

**HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY COMMONS
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6TH 2006

The AGM commenced at 8.00pm, chaired by Lindsay Griffin, Chairman, and was the 39th in the Society's history.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Anne & John Hawkes, Jenny Parsons, Sue Fletcher, Fletcher & Brenda Nicholson, Linda Wordsworth, Wendy Hutson, David Dennis & Lesley Paton, Ian & Sue Phillips.

2 WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, especially the new members. She extended a special welcome to the evening's speakers – Joan and Margaret Walton and Ron How. Joan had been a founder member of the Society 39 years ago and Ron had been a committee member for 27 years, including 2 stints as chairman and 6 years as vice-chairman. The Chairman commented that David Barnard, the present vice-chairman had just completed 27 years on the committee, having been chairman once and vice-chairman for 8 years.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM (7th December 2005)

The minutes were agreed by the meeting and signed by the Chairman as being a true and correct record of that meeting. (NB. After the meeting, Isobel Clark pointed out that the minutes incorrectly showed 64 hours for maintenance of the tractor and equipment; in fact this was the total hours for skilled volunteer activities, the correct figure for maintenance was 13.5.)

4 MATTERS ARISING

To be dealt with in the Chairman's report:

- Driving on the Commons – also addressed in the discussion session
- Verges – also addressed in the discussion session
- Willow Tree Cottage

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman opened her remarks by stating that the Society had had a productive year. The Commons were in good shape, thanks to the efforts put in, especially by Christine Stott who manages the Commons for all users.

The Chairman thanked a number of people for their continuing support and work:

The HCCPS Committee for its efforts. She remarked that the committee members had mixed skills which blended well. There were 3 members not standing for re-election:

- *Nicola Chaplin* who had resigned because she could not devote enough time to the committee, but still attended working parties and had done a great job behind the bar at the Summer Party.
- *John Garner* who will be doing great things for the 2007 Chelsea Flower Show. John would continue with his good works on the Commons.
- *Mike Wallis* who was a very useful person to have around, being highly practical. Mike did not particularly enjoy committee work but had done a good job.

The working parties without whose efforts it would be impossible to manage the Commons. There were also a lot of others doing practical work on the Commons outside of the formal working party sessions. The Chairman went on to say that none of this would happen without the organisational skills of Isobel Clark. The working

parties were well-managed and well-attended, the two together providing a virtuous circle.

The Chairman next extended her thanks to Carys, who was at the meeting, and Eric Gadsden for allowing the Summer Party to take place in the grounds of their house, Hawridge Place. The event had proved that it was possible to hold the Summer Party without needing to go into the hosts' house. A further bonus to the Party had been the level of sponsorship achieved from local businesses – this had exceeded all expectations with around £800 in cash and about the same in kind being received. The people attending the party had seemed to enjoy it and the event had had a real village-do feel.

The Chairman thanked the party sub-committee (John Cooper, John Garner, Steve Cheeld and Lindsay Griffin) who had worked extremely hard on the organisation. She also thanked all those who had helped in the setting up, serving food and drink and the clearing up afterwards.

The Chairman remarked that the Society had had help from members of the community, eg by donations of money, or by giving time to guide walks:

- David Dennis who led the butterfly walk. Charts to assist in butterfly identification were for sale at the meeting for £3 each.
- Roy Maycock who checks the plants on the Commons, and
- Clive Carey who guides fungi walks.

Looking to future guided walks on the Commons, an ornithologist had offered to lead a walk to listen to bird song at 7:00am one morning. A show of hands indicated a considerable interest in this.

The Society had recently been offered a grant by the Chilterns Conservation Board, up to a maximum of £2,081. Thanks were due to Isobel Clark who had worked hard putting the application together.

In concluding her remarks of thanks, the Chairman thanked Hilltop News (unfortunately the current edition advertising the AGM had been delayed), and Steve Clark for updating the web site.

The Chairman then moved on to work done and issues arising during the year:

- The ash tree opposite Benton Potts had been felled at a cost of £595.
- Commons regulations were being flouted by a few users – still the occasional horse rider, but the major problem at present was bike riders. The bike riders were going along the bottom ride and were difficult to deal with since, if the ride was open for horses, it was not very easy to stop bikes. New signs were being put up and physical barriers had been considered but these may only present a challenge to the riders. CCTV had also been thought about but would be expensive and could be technically complicated. Views of the audience on this issue would be welcomed in the plenary session of the meeting.
- Verges – work outside the Village Hall, the Cricket Club, at Rays Hill and opposite the school had improved matters. But as one area was improved, the problem moved elsewhere – often to the other side of the road. This was another subject that would be considered in the plenary session.
- Willow Tree Cottage (WTC) – this was still an ongoing issue. A letter in January 2005 from Mike Shires at Chiltern District Council (CDC) had said that enforcement action in respect of the gabion wall at WTC would be considered at a forthcoming planning meeting. The Society had written in response stating, amongst other things, that it supported any action that restored any common land to its rightful state. Alison Grief (WTC owner) had written to CDC reiterating her lawyer's advice regarding permitted development rights and the fact that there was no case law on this issue. CDC had then written to say that the matter was

under further review and would not now be considered at the February or March planning meetings. Apparently Mike Shires is no longer dealing with the case and although the Kings have written several times to ascertain the current position there has been no substantive response from CDC. Given the current position, the Chairman did not think the issue was worth discussing at the AGM.

In conclusion the Chairman asked for suggestions as to how the Society might celebrate its 40th birthday in 2007.

6 SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Secretary reported that there had been five committee meetings during the year and no extraordinary meetings.

The Secretary also thanked those involved in organising the Summer Party.

Another successful litterblitz week had again been held but the Council had collected the rubbish bags before a total count could be taken!

During the year there had been correspondence regarding parking on the Commons, repair of the verges, and an extension to the Cricket Club patio area.

7 TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer opened his remarks by stating that the Society's financial position was sound. The annual accounts had been approved by the Committee and signed by the Honorary Auditor. The surplus for the year was £1,499.19. Cash of £810 had been received from various sponsors. The Treasurer congratulated the Chairman on the organisation of the Summer Party and thanked John Garner for arranging the venue with Eric and Carys Gadsden.

The Treasurer reported that members' numbers were down slightly from 161 to 156.

Subscriptions remained at £7.50 per person for the coming year.

The £595 of "Other donations" included donations from residents in respect of felling the ash tree and repairing the verges, and from the Vale of Aylesbury Hunt following the Boxing Day meet.

The Society's total funds now stood at £9,621.26, mainly for the replacement of the tractor in due course. Of this amount, £9,182 was invested with Standard Life.

The Treasurer commented that it was good news that the Society would be receiving a grant from the Chilterns Conservation Board. He thanked Isobel Clark for organising the application.

The Treasurer concluded by thanking Adrian Sparkes, the Honorary Auditor, who was willing to stand again.

In response to a question regarding the liability of £,1,011 for invoices awaited, the Treasurer explained that this represented amounts of £866 for commons clearance, the invoice for which had not been received until mid-November, and £144 for the hire of the school for the 2004 Summer Party.

8 ELECTIONS

The Officers and Committee for 2006-07 were elected as follows:

Chairman	Lindsay Griffin
Vice-Chairman	David Barnard
Secretary	Graham Kersting
Treasurer	Mike Fletcher

Committee members:

Linden Bevan-Pritchard

Steve Cheeld
Isobel Clark
John Cooper
Paul Hembury

Honorary auditor
Adrian Sparkes

9 MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

Motor cycles on the Commons

There was general, but inconclusive, discussion. Sheila Davies from Berkhamsted said that she had encountered a similar problem locally and had taken a note of the registration numbers of accompanying vehicles and reported these to the police. Whilst the police had taken action in some instances, it had not solved the problem entirely. CCTV would not necessarily help if the bikes did not have registration numbers – the coloured suits of the riders may not be enough to identify them. Physical barriers, if they worked, might only serve to move the bikes to alternative routes on the Commons. Margaret Walton wondered if the route was being circulated in the internet. In response to a question about how often the bikes appeared, the Chairman commented that they were sporadic but had been seen on three successive weekends recently. Sheila said that she would supply the registration numbers of the vehicles she had seen. The Chairman concluded the discussion by asking for any help or information that people could give.

Verges

The Chairman opened the discussion by asking for any comments on what the Society should do about the verges and commented that the Committee had had a lot of discussion on this topic. The Society had been under pressure to take down the signs and remove the brash from the repaired area by the school – allegedly there are a number of people who want this but very few have come forward to the Society. The Chairman observed that having made the investment in the repair, it would be silly to remove the brash before the ground had settled.

Brian Harris suggested asking the parents to stop parking on the verges – but this has been tried before was the response. A further problem was the poor quality of the reinstatement work carried out by Thames Water. The Chairman asked Brian to let the Committee know of any such areas.

The issue of placing stones or logs on the verges to deter parking was raised. It was pointed out that Christine Stott (the Lord of the Manors) could not give permission for this and that any such instances would be at the householder's risk.

As regards the Full Moon, whilst acknowledging that there had been some improvements, the verge on the other side of the road from the pub was in a very poor state in places. David Barnard thought that pressure should be put on the pub to improve its car parking arrangements even if this meant leasing additional land.

Christine Stott asked how people would feel about having edges to the road sides? There were mixed views on this, some thought that this would spoil the rural nature of the area, whilst others thought it would help restrict the width of the carriageways even though edges may not entirely prevent vehicles driving over them. Tim Watts from Kingston Cottage thought that the road had widened by some 12-18 inches in the 2 years that he had been resident.

John Cooper commented that the road outside his house was widening daily to the extent that the weight of traffic is now breaking pipes under the verges and the resultant leaks are causing dampness in his house.

Paul Hembury said that the water pipes were old and very close to the surface. A vicious circle developed whereby leaking pipes made the ground wetter and softer, which meant that it was easier for cars to break the pipes.

As regards the funding of edges for the road sides, Lindsay Griffin thought that it was unlikely that the Highways Agency would pay, but some residents might be willing to pay for the edges outside their own houses,

Isobel Clark remarked that although road side edges may simply be driven over – as happens at the lay-by by the school – they do delineate the road and give a marker up to which the edge of the road surface can be reinstated.

Rick Holroyd said that kerbs and/or granite setts were not for him as they would detract from the rural feeling of the area. He would prefer built-up edges.

Lindsay Griffin said that one option might be to treat the manorial waste side of the road differently from the commons side – the former might use some form of barrier, whilst the latter could have built-up edges. Further views were welcome outside of the meeting

The formal meeting closed at 21:25.

After a break for refreshments there was a panel session where three speakers – Margaret Walton, Joan Walton and Ron How – recalled some of their memories of the area.

Margaret Walton

Margaret recalled the time before World War II. She had been born at Vale Farm, Hawridge, where her father had been a farmer. There had been a well outside what is now Jenny and Oliver Parsons' home. Her father had used to graze cattle on the commons. The cattle had eaten the young tree shoots with the result that it was possible to see from Heath End down the fields and across to the school.

At school, all activities had been in school or on the common – with sports days being held on the common. During this time the commons had less bracken – it would have been damaged by children playing and animals grazing. Also rabbits would have nibbled the shoots.

During the war there was a search light position at Hawridge Court, possibly as part of the defence for Bovingdon airfield. The USAF had an outpost (of its Bovingdon base) by the cricket pitch. There was also an air-raid shelter just off Horseblock Lane, which was only for use by the school children and teachers. A large dent still marks its position.

Also during the war doodlebugs fell in the area – one on a Wednesday, at around 16:55, just in front of Glebe House in Heath End and the other on a Thursday at around 11:30 in a field just beyond Tankards Dene.

Joan Walton

Joan had also been born at Vale Farm and had moved to her present house when she was about 3 years old.

Joan had been a founder member of the Commons Preservation Society. The Society had been formed with the introduction of the 1965 Commons Registration Act which had required all common land to be registered. Joan had been the Chairman of the Parish Council at the time and opened the inaugural meeting of the Society on 12 October 1967 with over 50 people present. Peter Knowles-Brown of Braziers End had been elected Chairman of the Society and an annual subscription of 10 shillings had been set. Joan still had a set of minutes from the inaugural meeting. There had been a fear that common land would be taken over if it was not properly registered. When determining which properties had rights that could be registered, one of the main criteria was whether the owners had been liable to pay rates to the poor of more than £4 in 1867.

The first annual party of the Society had been a bonfire party near the Full Moon with wood from the commons. The format had changed to a garden party when the event became too large to control properly and fireworks became very expensive.

Ron How

Ron had moved to the area (what used to be the turkey farm at Woodlands Farm in The Vale) on 8 February 1943. He had come into contact with the Society some six months after it had been formed when a tractor was needed. Before the war grazing cows used to keep the trees down as well as eating weeds and grass, however after the war this was no longer the case.

In his time in the area, Ron had taken many photos showing the commons clear of trees. The commons used to catch fire frequently in summer, which also helped to keep the commons clear of trees – but the fire brigade always came along to put the fire out!

One of the first implements the Society had bought was a swipe which, he understood, was still in service today. From October until March there had been a working party every Sunday morning.

Driving the tractor on the commons with bracken 4-5 feet high when spraying was “very hairy” owing to the slopes and rabbit holes. “Agrilux” had been used to spray the bracken and some Japanese knotweed (which had first been found some 20 or so years ago).

At the annual parties, the fireworks had been launched from just below the cricket pitch with the bonfire halfway between the pitch and the Full Moon. However, as Joan had already commented, the rising cost of fireworks made the cost of this type of party prohibitive.

In closing his remarks, Ron noted that when Tom Haggerty was treasurer, he had also kept the tractor fund separate from other monies, much as Mike Fletcher does now.

The informal session closed at 22:27.