

**HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY COMMONS
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5TH 2007

The AGM commenced at 8.00pm, chaired by Lindsay Griffin, Chairman and was the 40th in the Society's history.

1 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the AGM, particularly the guest speakers – John Willson (Member of the Chilterns Conservation Board, Chairman of the Chilterns Commons Network, resident of Downley and member of the local Commons Society) and Kath Daly (Countryside Officer with the Chilterns Conservation Board).

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Gill Fleckney, John and Anne Caple, John and Ann Hawkes, Steve Clark, Windsor & Paddy Thomas.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM (6th December 2006)

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

4 MATTERS ARISING

To be dealt with in the Chairman's report – Willow Tree Cottage.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman opened her report by saying that because of the very full agenda she had produced a note of thanks this year so as to shorten the time needed for her to speak (a copy is attached at Annex A).

Logistical issues

The Chairman commented that it was quite difficult being the Committee since local residents have very different ideas on what should, or should not, happen and how the Commons should be run. She said that the phone calls of complaint should not make us lose sight of the good things – the many events that are held (the fete, butterfly and bird walks, and, this year, the archaeology dig) and the fact that we all live in a lovely part of the world with 105 acres of very varied habitat in which to walk, run, ride etc.

The Chairman remarked that there seemed to have been fewer hassles this year – no kids on trail bikes or gypsies, for example.

The Commons received lots of visitors which was good, but carried its downside in the parking and associated damage to the Commons. She reiterated that nobody has any right to park on the Commons since, despite not being urban Commons, s193 legislation did apply (Malcolm Stewart had dedicated the Commons even though he did not need to). However, the villages would grind to a halt if the "no parking" rule was strictly enforced. The most lasting remedy to prevent parking damage was that used outside the Village Hall, but this was very expensive on a large scale and it was doubtful if the funds or the will would be available.

Plants and Animals

The Chairman went on to comment on the plants and animals.

- There has been an increase in the number of rarer species – fine herbs and fine grasses – due to a lot of hard work, but the trees are getting bigger and more mature and creating their own problems. The costs associated with felling trees were quite prohibitive.

- The last studies of birds had been carried out in 1977 and 1981. There were no accurate studies of animals on the Commons. The Chairman said that she would like to see the bird studies updated and an animal study carried out.

As regards the Society's finances, Mike Fletcher would be talking in detail in his report, but the Chairman commented that costs were escalating and the Society had to run to stand still so to speak.

Willow Tree Cottage update

The Chairman had reported last year that Alison Grief and Martin King (AG/MK), the owners of Willow Tree Cottage (WTC), had written to Chiltern District Council (CDC) regarding the proposed enforcement action which would have resulted in the demolition of the gabion wall. AG/MK had said that their advice was that they had Permitted Development Rights (PDRs) and consequently CDC had put the enforcement action on hold to seek further legal advice of its own. CDC's Counsel had recently stated that he agreed with the advice given to AG/MK regarding PDRs, but noted that the situation may be different under Commons law. However, it was extremely unlikely that any action for enforcement under Commons law would succeed due to the passage of time. CDC would not be taking any action although it would be open for an affected individual to do so. The Chairman commented that the Society was not in a financial position to mount a challenge.

6 SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Secretary said that there had been 5 Committee meetings during the year and no extraordinary meetings.

The summer party had been led at Hawridge Place on 7th July and, although he had been unable to go himself, reported that a good time had been had by those attending.

A bird walk had been held on 6th May, led by John Kilpatrick and Francesca Greenoak, for a number of hardy souls that met at 7am.

A butterfly walk had been held on 12th August, led again by David Dennis.

7 TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer opened his remarks by saying that members numbered 167, including 18 new members. The Summer Party had been successful both socially and financial and had made a surplus of £1,500.

The Society was very grateful for the grant of £2,081, negotiated by Isobel with Kath Daly of the Chilterns Conservation Board. This had been used for heather regeneration, pond clearance, a chainsaw course and stump grinding.

The tractor had incurred more expense during the year.

The Treasurer thanked Adrian Sparkes for his audit work and said that Adrian was willing to stand again for the coming year.

John Garner questioned the £400/day for the cost of the chainsaw course – he thought this seemed rather excessive. Mike said this cost was the standard fee and did include a discount. Joan Barnard asked how many people went on the course, to which the answer was 4. Kath Daly confirmed that this level of fee was a fairly standard charge.

8 REVISION OF THE SOCIETY'S AIMS

The Chairman introduced the motion to amend the Society's Aims (copy attached at Annex B). In her introduction she commented in respect of:

- current Aim 2 – that the Road Traffic Act does not apply to the Commons and this reference was therefore redundant; and

- current Aim 5 – that whilst nominations to the Parish and District Councils was a worthy aim the Society had never knowingly sent anyone to either Council. In terms of reporting back the activities of Council meetings, several Society members are also Council members and could report back if necessary.

The motion was proposed by David Barnard, seconded by John Garner and approved by the meeting.

9 PRESENTATIONS

Presentations to Lindsay were made by Christine Stott and David Barnard to mark the end of her three years as Society Chairman.

10 ELECTIONS

David Barnard took over as Chairman of the meeting for the election of the new Chairman. Linden Bevan-Pritchard was elected Chairman and duly took over as Chairman of the meeting.

The Officers and Committee for 2007-08 were elected as follows:

Chairman	Linden Bevan-Pritchard
Vice-Chairman	Lindsay Griffin
Secretary	Graham Kersting
Treasurer	Mike Fletcher

Committee members:

David Barnard
Steve Cheeld
Isobel Clark
John Cooper
John Caple
Paul Hembury
Sue Phillips

Honorary auditor
Adrian Sparkes

11 ISOBEL CLARK – Hawridge & Cholesbury Commons: their importance and work done

Isobel explained that it was almost 10 years since the Commons had been designated as a County Wildlife Site. This status was one step down from a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Various criteria were used to judge the designation:

- Diversity – the range of plants
- Rarity – ie. Rare for Buckinghamshire (eg. Acid grasslands and heathland)
- Fragility – how sensitive a place is to damage or development. Acid grasslands are quite sensitive if grazing stops – trees grow and different plants take hold.
- Typicalness – most of the Chilterns are chalk, but here it is clay with flints overlying chalk. Hence the different habitats from the rest of the Chilterns.

Particularly special plants were pill sedge, heath grass, wavy hair grass, heather, heath bedstraw, field woodrush and sheep's sorrel.

The greater the variety of plants, the wider the range of animal life that is found. Butterflies found on the Commons include the Purple Hairstreak, the White-letter hairstreak (now one of the 16 most rare butterflies in the UK), Small Skipper, Small Copper and the Silver-washed Fritillary. A large selection of moths and insects are also found on the Commons, both of which form an important part of the food chain.

As regards birds, the yellow hammer, dunnoek, redwing, greater spotted woodpecker, tawny owl, buzzard, red kite are amongst those found. The herbivore population includes

rabbit, muntjac, glis glis, grey squirrel, whilst the carnivorous population includes fox, hedgehog, pipistrelle bat and badger.

All of these interdependencies needed to be considered when managing the Commons, where the objectives include to:

- enhance the quality of the grassland by suitable management;
- extend the grassland by pushing back the edges of the woodland;
- regenerate heather by removal of thatch and seed spreading;
- keep the rides wide and glades open, with short grasses at the edge and longer grasses in the middle to help butterflies;
- leave dead wood standing and create log piles for beetles and other invertebrates.

The formal meeting finished at 21:15.

Guest Speaker Presentations

Following a refreshment break Kath Daly and John Willson gave presentations.

Kath Daly, of the Chilterns Conservation Board, spoke on the Conservation Board, the Chilterns Commons and the Chilterns Commons Network.

From a County and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) perspective, the various commons are significant. The AONB is 833km², contains 70,000 residents, covers 10 District councils, 4 County Councils and one Unitary Council. The statutory purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area and to promote understanding and enjoyment of special facilities. The Chilterns now contain 2000ha of common land and 187 registered commons. All commons are of significant social benefit, and all suffer from a range of common issues – lack of grazing, fly tipping and encroachment.

The Commons Network has 22 groups with landowners being represented. There are some 280 on the Network mailing list and this is a way of exchanging information on managing commons in the present day.

John Willson is a member of the Chilterns Conservation Board, Chairman of the Chilterns Commons Network, a resident of Downley and a member of the local Downley Commons Preservation Society. The main points of John's presentation and subsequent questions are summarised below:

- Downley is on the north-west side of High Wycombe, some 2 miles from the town centre.
- Downley Common is 20 ha (55 acres) and links to Naphill Common.
- The Preservation Society produced a village map with the village at the middle and all relevant organisations around the outside.
- Downley Common has both gorse and heather, and about 2 acres of non-intervention areas are maintained.
- A brick kiln has been found and clay pits were known.
- A book on the archaeology of Downley Common has recently been published.
- Football is played on the Common.
- A "Beating the Bounds" walk is held every year. 100 or so people usually take part, finishing at the local pub (Le Despencers Arms).

- “Downley Day” is the summer fete which is held over a weekend and includes a wood-turning demonstration.
- A bonfire on November 5th is used to get rid of conservation work cuttings.
- The Society has started to use saws and axes for tree felling instead of chain saws. A tractor and flail are used for cutting grass and brambles.
- John could see a lot of parallels with Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons, but there were differences due to the proximity of High Wycombe and, also, Downley was a smaller area but had more people to choose from.
- Downley Common was owned by Sir Edward Dashwood and formed part of the Dashwood Estate.

In closing, the Chairman thanked the speakers for their interesting talks.

DRAFT

Chairman's Report AGM December 2007

Chairman's Thanks

Firstly, I would like to thank **Christine** for all that she does for the Commons, much of which goes largely unacknowledged and unreported. She continues to manage the Commons in a way that allows us all to enjoy them even-handedly whether as walkers, riders, cricketers, etc.

I also need to thank **the members of the Committee** who have worked very hard throughout the year. Again, though we often differ in our opinions, we have been able to offer a variety of interests and skills to the job in hand and we have tried to represent the community at large. Each member has been prepared to take on many different jobs whenever necessary. I am happy to say that all are prepared to stand for re-election.

I would also like to thank **the office bearers** who have been reliable and efficient and so have made my job as Chairman very much easier. In particular, I would like to thank David Barnard. Whilst he is prepared to stay on the committee, David would prefer to stand down as Vice-Chairman. David has been a member of the committee for 28 years and has taken on the role of Chairman for three years and nine as Vice-Chairman. As well as his work on the committee David has been a staunch member of the working parties and the management subcommittee, as well as taking on many other jobs - an amazing record!

The Working Parties It is also vital to thank the working parties, without whom managing the work on the Commons, would be impossible. Because the WPs are well organised and are well attended they manage to get through an enormous amount of work and apparently enjoy themselves while they are at it!! For example last Sunday, when it was pouring rain and the wind blowing a gale, there were eight of them working apparently oblivious to the weather with a bonfire going!

I would also like to thank those members (I can't name them all) who tend to **work independently** from the working parties but who also put in a great many hours keeping the Commons in good shape either **mowing, chopping, chainsawing, emailing, fixing equipment, clearing paths; cutting stumps; starting the bonfire in sometimes almost impossible situations; giving advice.**

Again, I would like to thank the **Hemel Hempstead Volunteers** who have paid their annual visit and cleared much of the blackthorn scrub by Mermaid Cottage. This was very much appreciated.

In particular, we need to thank **Isobel** for the enormous amount of time and effort which she puts into the management of the working parties and into co-ordinating all of this work. We are very much indebted to her.

We also need to thank those who were associated with **raising funds** to enable us to carry out the work that we need to do. Much of this was associated with the **Summer Party**. Again, this was a huge combined effort.

Firstly, we need to thank **Eric and Carys Gadsden for allowing us to hold Party in their grounds.** There is no doubt that such a beautiful environment added a huge cachet to the evening. They were excellent hosts and we benefited enormously by having such pleasant surroundings and a safe venue for the children.

We were again fortunate in having the support of the **following local businesses and individuals** who willingly sponsored the Party financially or in other ways. Their contributions also greatly added to the atmosphere and the success of the party:-**Bellingdon End Farm Shop; George Brown's; Chesham Marquees; Chiltern Motors; The Full Moon; David Hawkes; H&C Cricket Club; LRG Insurance (Commercial); G and MB**

Manning; HG Matthews; MT Loos; Paul Nicholson and his band; Ellie Redding; The Rose and Crown; Savill's

Without a doubt, a real asset at this year's party was **The Cholesbury Swing Quintet** who quite literally played for their supper! The band added enormously to the happy, relaxed atmosphere and the good news is that **they are prepared to come again!**

I like to think that the Founding Members would have approved of the party since one of their aims to foster community spirit. Again its success was due to the **combined efforts of many local people** who so willingly helped in a great variety of ways, far too numerous to list in full. These included 2 **excellent sub-committees** who did the pre-planning; worked their socks off and who for at least a week before the event vowed they **ARE NEVER GOING TO DO IT AGAIN!** (..until it all went off reasonably smoothly and we saw the pleasure of the guests). Thank you to all those who **provided food or served it; those who decorated marquees; fetched and carried; printed tickets/signs; provided raffle prizes; sold tickets/drinks; and did the washing up etc. etc!**

Whilst we could possibly break even financially at the summer party with present numbers; members providing food; etc, there is no doubt that the **Zing** of the evening was due to having a **good venue; the good will** of so many locals and **back-up** funds, which allowed us to take a few risks with spending.

A truly tremendous effort. Thank you all.

We have also had considerable support **other individuals or groups** who have helped in a variety of ways. For example, **David Burns** not only cleared the large ash tree, which had fallen across the path leading from Stoney Lane to the Rose and Crown, but he also felled the very large dying beech tree opposite the Old Smithy. This was work which we couldn't afford to do on our own and very much appreciated.

We are also lucky to have **experts** like **David Dennis; John Kilpatrick and Francesca Greenoak; Clive Carey and Roy Maycock** who are willing to conduct walks on the Commons and show us aspects of the Commons that we might not see by ourselves or to give us advice.

We are also grateful to organisations such as the Chiltern Conservation Board and the Chilterns Commons Network for providing advice and opportunities to learn more about the management of our own Commons and the work of others nearby.

Lastly, I would like to thank the **Hilltop** News for publicity, **Graham Kersting** for the work that he is doing on the website and **Steve Clark** for regularly updating it
www.cholesburv.com/hccps.htm

Lindsay Griffin
December 2007

HCCPS Aims and Rules 2007

Motion:- That we accept the following changes to the Society's Aims. Proposed David Barnard; seconded Lindsay Griffin.

Delete previous Aims 2 and Aim 5

Original Aim 2:- To enforce the law under the road Traffic Act, 1960

Original Aim 5:- To nominate a member for election to Parish and District Councils.

Amended Aims:-

1. To protect the Commons, keep the footpaths and permissive rides clear and enhance the Commons' ecological value.*

***(ecological value: A measure of the significance or interest of an area of land as a habitat supporting species of flora and fauna.)**

2. To preserve the Commons as a natural sanctuary for wildlife and, noting their special status as a Local Wildlife Site, to enhance their biodiversity.**

**** (biological diversity: "the variety of life forms, the ecological roles they perform, and the genetic diversity they contain")**

New Aim:-

3. To develop and implement the plan for the management of the Commons.

Amended Aims:-

4. To keep the Commons clear of rubbish.

5. To keep a watching brief on matters related to legislation which may affect the Commons.

6. To give the Society's views to the appropriate person or body on any development which might affect the natural beauty of the area.

7. To hold an annual Social Occasion to enable members and others who live locally to get to know each other.