

**HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY COMMONS  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

**MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008**

The AGM commenced at 8.00pm, chaired by Linden Bevan-Pritchard, Chairman, and was the 41<sup>st</sup> in the Society's history.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Christine Stott, Windsor Thomas, Jenny Parsons, Fletcher & Brenda Nicholson.

2 WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, especially any newcomers. She particularly welcomed the guest speakers for the evening Margaret Jarrett and Jenni Hignett.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM (5<sup>th</sup> December 2007)

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 issue with trail bikes seemed to have abated – hopefully the signs in this regard are helping.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman opened her report by thanking those who had helped the Society in various ways:

- Christine Stott, the owner of the Commons, for everything that she does to ensure that all can enjoy them in so many different ways.
- The members of the Committee, who work so hard during the year. In her first year as Chairman, Linden had been very grateful for all the advice and help that they have given.
- Working party attendees – too numerous to mention by name – were given a big thank you. Thanks also to Lindsay for providing the refreshments for these sessions.
- Ian Phillips for his help with encouraging those who follow an exercise regime to use the working parties as an opportunity to get fit in the fresh air.
- Windsor Thomas for his generous help with repairs to the tractor.
- Particular thanks to Isobel, who worked so hard to co-ordinate and manage the work that is done, much of the planning goes on behind the scenes. Not only did Isobel spend many hours planning and mapping out the projected work and attending working parties, she also spent considerable time using the tractor on the Commons.
- Other people put in a great number of hours outside the regular working parties, mowing, clearing paths, chain sawing, mending equipment, closing the permissive rides for one day a year, printing Newsletters or managing the heather restoration project. Jef Bell cuts grass at the Cholesbury end of the Commons, Brian Harris looks after the bottom ride, Stephen Cheeld has cut invading undergrowth underneath the big beech trees in Hawridge, David Collett had been trained this year to cut grass with the tractor and Mike Wallis had cut grass from The Row to Mermaid Cottage.
- Oliver Parsons, who not only helped with working parties, but, with Christine's consent, and the help of some neighbours, had worked on weak/leaning trees on the edges of Pound Lane.
- Hemel Hempstead Volunteers, who came to help the Society annually. This year, they had come to help on two occasions – July, to weaken bracken fronds by breaking them and to dig out little gorse seedlings that would eventually overshadow the heather plants, and September, to help clear Pallett's Pond.

The main fund-raising event of the year was the Summer Party. The Chairman thanked everyone who helped to make it such a success:

- Eric and Carys Gadsden for hosting the party. They were very welcoming and generous hosts.
- Local businesses and individuals, who had supported the party financially or in other ways: Chiltern Motors, The Full Moon, Dave Cox Engineering, The Rose and Crown, LRG Insurance, En Route in Chesham, George Brown's agricultural supplies, Savills Estate Agents, MT Loos, Ellie Redding, Vineyard Foods, David Hawkes, Nanette Street and Paul Nicholson and The Cholesbury Quintet.

- The party sub-committee that did the planning, those who helped to set up marquees, arrange decorations, fetched tables and chairs, arranged parking, printed tickets and signs, roped off the pond and provided raffle prizes. She also thanked those who, on the day, provided food, sold raffle tickets and drinks, served the supper and helped to clear everything up.
- Francis Sanger for being Master of Ceremonies.
- Joan Barnard who had taken much of the cutlery and dishes home to wash.
- Sandra and Peter Broom of the Rose and Crown, who had taken the remaining crockery to the pub for washing.

The Chairman went on to thank:

- the local experts who were happy to share their knowledge – David Dennis led a butterfly walk and Clive Carey conducted a fungus foray; and
- The Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chiltern Commons Network who provided advice and opportunities to learn about the management of our own Commons and the work of others nearby.

In closing this section of her report, the Chairman thanked the Hilltop News for publicity, Graham Kersting for the improvements that he has made to our website and Steve Clark for updating it on a regular basis.

The Chairman moved on to talk about the issues and events of the year, noting that the Commons are for the whole community which comprised several different groups of users – walkers, joggers, horse-riders, the Cricket Club, the Schools Cross Country Race, which is permitted to hold an annual event, the Church Fete is held on the Commons each year and the Hunt meets on Boxing Day.

The Chairman commented that she saw no incompatibility between looking after the Commons for the visitors and caring for the land in a way that enhances the diversity of species, from fungi to plants, birds, amphibians and mammals.

She noted the diversity of views on how the Commons should be managed – some felt that too much woodland had been allowed to grow, while others would like nature to take its course. The 105 acres of Commons provided a diverse range of habitats that allow for a greater range of species, as well as different experiences for the people who visit.

The Chairman explained that the reason that grass was collected after cutting was to improve the acid grassland that has been identified as a rare habitat in Buckinghamshire. If cuttings were left, they would make the ground too rich, encouraging rank and coarse grass to grow at the expense of plants that thrive on poorer soil. These are the fine grasses and flowering plants that give parts of the Commons such a beautiful sheen in the summer and their presence has earned the Commons a designation as a County Wildlife Site.

### Verges

The Chairman noted that parents who drive to the school were now parking on the school side of the road, making it much safer for the children and ensuring that cars could pass safely through the school pick-up area. However, problems were still occurring in other parts of the Commons. The road was slowly becoming wider in places and residents had experienced problems with heavy vehicles driving over edges previously protected by common land, with consequent damage to water pipes. The Society had decided that the most inconspicuous deterrent to driving onto the verges was to continue to bank up the edges with earth. This was time consuming and costly, so would have to be progressed on an “as and when” basis.

### Boxing Day Meet

The Chairman observed that in recent years, the Hunt meet that occurs on Boxing Day has become much more popular – partly because two hunts had combined and partly because many people came out from surrounding towns and villages to enjoy the traditional spectacle.

The Society had been working with the Hunt organisers to ensure that the event went ahead with as little disruption as possible, realising that, for some, the event caused inconvenience. To facilitate access to the village for other users, the Society had asked that there should be parking on one side of the road only and the organisers would endeavour to identify parking places away from the Commons.

### Pound Lane

The Chairman said that in common with many areas around the county, there had been problems with falling branches and leaning trees in Pound Lane, particularly after the snow that fell in October. Thanks to Oliver and Jenny Parsons, and with Christine’s agreement, some of the

residents who live near that part of Hawridge Common had removed some weak branches and coppiced small trees along the edge of Pound Lane.

#### Tractor

The Chairman went on to talk about the tractor had served the Society very well for many years, but the Committee was now considering the restoration of the existing vehicle or the purchase of a replacement vehicle. It had taken since 1987 to accumulate enough for the Society to consider this course of action.

#### Summer Party

In commenting on the Summer Party, the Chairman said that in the past this was held mainly as a social function, but in recent years, the Society had needed to raise considerable funds to accomplish all the tasks that need to be done on the Commons. Given the economic climate, it was unclear whether the generous sponsorship received in previous years could be expected in the coming year. Whilst the price of the tickets could be increased, this would be unlikely to compensate for possible shortfalls in financial support. The issue to be considered was whether we really wanted to have a party or should some other way of raising funds be found? The Chairman thought that it would be helpful to have a discussion on this question during the evening. The Summer Party involved an immense amount of work and the question was whether this was the most productive way of using time and energy.

### 6 SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Secretary reported that there had been five committee meetings during the year and one extraordinary meeting to consider options for the tractor.

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

### 7 TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer opened his remarks by reporting that members were down to 156 from 167. The summer party had been very successful making £1,086 profit (2007: £1,651). The fall in profit from the previous year was due to lower ticket sales and higher costs. He thanked all those involved.

Interest received during the year had increased slightly but was expected to reduce in the coming year.

A sum of £1,200 had been included in expenditure as a provision for cutting and collecting of grass and the installation of posts that had still to be carried out, since the ground had been too wet to allow the work to be finished

Overall the surplus for the year was about £200 – much the same as the previous year.

Reserves were healthy and sufficient to allow for a replacement of the Society's tractor shortly.

The Treasurer concluded by saying that membership subscriptions were being maintained at £7.50 per person or £15.00 per family.

### 8 ELECTIONS

The Officers and Committee for 2008-09 were elected as follows:

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

Committee members:

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

Honorary auditor

Adrian Sparkes

## 9 DISCUSSION/QUESTION SESSION

The Chairman opened this session by thanking Paul Hembury for arranging the evening's refreshments.

1. Tim Watts suggested that if the aim of the party was to raise money then the same result could be achieved, without the work, by doubling the subscription.
2. Were sponsorships tax deductible by the sponsor? – Yes.
3. How much is the Society expecting to pay for a replacement tractor, and how much will be left in the fund? *The fund was around £10,000 and various options were being explored at the present time so that a definitive answer could not be given – but £10,000 was the limit.*
4. Has the Society asked the Chilterns Sustainable Development Fund for a grant? *Not yet.*
5. A suggestion was made that an ongoing programme to raise funds with an option to win a prize should be considered; however, this could give rise to potential lottery/gambling legal issues.
6. When asked if the summer party would be missed, there was little response from the audience.
7. John Cooper wondered whether the party tickets were significantly under-priced, particularly children's tickets at £6. This view was supported by Lindsay Griffin, who added that the event was originally a social event, but now the Society needed to make money to fund its activities. Isobel suggested that decoupling social events from fund raising ought to be considered.
8. John Garner asked whether the Society should be taking a bucket collection around the Boxing Day Hunt meet. The Committee's view was that the Hunt should do more for the Society by way of a donation, noting that nothing had been paid for the 2007 meet. Various offers were made to take buckets around the Hunt meet but Mike Fletcher pointed out that this would detract from the Hunt giving the Society a donation.
9. A runner commented that there were more hoof marks on the footpaths lately. Isobel responded that signage wasn't as good as it had been a few years ago, but it was planned to improve this.

The formal meeting closed at 21:06

- 10 After a break, the first of the evening's speakers, Margaret Jarrett, spoke about bringing cattle back to Chorleywood Common. Margaret was a councillor with Chorleywood Parish Council, chaired the Open Spaces Committee and was a member of the Chilterns Conservation Board. Chorleywood Common was around 200 acres, with a mix of woodland and grassland. The woodland had reduced over the past few years. The common was owned by the Parish Council and had a golf course, cricket field and a permissive horse track. After World War 1 there had been sheep, cattle and geese but no trees on the common. As grazing had stopped, so trees had started to grow.  
  
In the 1980s it was noted how important the common's grasslands had become. There were three different types: acid heathland (making up the greater part of the common), neutral grassland and chalk meadow (which had been created when the railway was built). Once these different areas were recognised, the mowing regime was changed to accommodate the vegetation.  
  
Why bring cattle back? Cutting grass brings its own problems. Although the grass can be cut, it cannot be collected and this means that too much nutrient goes into the ground which does not encourage acid grasses. Also thatch increases and this stops seeds germinating.  
  
The idea of re-introducing cattle had been developing over 3-4 years to get the local people onside and to help in this a "meet the cattle" day had been organised. One particular issue had been that DEFRA consent was required for the temporary fencing and a new permission was needed every time the fencing was to be moved. However, the coming into force of the Commons Act 2006 meant that DEFRA consent was not needed for temporary fencing for conservation reasons so long as it was for less than 6 months less than 10% of the area of the common.  
  
A trial was proposed for the Spring of 2009 in Larks Meadow using probably 3-4 cattle. There will be a parish-wide consultation after the trial to see if grazing could become more permanent. If so, the cattle would be moved around the common.
- 11 The evening's second guest was Jenni Hignett who works for Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. Jenni spoke about the Nettlebed Commons Project.

Nettlebed Commons comprised 8 separate commons ("Nettlebed and District Commons") totalling some 560 acres, with 6 local wildlife sites and a geological SSSI. All the commons are protected by their own 1906 Act of Parliament.

Nettlebed Common was a mixed habitat of woodland and woodland ponds (old clay pits). It has the last conical brick kiln in the county. The common is now about 90% wooded but was completely open when the brick industry was thriving, some 100 or so years ago. Nettlebed had never been grazed owing to the brick industry.

In giving a brief history, Jenni said that Highmoor had been noted for cherry picking, Peppard had a golf course and grazing, Kingwood had grazing, wood gathering, and a WW2 military hospital. However, Peppard Common was now very wooded, the last grazing having been in the 1950s.

Today the emphasis was on recreation, but scrub and woodland were encroaching onto formerly open areas. Intensive management was needed on open areas due to the lack of grazing.

The commons were fantastic areas for wildlife with woodland ponds, ancient woodland, lowland heathland and acid grassland habitats.

Funding from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme had been received from 1995-2005, and since this had ceased only volunteer labour had been available to manage the commons.

In summary, Jenni said that the commons presented a classic example of the change of use of common land from economic to recreation, and the changes in landscape and management requirements that this brought.

The informal session closed at 22:15.