

Friends of the Flitch Way and Associated Woodlands

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

Date Tuesday 24th January 2006

Venue Rayne Scout Hall

Persons present Matt Wilson, Manager, Nigel Wood, Senior Ranger, 25 members of the Friends

Time started 7.10pm

Time finished 9.05pm

1. Nigel opened the meeting by welcoming everybody and confirming that all had a copy of the agenda, the abridged version of the Constitution and details of the nominees for election to the executive committee.
2. Stan explained that for the Friends to be set up as a registered charity, it was necessary for a Constitution to be drawn up, voted upon by the membership and submitted to the Charities Commission for approval. The document is essentially the set of rules under which the Friends will operate and the Commission needs to be satisfied that the aims and objects are wholly charitable and that the content fulfils all the relevant requirements for the Friends to be able to enjoy the benefits that a charitable organisation can enjoy. Stan said that the full version of the Constitution ran to six pages. The abridged version, which had been given to everyone on arrival, contained the major points of the document and there were copies of the full constitution at various places within the hall, which could be scrutinised or taken away by anyone who wished to do so. The meeting was asked whether there were any questions arising from the abridged version. One query arose from paragraph 4.1 and the reason for membership being restricted to persons over 18 years of age, why not 16 or lower, for example. Nigel said that Essex County Council rules did not allow the use of cutting tools in practical work by those under 18. A comment from the floor also referred to Child Protection issues, which would arise if younger people were allowed to be members. Both Matt and Nigel confirmed that there were no objections in principle to parents bringing children to Friends activities. Stan said that the age issue could be given further consideration at a later stage and changed if it was felt necessary to do so, the Rules of the Constitution providing for that to happen. A further question was put on what constituted a quorum for meetings of the Friends. Stan referred to paragraph 11.6 of the Constitution and said that it would effectively be four members of the Executive Committee. Although no further questions were forthcoming, Nigel said that a 28 day period of grace could be given for the members to consider the full document before making a decision but the meeting felt such action would not be necessary. In the circumstances, therefore, Stan asked for a show of hands for those in favour of the Constitution being adopted. The motion was carried without opposition.

Moving on to the election of Executive Committee members, Stan referred the meeting to the details of nominees, which had been provided and asked whether there were any other names to be put to the vote. There were none and, after a show of hands, Stan Davies, Pete Lane and Wendy Moss were elected to the posts of Chair, Treasurer and Secretary respectively. With regard to other members to serve on the Executive Committee, Stan said that a maximum of four persons were required. He said that he had had three expressions of interest, from Ann Lane, Jo Fish and Claire Malone Lee and asked whether there were any other names to be put to the vote. There were none and those three persons were duly elected on a show of hands.

3. Matt Wilson, Manager of the Flitch Way, then gave his overview. Matt said that he had been pleased to receive two awards on behalf of the Flitch Way, one from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England for all the work done on the Flitch Way and one from the European Greenway organisation, which he had received at a presentation in Lille.

The contract for gate construction on the Flitch Way had been finalised and work was scheduled to start within the month.

Matt advised the meeting that a major change would happen, possibly sometime in April, with the Rangers moving their base from Rayne Station to the station at Takeley which was currently being re-furbished. The logistics and implications of that move were still being worked on but it was hoped that the move would help obtain greater involvement by the community in and near to Takeley. Matt said that he would continue to have his home at Rayne station.

4. Nigel said that Rayne Station would continue to be the hub for volunteer work parties and there would be a store room and a mini-office located there..

Adding to Matt's comments on the Rangers' move, Nigel said that the move to Takeley would allow greater creativity in the use of the station at Rayne and a sum of £10,000 had been allocated for work to be done. Current exhibits focussed on the former railway line, for example, while a greater emphasis on wildlife and the flora and fauna of the Flitch Way was envisaged for the future. As highlighted by the European Green Way award referred to earlier by Matt, the Flitch Way was now an important cycle way and Rayne station could develop that.

One of the ideas that were to be taken up would be converting the current office and the adjoining exhibition room at Rayne into a tearoom, to be open at weekends and bank holidays. There were no funds for an extra member of staff and the hope was that the members of the Friends would manage and run the team room. There are currently over 120 people on the list of Friends. It was understood that, for a variety of reasons, not everybody was able to come out on work parties but there was a wide range of other volunteer activities available.

Nigel invited Wendy Moss to give details of work parties, which she did as follows: Current membership was 124, 51 of whom had attended work parties.

An average of 7 volunteers had attended each of the 70 work parties and events, which had taken place between December 2004 and December 2005, as follows

- Garnetts Wood 20 visits
- Dunmow Cutting 9
- Rayne Ponds and Station 22
- Levelly Wood 5
- Blackwater Trail 3
- Canfield 1
- Takeley 1
- Tarecroft Wood 2
- Border Wood 3
- Belhus 1
- Discovery Centre 2
- Maldon 1

Summer activities had involved volunteers on learning about butterflies, dragonflies and wild flowers and Wendy was supported by other attendees in saying how enjoyable and instructive those sessions had been.

Nigel said that the volunteer work parties had helped good management of Garnetts Wood, which was a Site of Special Scientific Interest where more than 1 acre of hazel woodland had been coppiced. Matt said that this year all hazel produced would be going to the Country Park at Hadleigh to be used in the construction of a wattle and daub roundhouse. Nigel continued by saying that cyclical coppicing would continue to take place in Garnetts and other woodlands. It had been planned for volunteers to excavate the pond at Garnetts by hand but Keith Hind had put in a lot of work and persuaded Tamdown to do the job with a mechanical digger, which had saved a lot of time and effort. Nigel said that volunteers had made a huge difference, enhancing the major contractual work, which had been done on the Flitch Way, and he was proud of the work done at Garnetts and elsewhere.

All the work done on work parties was wildlife orientated. At the Dunmow cutting, for example, work had been done to let in light on the trail and open up ponds in order to encourage wildlife.

Future plans would involve volunteers learning new woodland skills in order to be able to make products for people to buy, hazel hurdles, for example, or compost bins. As a means to that end, another visit to Belhus Country Park was planned for any volunteers who wanted to take up the challenge of learning those new skills. The great crested newt project had greatly impressed Lin Wenlock, the director of Frog Life, when she had visited the Flitch Way and seen what was being done and an invitation to visit Frog Life at Peterborough had been extended which was to be taken up in due course. The recording of species such as newts and butterflies by volunteers would also continue, the meeting was told, as would the provision of tours for the general public.

Break for refreshments

Nigel concluded his presentation by summarising what had been said before the break on future plans including: -

- Learning and implementing woodland skills by volunteers
- Species recording
- Schoolchildren events, led by Matt
- Involving local Scouts, on work around the ponds, for example
- Starting a new area of coppicing in Garnetts in September
- More work in the Dunmow Cutting
- More work in Tarecroft Wood
- Focussing on wildlife hotspots, opening up areas of grassland and clearing scrub in order to let more light in. 3 work parties planned for March

5. In his summing up, Matt referred to changes to the Country Park Ranger Service, which continued to be made. He acknowledged and appreciated the work, which continued to be done by all the volunteers. The outreach and community work done on the Flitch Way was appreciated by the head of the service at Essex County Council, Matt said and 100% of targets set for the Country Park had been met. There was less pressure on the Flitch Way than other Parks to generate funds, the meeting was told. The Flitch Way had also given help and assistance to other sites, including Cressing Temple.
6. In response to a request for questions from the floor, Peter Lane asked whether there were any plans to keep a Ranger based at Rayne following the move to Takeley. Matt said there were not although he would continue to have his home at Rayne station. Nigel confirmed that volunteer work parties would continue to meet at Rayne.

Wendy Moss asked whether there were any projects planned during the summer months. Nigel said that, as had happened in 2005, there would be both public events as well as those involving volunteer work groups.

Keith Hind asked whether a date was known for the woodlands skills visit to Belhus Country Park. Nigel and Matt said no specific date had yet been set for the session which would take place either at Belhus or at Cressing Temple.

Nigel asked that anybody who was interested in learning hurdle making or in visiting Frog Life in Peterborough to contact Wendy Moss, either by phone or e-mail. The expectation would be that anybody attending either session would put the skills they had learned to good use. Nigel also asked those present that he be contacted if there were any wildlife aspects, which they would like to learn more about. Stan asked that if anybody attending the meeting was interested or knew of somebody who might be interested in helping out in the proposed tea room at Rayne, they should let one of the Rangers or the executive committee know.

Carl Blamire asked how it would become known that somebody was interested in one thing or another. Stan said that Wendy already had some information, of who was or wasn't interested in work parties, for example, but communication with members, perhaps in the form of a newsletter was something, which the executive committee

would be looking at. Wendy said that she would send out a questionnaire to members with a copy of the minutes of that evening's meeting. Stan said that minutes of all meetings, whether general or confined to the executive committee, would be sent to members as a means of letting people know what was happening and he asked for feedback, positive or negative, the latter being important if the committee was to be able to do something about whatever the perceived problem was.

The meeting was brought to a close by Nigel at 9.05pm.