

Friends of the Flitch Way and Associated Woodlands

Notes from Annual General Meeting

Venue: Discovery Centre, Great Notley Country Park

Date: Friday, 26 April 2013

Attendees: As attached

Chairman welcomed everybody to the meeting and introduced the guest speaker, David Gridley, author of "Walking the lost Railways of Essex". Stan also welcomed Brenda and Malcolm Allard. Brenda's grandfather was the last station master at Rayne Station. David proceeded to give an interesting talk based on his new book, "The Flitch Way: My Journey" which he hoped would be published before the end of the year. David answered questions from the floor and members also had the opportunity to speak to him during the break for refreshments which followed.

Following the break, Stan explained the purposes of the meeting to be for members to hear reports on the activities of the Charity during the year, to vote on accepting the annual accounts and to elect Officers and Committee members for the coming year. He confirmed that everybody had a copy of the accounts and an agenda which was set out as following:

1. To accept the Minutes of the 2012 Annual General Meeting.

Having confirmed members had received a copy of the minutes sent out following the 2012 AGM, a proposal to accept was made by John Moss, seconded by Val Blamire. All in favour.

2. Chairman's report.

Stan began his report by referring to the sad loss of one of our volunteers, Phillip Wade, who had passed away during the year. Although he had only been with us during November and December, Phillip was a popular member of work parties and his widow said that he had very much enjoyed his time with us.

Stan said that the detail of what had occurred during the year would be reported on by other speakers but he felt that he could speak on behalf of everybody in saying that it had been another fruitful and enjoyable year for the Friends. Members volunteered to come out on work parties because they enjoyed the social aspect of our get-togethers as well as the satisfaction in a job well done.

It was always satisfying to receive favourable and positive comments about the work done from the public but, unfortunately, a minority of people found it too easy to criticize and be negative and often they are the comments which stick. It is notable that those who were so vehement in their criticism of the felling and clearance work which we had done along the Flitch Way over the last eighteen months or so have not commented on the wonderful displays of wildflowers which have resulted from the light now getting in to those cleared sections.

Chairman concluded his report by thanking, on behalf of the Committee, all the volunteers who had helped during the year, whether on the Flitch Way or on P3 work parties.

3. Treasurer's report and acceptance of Accounts

Margaret explained several of the entries shown in the summarised accounts and said that a full breakdown of the figures was available should anybody wish to see them. Margaret said that included in the figure for donations was over £400 gratefully received from Robert Branch at the Booking Hall Café from the sale of logs, leaflets, books and general donations from visitors which Robert encouraged.

There were no questions from the floor for the Treasurer but Pete Lane reported the illness of the person who had audited the accounts from our charity's first year and which had prevented him doing so again this year. Margaret said that she had spoken to his wife and expressed our best wishes and thanks for the work he had done.

Jim Cloke proposed acceptance of the Accounts, seconded by Carl Blamire. All in favour. Chairman thanked Margaret for the work she had done during the year.

4. Secretary's report.

Wendy reported 65 work parties having taken place at 16 different sites during the year compared to 87 work parties in 2011-12. That equated to 593 volunteer days or 3558 volunteer hours. Average volunteer attendance over the whole year was 9 per work party with between 12-14 persons at each work party during the winter months. A number of new volunteers had joined during the year.

Wendy thanked Bob and Sue Lucas for the work they had put in on designing the most recent information board which had recently been installed at High Cross Lane picnic site and which had been funded by Uttlesford District Council.

Thanks were also given by Wendy to all the volunteers for the hard work put in during the year.

Members were reminded to let the Treasurer have their subscriptions and to complete Gift Aid forms if they were basic rate taxpayers.

Stan thanked Wendy on behalf of everybody for the amount of time put in behind the scenes.

5. Report on Parish Paths Partnership and an update on the carriage project

Pete Lane said that details of the sites visited by the P3 team, together with the work done and number of volunteers attending could be viewed on a spreadsheet on the Friends website.

Approximately 1700 man-hours work had been done in the 12 month period with an average of 6-7 persons on each work party. Purely from a financial point of view, the Friends P3 group are saving Essex County Council vast sums of money and the high standard of work done by our group is being used as a benchmark for other P3 groups within the County.

Pete also mentioned changes which had taken place in Public Rights of Way at County Hall and said that he had corresponded with the Councillor responsible, Kay Twitchen, who had taken on board the comments he had made and sorted matters out. We now work under the management of Rob Venables who now has responsibility for all P3 groups within Essex.

Pete said that Andrew, Pat, Jim and himself had received training in undertaking surveys and had identified plenty of work for the team around Boreham. Overall, sufficient work to keep the team busy for the rest of the year has already been identified. Pete thanked everyone who had been involved in P3 work during the year and paid tribute to the effort which continues to be put in by everybody. Pete also said that while it would be good to involve more people in P3 work parties, the work often took place in more confined spaces than on the Flitch Way and the nature of the tasks to be done usually required a smaller work party.

With regard to the carriage project, Pete gave a broad outline of progress so far with additional input from Jim Cloke. The carriage at Colne Valley was rejected because of its poor condition, Pete advised, but another one in good condition and suitable for our purpose has been identified at Eastleigh in Hampshire which Jim is currently negotiating to purchase. Although planning permission to site the carriage at Rayne Station had been granted by Braintree Council in 2012, the one we are currently hoping to buy is bigger and that, together with the fact that it was more than 12 months since permission was given means that we are obliged to re-apply for planning permission which will delay matters further. We have a quote for delivering the carriage, however, and the haulage company will also install sufficient length of track for the carriage to sit on. Pete said that he hoped the application would be with BDC within the coming week. We are also in discussion with ECC over a lease for the land we require at Rayne station.

Pete agreed with Wendy that we should post something at Rayne Station, inside and outside the building, to let visitors know what was happening and he will draft something accordingly to give the current situation. Rob Branch commented that there was great interest in the carriage project and he was constantly being asked what was happening by café customers. Everybody was in agreement on the importance of keeping locals up to date with the project and a public meeting is planned to take place once the planning position becomes clearer. Pete asked everybody in favour of the project to notify BDC of that fact once the planning application went on-line. Pete also gave a reminder that the carriage would not be an extension to the café. No problems were envisaged if people chose to take their refreshments into the carriage, however.

Stan thanked Stansted Airport Community Fund, Greenfields Community Fund, the Big Society Fund and the local Greyhound Walkers group for their financial support of the whole carriage project.

Stan thanked Pete for having taken on the role of co-ordinator for the carriage project. He added that, as a member of the P3 team, it was easy to turn up each Wednesday and forget the tremendous amount of work done by Pete and Ann prior to each work party. That work was much appreciated by all the P3 team and he thanked Pete and Ann on their behalf.

6. Report by Duncan Fisher on behalf of the Rangers.

Duncan apologised for Steve's absence due to family commitments.

On behalf of his Ranger colleagues, he thanked Friends volunteers for the invaluable work they had done during the year.

Referring to comments made earlier, Duncan acknowledged fewer work parties having taken place in the last year which he said had been mostly due to Ranger unavailability due to illness. Claire said that any complaints made by members of the public should be referred to the Ranger accompanying the work party.

Duncan also advised the meeting of Steve's appointment as Area Manager North for ECC Country Parks and Claire Jones' appointment as Events Co-ordinator for North Essex Country Parks. Stan tendered congratulations to Steve and Claire on behalf of the Friends but asked what effect that would have on the volunteers' work. Duncan replied that clearly the extra responsibilities being taken on by Steve and Claire in their new roles would mean some re-adjustment for the Rangers based at Notley. Steve had ideas of using Ranger resources from other Country Parks as a way of covering for shortages, Duncan said, as well as other strategies yet to be finalised. He stressed that all the Rangers wanted to come out on work parties and hoped that they would be able to continue to do so in the future. Given the demands on Rangers' time, Pete Lane asked whether the P3 system could be adopted whereby the Rangers plan and decide the work that needs to be done and then refer those tasks to the volunteer team to carry out. Duncan said that it was possible that that system could be taken up. Wendy added that volunteers had sufficient experience and expertise to be able to work without a Ranger in attendance but the biggest problem when Rangers were not available to attend, was getting tools etc to the site. Duncan acknowledged that was a situation which needed to be addressed.

Jim Cloke suggested better long-term planning for work parties by the Rangers might also help the situation.

Stan thanked Steve and all the Rangers for their support, particularly to Tom who had responsibility for the volunteers and was usually the person who came out on work parties.

7. Members' resolutions

Wendy confirmed none to have been received.

8. Election of Officers and Committee members.

Stan identified the current Committee as himself as Chairman, Wendy as Secretary, Margaret as Treasurer and Andrew B and Bob as Committee members. Wendy confirmed no postal nominations had been received. Stan said that the current Committee were prepared to continue to stand in 2013-14. Two vacancies remained open and John Moss offered to fill one of them.

Andrew Adair proposed that the existing committee members, together with John Moss be elected for the year 2013-14. The meeting voted unanimously in favour. An invitation was issued for any member who wished to attend a committee meeting to contact the secretary beforehand.

9. Social events for the coming year

A suggestion for a summer outing from Margaret was a boat trip on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation in June or July. The trip lasts approximately 2 hours and leaves from Papermill Lock with an option for a cream tea or other refreshments while on board. Margaret asked that she be given names of those interested as soon as possible in order for her to make a booking.

Margaret asked for any suggestions for an alternative summer outing be given to her. Similarly, Margaret said that she would be pleased to receive suggestions for a Christmas meal venue.

Before moving on to the final item on the agenda, Stan said that he had a number of people to thank in addition to those he had already thanked.
 Bob Lucas and his wife, Sue, for the work they had put in on designing and progressing the new information board at Little Canfield.
 Andrew Bloomfield for his wonderful photographs of the task undertaken by the volunteers which were on display and which it was hoped everybody had had the chance to look at.
 Andrew and Irene Adair who had attended village fetes on our behalf during summer, publicizing the Flitch Way and making people aware of the Friends.
 Val Blamire for looking after the wildflower site at Rayne Station.
 Last but not least, Rob Branch of the Booking Hall café for his continuing support of the Friends.

Pete Lane proposed the Friends thanks to the chairman Stan Davies for all the time and hard work he has put in this year particularly with regards to raising the funds for the carriage project.

10. Any other business.

Wendy thanked Lesley Gillman for attending and bringing copies of the Little Canfield map/leaflet which was available for members to take.

Robert Branch reminded the meeting that this year's Rayne festival will take place at Rayne Station on 21st, 22nd and 23rd June.

There being no further business, Stan thanked everybody for attending and brought the meeting to a close at 9.07pm

Meeting attendees (in alphabetical order)

Andrew Adair	Brenda Allard	Malcolm Allard
Carl Blamire	Val Blamire	Andrew Bloomfield *
Robert Branch	Pauline Brenner	Jim Cloke
Cass Dammingier	Stan Davies *	Duncan Fisher **
Joe Ford	Lesley Gillman	David Gridley
Pat Griffin	Keith Hind	Margaret James *
Claire Jones **	Ann Lane	Pete Lane
Bob Lucas *	Sue Lucas	Pamela Maskell
John Moss *	Wendy Moss *	Michael Scade
Wendy Taylor	John West	

* Committee member

** Country Park Ranger