

FRIENDS OF RYE HARBOUR NATURE RESERVE
MINUTES OF THE 46th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Held at Winchelsea Beach Village Hall on
Saturday 29th September 2018

Number of members present: 53

The Chairman opened the meeting at 2.33pm and welcomed all those present.

1. Apologies for absence: Melvin and Pam Smith, Simon and Barbara Hill, Audrey Wende, Anita Davie, John and Marion Pryor and Mary Barnes.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 45th AGM held on 7th October 2017. Copies of the minutes were displayed on the notice boards in the hall prior to and during the meeting and the Chairman apologised for the fact that the minutes had not been available on the website as noted in the meeting agenda. The minutes were approved as a correct record and their adoption proposed by John Barnes, seconded by Alan Martin and carried unanimously by a show of hands.

3. Matters arising from the minutes. These were covered by the Chairman within the items reported and detailed in item **4.** below.

4. Adoption of the Committee's report for the year. The report of the Committee (essentially the Chairman's Report) had been published in the Friends Summer newsletter. For the meeting the Chairman gave a more detailed account of progress thus far with the Discovery Centre development and other changes that had taken place since our previous AGM.

He related that the plans for the Discovery Centre had been unanimously approved by Rother District Council and that several councillors at that meeting had commended the project with great enthusiasm, emphasising their view that the project will be key to the development of year-round nature tourism across the whole area of Rother, Shepway, Romney Marshes, 1066 Country and the High Weald AONB.

As regards the concerns expressed by local residents about the project, the Chairman related that we have done our best in private and public meetings to address ~~the~~ concerns about the perceived negative effect on ~~one~~ local business and the potential problems of parking/ traffic congestion caused by increased visitor numbers. It was felt that misunderstandings have been reduced.

During the summer the construction work for the Discovery Centre was put out to tender and after initial consideration we have two submissions which are very similar and that will require very close analysis before a decision can be made. The Chairman related that whilst he had expected that the SWT's decision ~~as to~~ **on** the preferred contractor would have been made by now, it is easy to fail to take account of the complexities involved in a project such as this and the time taken to undertake the thorough analysis of the tenders that is required. Patience is required and work is not likely to start for a couple of months.

In addition the new CEO of the Sussex Wildlife Trust Tor Lawrence needs to ensure that the Trust are content with all aspects of the project as it proceeds and that they are able to guarantee robust financial support for **it** ~~the project~~. Tor is 100% behind the project and recently brought the whole of SWT staff from Woods Mill (the Sussex Wildlife Trust HQ) to meet the Discovery Centre team, to see the Reserve and to learn more about the project.

Our temporary Information Centre or "the Cabins" has proved a great success and a recent refurbishment of the information/ interpretive/visitor aspects has made a more ~~attractive and~~ inviting venue that has attracted more visitors and resulted in increased sales. It has also made the cabins a more comfortable work place for the staff and provided space for meetings. The Chairman thanked Lucy and Linda for their work, especially for their organisation and support of our team of volunteers.

One of our volunteers, Meg Dodson, has offered to take charge of our retail operation and visitors will have noticed the improved appearance of the retail space and the appealing new lines of merchandise.

After fifteen years employment on the Reserve Sam Smith has left us to go travelling. Sam was much appreciated for his initiative, reliability, practical skills and wildlife knowledge. He has been replaced by Dave King who was present at the meeting and at this point the Chairman was able to introduce him to all those present.

In advance of the demolition of Lime Kiln Cottage we were able to help Chris and his wife to move from the Cottage to new accommodation in Rye.

The Reserve attracts more than a third of a million visitors a year and apart from coping with these visitor numbers the Reserve staff have run more than 100 events, most of them supported by volunteers. Several events are run specifically for members of the Friends and some for members of the Sussex Wildlife Trust. These events include walks, talks, family activities, Nature Tots, castle visits, monthly beach cleans, work parties and health walks.

Our publication "The Shingle Shore" had an enthusiastic reception and we have already sold the first 500 copies.- A further batch of 500 has just been printed. We have used imagery from our picture map on new mugs and coasters.

New drone footage of the reserve in the icy, foggy conditions of winter has been filmed by Sam Moore, who produced our first and very successful drone film. Sam is editing down the footage to produce another 2 minute version that we hope will be shown at the Kino cinema in Rye.

The Friends website has not been fully operative for some time, but Morgan has been working to make it more effective and attractive and it should be up and running soon.

Concerning a suggestion that had been made at the previous AGM that possible changes to the Friends Constitution were to be considered regarding the rotation of committee membership it had been decided that this was not a priority. It was not felt necessary to recruit at the moment. The committee has recently approved a number of policy statements required by the Charity Commissioners. In addition a policy on memorials on the reserve has been approved now that we are running out of sites for benches.

The Chairman commented on the amount of work being undertaken and the many aspects of the Discovery Centre to be considered. The agendas for our committee meetings are often long due to the number of topics to be discussed and agreed. We all recognise the importance of the Discovery Centre to the development of the Reserve and ~~its~~ **its** future value to our visitors and to us the Friends.

Ian Rumley Dawson asked how long the DC build would take and the figure of 32 weeks was given by Reserve Manager Dr. Barry Yates. In reply to a question from Mike Slavin, Barry was able to confirm that piling would be necessary to support the building. Mr. Rod Brown asked about the ecological impact of the construction of the building. Barry explained that the building would be as ecologically sound as it was possible to make it. Most timber used would be from local managed sources, energy would come from solar panels and air source pumps. The building would be connected to main drains at Rye Harbour Village

The adoption of the Committee's Report for the year was proposed by Ian Rumley-Dawson, seconded by Tony Lloyd and carried by a show of hands.

5. Approval of the Accounts for the period 1st April 2017 - 31st March 2018. The accounts for the period had been prepared by Treasurer Mike Russell and were included with the AGM agenda published in the recent Friends newsletter.

Pat Bonham asked how the valuation figure for Watch Cottage had been assessed. Treasurer Mike Russell commented that the figure was a best guess based on the known value of adjacent dwellings. Mike Slavin asked what would be the Friends level of contingency as regards the cost of the project. The Treasurer explained that we had already committed £750,000 with another £750,000 in hand. This would be the limit of the Friends contribution. The remainder of the funding would come from the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Peter Nance, seconded by John Willsher and duly carried.

6. Election of Officers and Committee for 2018/19. The election of the Officers and committee members was proposed en bloc by Peter Nance, seconded by Tony Lloyd and duly carried.

The appointment to the committee of two new co-opted members Catherine Emmitt and Phil Jones was proposed by John Barnes, seconded by Robbie Gooders and duly carried.

Colin Page was standing down from the committee at this meeting and in thanking Colin on our behalf the Chairman paid tribute to his work and contribution to the committee. Colin would continue to be involved with the arrangements for our indoor meetings and had already booked the speakers for our meetings for a considerable time ahead.

The Chairman reminded members that they could put themselves forward for possible membership of the committee if they felt inclined.

7. Appointment of Independent Examiner. Treasurer Mike Russell explained that the services of a local accountancy firm Ashdown Hurrey of Hastings had been required for the approval and audit of our accounts due to the level of income involved.

The re-appointment of Ashdown Hurrey was proposed by Ian Rumley-Dawson, seconded by Alan Martin and duly carried.

8. Any other business. Mr. George Veness asked what the Reserve position was in relation to low flying aircraft, since he thought that SSSIs would be protected from being overflowed. Barry replied that such incursions by drones and low flying aircraft would be reported to the Civil Aviation Authority but it is very difficult to obtain photographic evidence to identify the culprit. If you witness such an incident you should try to get photographic evidence and get in touch with Barry.

Peter Nance commented on what seemed to be a lack of bird watching walks in the Friends programme later in the year, since he felt that they were important occasions to meet other members. Barry replied that this may have been an oversight but planning for 2019 events will begin shortly and his comment will be taken on board. Barry pointed out that there was an upcoming birding event in the Reserve programme of events.

Mr. Martyn Brown asked about work being carried out at Camber Castle and asked whether the Castle under the Reserves jurisdiction? Barry explained that permission had been given for some limited improvements in the courtyard area and suggested that Mr. Brown keep in touch with him. As regards the relationship with English Heritage and the Castle, Barry explained our responsibilities and the service level agreements that pertain. The Reserve arranges all Castle visits and no one is allowed entry without the attendance of a member of the Reserve staff. The Reserve is allowed to retain the entry fees paid by visitors. The Chairman commented upon the overwhelming number of visitors that had attended the two recent walks. Peter Nance thanked the committee and all of the staff for all of their hard work.

The meeting close at 3.14pm.

Following tea, Reserve Manager Dr. Barry Yates gave a talk describing the last 12 months of the Reserve and illustrating the talk with a series of excellent photographs. Barry commented on a number of disappointments including the poor breeding success of the terns, it had been a tough breeding season with an obvious shortage of suitable small fish in Rye Bay. He showed the extent of surface coverage of the water in parts of the Reserve by Australian Swampweed which is very difficult to control and seriously reduces habitat for birds, plants and invertebrates. On a lighter note, many of Barry's photographs revealed the beauty of our Reserve and not just in the landscape, but details of some of the smaller wildlife and most

amazing close up photographs showing the intricate surface patterns of some of the tiniest seeds that some of our native plants produce. He was also able to report an increase in sightings of bumble bees on the Reserve, including the rare Moss Carder Bee.

After Barry's presentation, the Discovery Centre Fundraiser Kim Deshayes spent some time describing the current state of the fund raising process as much had happened since he talked to us at the previous 2017 AGM. Thus far £1.4 million pounds had been raised, the major component of which had come in the shape of a £900,000 grant from EU funds and £200,000 funding from the Garfield Western Foundation. He itemised other substantial amounts and their sources including the £20,000 raised from three local events that Reserve staff had been instrumental in setting up and £50,000 from Rother District Council. £100,000 had been amassed from general donations. He outlined some future planned events that will take place in the next 12 months including a House of Commons funding launch in April 2019.