the things that detract from the Commons – rubbish dumping, trail bikes and travellers. The Chairman pointed out that travellers were a potentially unpleasant issue for Christine to deal with, albeit hopefully with police support. The more residents who rang the police to complain when travellers appeared on the Commons, the quicker they would attend and help get the situation resolved.
- A number of trees on the Commons were succumbing to old age and those adjoining public thoroughfares could not be left to their own devices. Christine was in discussion with the Forestry Commission about a management plan. More details would be made available once plans were firmer.
- The Society had been awarded a "Highly Commended" recommendation for the Chilterns Wildlife and Landscape Award from the Chilterns Conservation Board. The Chairman and Isobel had the pleasure of receiving the award in November.

The Chairman closed her report by hoping that all could continue to enjoy the Commons and remember that we were fortunate to have such a lovely place on the doorstep.

**6. SECRETARY'S REPORT**

The Secretary apologised for the quality of the printing on some of the evening's papers.

He reported on the moth trapping evening that had been held in late August, with David Dennis, Peter Bygate and Alan Bernard dispensing their expertise. A future similar event held earlier in the year would hopefully yield a different range of moth types for examination. Lindsay Griffin's report of the event, and David Dennis' photos of the moths trapped, could be found on the Society's web site.

The Secretary, who was resigning from the Committee, closed by saying it had been a pleasure working with assorted Committee colleagues over the years and wished the new Committee well for the forthcoming year.

## 7. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer opened his remarks by pointing out that the accounts were unaudited owing to a recent accident to the auditor, Adrian Sparks, who had broken his hip. Hopefully, Adrian was on the road to recovery and would be able to audit the accounts in the not too distant future.

Membership numbers were approximately the same as last year, having been significantly lower for much of the year. A concerted effort over the past weeks had resulted in substantial renewals.

There was a motion on the agenda proposing to increase the subscription to £10 per person (from £7.50) – the first increase for seven years and only the second in 20 years.

Grants received during the year amounted to £1,587.69 and covered costs in the accounts that were annotated "Grant Aided".

Insurance costs had increased owing to the increased value of the tractor following its overhaul and the cover for chain saw work.

The expenditure on Commons Clearance was unusually low at £320 since no cutting and collecting had been done this year. The Society would probably need to find a new contractor for the coming year.

The Society's tractor required a further £1,500 of expenditure to complete its overhaul, by which time some £9,000 will have been spent on it. However, a significant proportion of this cost had been covered by grants such that the net cost to the Society was approximately £5,000.

Society reserves stood at £7,052 at the year end.

Following the Treasurer's report, Windsor Thomas congratulated the Committee on overhauling the tractor. It was, in his opinion, the only tractor suitable for use on the Commons.

## 8. VOTING ON MOTIONS

8.1. Amendments to the Society's Rules: Agreed unanimously.

8.2. Increase in subscription to £10 per person: Agreed unanimously.

## 9. ELECTIONS

The Officers and Committee for 2010-11 were elected as follows:

Chairman	Paul Hembury
Vice-Chairman	Linden Bevan-Pritchard
Secretary	Veronica Mash
Treasurer	Mike Fletcher

Committee members:

David Barnard	Lindsay Griffin
John Caple	Mark Hobbs
Steve Cheeld	Sue Phillips
Isobel Clark	

Honorary auditor  
Adrian Sparks

Following his election as Chairman, Paul Hembury made a few remarks before continuing with the elections for the remainder of the Committee. He thanked the outgoing Chairman, Linden Bevan-Pritchard, for her chairmanship during her tenure and remarked on the calm nature that she brought to the Society's affairs. He thanked the outgoing Secretary, Graham Kersting, for his "forensically accurate" minutes of Committee meetings. He also thanked Graham for his work redesigning the Society's web site, which was now very user friendly – where "cyberspace meets charm". Paul presented both Linden and Graham with thumbsticks made by Clive Cary, as mementos.

## 10. DISCUSSION/QUESTION SESSION

- 10.1. Fletcher Nicholson asked whether moving the year end to 31 December and holding the AGM towards the end of March, when the weather might be kinder to prospective attendees, had been considered.

Paul said such a move had been discussed, but had been decided against for a number of reasons including the issues arising from having to have either a very long or very short transitional period at the changeover.

- 10.2. Veronica Mash asked whether there had been more attendees in the past.

Paul responded that the evening's cold weather would have deterred some people from coming out, but that attendance generally was probably more affected by any current contentious issues. Graham said that the previous year's attendance had been around 13 people more than this year, but that numbers had not exceeded 44 since 2000.

- 10.3. David Dennis asked about future plans for the Commons.

Isobel Clark responded to this question, saying that most of the Society's work was maintenance – keeping rides and paths clear, clearing fallen trees/branches, keeping glades open etc. There were no plans at present for additional heather scrapes. Isobel and Christine Stott were talking to the Forestry Commission about how best to manage roadside trees and this might be the subject of a separate meeting once plans were firmer. In commenting on the invasive weed at Pallett's Pond, Isobel said that the black plastic would not be lifted until at least March as it took six months to be effective.

- 10.4. Peter Hall asked about any plans to increase membership.

Paul said that the issue was discussed frequently. Membership had been considerably down for much of the year but had risen in the latter weeks. Much depended on the luck of collectors finding people at home when they went on their rounds. Peter pointed out that, when trying to collect subscriptions, security gates and dogs were making entry to properties increasingly difficult. An automatic payment mechanism would be very helpful.

David Dennis supported the use of direct debit or standing orders to collecting subscriptions.

In discussion it was suggested that the Society's web site could be developed to try and encourage new members.

- 10.5. Fletcher Nicholson asked whether Gift Aid worked with subscriptions.

The answer was "No", since the Society was not a registered charity. Mike Fletcher said that there were a number of practical issues involved in becoming a charity, but the issue could be revisited.

- 10.6. David Dennis said that he thought the Society's web site was great, having looked at it to check the galleries of his moth and butterfly photographs. He suggested that more publicity was needed regarding changes to the web site, perhaps by email.

Paul thought this was a good idea but said that more email addresses of members were needed. [Secretary's note: the attendance list for the evening had asked for both telephone numbers and email addresses.]

During further discussion, Veronica suggested that the villages' Grapevine system could be used to make an initial contact for email addresses. Oliver Parsons said that both the History and Horticultural Societies sent emails to their members, also used Grapevine and then sent reminders. Isobel commented that the Society had been reluctant to send out Grapevine messages in relation to working parties (WPs) in case the volume alienated those residents who were not interested. However, the general view of the meeting was more positive to the idea. Joan Barnard suggested that at least the dates when WPs were taking place could be posted. This could also be a useful warning to riders of areas to avoid if WPs were on or near rides.

In closing this discussion, David Barnard expressed the gratitude of the WP attendees to Lindsay for the regular provision of cake and refreshments.

The formal meeting closed at 21:01.

11. After a break, the Chairman welcomed the evening's speaker – John Morris of the Chiltern Woodlands Project. John gave a very informative talk about the history and nature of Chiltern woodlands with particular reference to the incidence and uses of trees on common land over time.

If you would like more information on this project please see the website:  
[www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/woodlands\\_project](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/woodlands_project)

Or contact: John Morris, Manager, Chiltern Woodlands Project

Tel 01844 355503

Email [woodlands@chilternsaonb.org](mailto:woodlands@chilternsaonb.org)

The informal session closed at 10.10pm.

**My thanks to all those who have given so much help to the Society during the past year**

First of all, I would like to thank **Christine Stott**, the owner of our Commons. Christine does everything that she can to ensure that the Commons are available for visitors to enjoy, whether they are horse riders, walkers or nature lovers. She also supports and encourages us in our efforts to enhance the conditions for the plants and creatures that find a niche in the varied habitats. As the owner of the Commons, Christine has a lot of concerns which have to be resolved, and spends many hours considering the issues that arise.

My thanks also go to all the **members of the Committee**. Each, in different ways, offer particular skills to help maintain the Commons. **Graham Kersting**, who has been our secretary for the past seven years, is resigning from the committee, and I would like to thank him for the meticulous work that he has done, including the updating of the website. We are very grateful that he has offered to continue with this after he has left the Committee. Throughout my three years as Chairman, **Lindsay Griffin** has been a great source of advice and help for me, always there with a thoughtful response to issues. In addition, she is always ready to help organise our events in all kinds of ways. **Isobel Clark**, as you probably know, does a huge amount of work for the Society: mapping the areas for the working parties; organising the working parties; managing the workers; liaising with the Chilterns Conservation Board; securing grants, driving the tractor; helping to ensure that the tractor is functioning – the list could go on. I would like to thank **Mike Fletcher**, who has been our treasurer for such a long time, as well as **Adrian Sparks** who has continued to be our Honorary Auditor.

We are very grateful to **all those who turn out in the winter** for the fortnightly Sunday working parties. The list of helpers is long, and I have thanked those involved in last winter's work parties by email. Together, they achieve a great deal of good work: without them, the Commons would be all woodland in no time. **Lindsay Griffin**, without fail, provides substantial refreshments to give them strength to carry on until lunchtime.

**There are also others who put in a great deal of work outside the working parties**, cutting and clearing fallen trees and branches where they obstruct paths or rides, attending Chilterns Commons Network conferences, printing and distributing Newsletters, organising the annual Litterblitz and carrying out the annual closure of the permissive rides. I would like to thank **Brian Harris, Stephen Cheeld, Jef Bell, David Collett and Isobel**, who all go out on the tractor to keep the paths and rides clear during the summer.

We are very grateful to **Sarah Clark** for her brilliant idea that we should run a snow sculpture competition during the snowy spell last January. Many of us were stranded in the villages and everyone who participated seemed to be enjoying themselves. Maybe it could become an annual event!

I would like to thank **Michael Augur**, who demonstrated the art of coppicing on the chalk bank behind Lindsay Griffin's house. This was another occasion when **Lindsay's** refreshments were very welcome, as the workers had to endure the tail end of an Atlantic storm that had battered the west coast of France.

We are very grateful to **The Hemel Hempstead Conservation Volunteers**, a group of volunteers who offer help at all sorts of local sites where conservation is practised. They are led by **Vicky Duxbury**, who works as the education officer for Groundwork, which is an environmental regeneration charity involved in all kinds of restoration work of urban and countryside sites. Not only did they come in force to help with the coppicing event, but early this autumn, they also helped with clearing some of the unwanted growth in Pallett's Pond.

This year, instead of the Summer Party, we decided that we would hold a different kind of social event. Thanks to an idea of **Sue Phillips**, we decided to have an orienteering event, combined with a traditional village tea and rural craft demonstrations. We would like to thank the **Thames Valley Orienteering Club**, who offered to run our orienteering day on the Commons in June. They very generously supplied all the equipment, maps, instructors and helpers that were needed to make the day a great success, enjoyed by all who came. Many thanks are due to **Sue Phillips**, who made all the arrangements with the Orienteering Club to ensure that her idea was a success. I would like to thank

**Lindsay Griffin** for mounting such a good exhibition celebrating the varied aspects of the Commons, both now and in the past. Thank you to **Sue and Clive Cary**, who demonstrated their skills in lace-making and walking-stick making, also to **Marjorie Brown**, who showed us how to make felt. **Steve Roberts** kindly demonstrated his technique of creating usable lengths of wood from tree trunks with his mobile sawmill. The teas were beautifully managed by a **team of servers and washers-up**, and thanks to everyone who provided cakes and sandwiches for this event. **John and Ann Caple** helped the afternoon to go well, with the provision of many bears for the tombola. Once again, John endured the heat of his bear costume and also brought his restored vintage Ferguson tractor for all to admire. We were grateful to **Paul Nicholson and his Arcadia Trio** for entertaining us all afternoon. The band was housed in a lovely tent inspired by the east, provided for us by **En Route**, the exotic shop at the junction of Vale Road and Berkhamsted Road. Everyone who came appreciated the afternoon, with all generations enjoying a very relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

This July, we invited **Roy Maycock**, the County Recorder for plants in Buckinghamshire, to look at the range of plants that we have on our acid grassland. He found plenty of species typical of this kind of soil, plants such as the white-flowered Heath Bedstraw, which has done particularly well this year, Sheep's Sorrel and Wavy Hair Grass. Acid grassland is not expected to yield rare species, but Roy thought that we have all the typical flora of acid grassland. He spent a good part of a day looking closely at the plants and sent a list of his findings. We thank him for all that he has done.

Many thanks are due to **David Dennis**, who organised a moth-trap on the Commons at the end of August. Moth experts **Peter Bygate** and **Alan Bernard** set up the traps at the woodland edge of Cholesbury Common. Those who gathered were kept warm with three litres of mulled wine, thoughtfully provided by David. In the morning, the traps were opened and all the species were recorded before being set free.

We are fortunate to be able to consult several professionals who give us advice on the best ways to manage the Commons. I would like to thank **Kath Daly** from the Chilterns Conservation Board for all the help she has given and for providing the opportunity to benefit from several generous grants given to us on the basis of match-funding. **Andy McVeigh** works for the County Council as an ecologist and has given us a great deal of useful information, which has helped us to form our views on the management of the acid grassland.

I would like to thank the **production team at the Hilltop News** for printing our articles and publicising events, and **Steve Clark** for managing the website. In the last Hilltop News, I urged you to look at the website, which is very easy to navigate. **Graham Kersting** has done a lot of work to update the website, and, as I said, has offered to continue with this after he has left the Committee.

Finally, but not least important, I want to thank **everyone who supports the Society by becoming a member** and paying a subscription. This money represents a large proportion of our income and is absolutely vital if we are to continue to do the work. I would also like to thank **Ian Phillips** for help and support in new ideas to promote the Society's work and fund-raising efforts.

You can see that this list of thanks is very long. I do hope that I have not forgotten anyone. Thanks to all these volunteers, we are able to carry on looking after the Commons: we rely very much on support from such a wide circle of generous individuals and organisations. I hope that all of you will agree that keeping our Commons in good heart is worthwhile and rewarding. We are so fortunate to have this open space right on our doorstep. Let us continue to nurture and maintain it so that it remains an important part of our community.

Linden Bevan-Pritchard, December 2010