

Friends of the Flitch Way and Associated Woodlands

Notes from Annual General Meeting

Date: Friday 3 May 2019

Venue: Discovery Centre, Great Notley Country Park

Present: See footnote

Chairman Alan welcomed everybody to the 15th Annual General Meeting of the Friends. He explained the format of the evening, introduced the speaker, Dougal Urquhart, and said that the presentation would be followed by a short break for refreshments before the formal part of the meeting took place.

There followed an interesting presentation on the Red Squirrels of Mersea Island by Dougal Urquhart, a former Essex Country Park Ranger. Split broadly into 3 parts, Dougal's talk covered the locations of the species on a national basis, their introduction and history on Mersea and finally their regular appearance and behaviour within the confines of his own garden on the island, the latter section being illustrated by the many excellent photographs he had taken.

After thanking the speaker and taking a refreshment break, the meeting resumed with the Chairman confirming that everyone had a copy of the annual accounts and associated papers.

Referring to the minutes of the previous year's AGM which had been sent to members following that meeting, Alan asked for any comments on their content and whether any amendments needed to be made. There being none, the minutes were accepted as a true record and signed accordingly.

Chairman's report:

As Chairman, Alan said that it was nice to report on yet another interesting and successful year for the Friends, details of which would be reported on by other Committee members during the evening. It was felt that the objectives contained in the Constitution when the Friends charity was first set up continue to be met.

As most people were probably aware, the application for a grant for £52,000 from the Garfield Weston Anniversary Fund for work on the boardwalk at Dunmow cutting had not been successful. 2,300 applications totalling £200 million had been made to the fund with only £5 million available for distribution and only 10% of applications had been successful.

Better news was the successful installation and unveiling of the information board at Rayne Station in November as a tribute to Frederick Fuller who was tragically killed on the level crossing at the station in 1961. Thanks to long term Rayne resident Jim Gepp, we were able to trace and get in touch with Fred's son, Alan, and it was very pleasing to see so many members of his family at the unveiling along with other local residents.

New information boards have been sited along the Flitch Way thanks to a generous £500 donation from Josh and Grace Meehan following their Free Music Festival charity fundraiser at the Booking Hall Café in the summer. A donation of £258 was made by the Hare and Tortoise Running Club who organise events using the track and that money has been put to good use in purchasing equipment to maintain the Flitch Way. We also had a £150 anonymous donation. This meant we were able to allocate funds for the purchase of a new hedge cutter for the use of the P3 group which was much needed in their footpath clearance work.

Alan said that he had been involved in the Essex Quest again in July, this time at Langford Halt. He explained that the Essex Quest is a radio programme broadcast by BBC Essex every Sunday morning involving presenters trying to solve clues at various points in Essex with input from listeners and interviews at each of the places visited. He had spoken during the programme's visit to Langford Halt, as had Peter Blaney who lived in the old station house. Alan said that further publicity for the Flitch and the Friends would be gained by his being on BBC Essex at 8.30pm on Wednesday evening 15th May, along with Sandra and Stan.

Chairman thanked fellow Committee members for their support during the previous 12 months and wished to record special thanks to the following people: -

Wendy Moss, chief organizer for work parties who keeps us all in line. One of the founding members of the Friends and the person to contact about joining the group, she continues to be a valued committee member and volunteer.

Margaret James, treasurer and social secretary who continues to manage our increasingly complicated finances and organise group outings with help from Wendy and Val.

Sandra Reynolds, our secretary who does a tremendous job re-vamping and improving the Friends website. Sandra has been instrumental in pushing the case for the Flitch Way to be declared as a Local Nature Reserve. Sandra continues to keep her eye on the developments which threaten the Flitch Way and submits objections on the Friends' behalf. Sandra also liaises regularly with Tom Hamilton if she spots or hears anything untoward along the Flitch Way.

Pete and Ann Lane for their work in organising the P3 work parties which receive many plaudits and messages of thanks from around the Essex area and for the time-consuming work they do behind the scenes in surveying sites etc.

Pam Maskell, co-ordinator for Carriage Stewards who has the task of organising people to fill the rota. Carriage volunteers play an important role and continue to be needed, mainly at weekends but also during school holidays. Chairman urged members to keep in touch with Pam if they had any time available to help in the carriage.

Stan Davies, for his advice, support and minute-taking skills.

Andy Horder for the maintenance work he does on the carriage bodywork.

Andrew and Irene Adair for all the work put in on the Friends' behalf in lodging objections to the proposed Brook Green development and for manning the Friends' stall at different events.

The **Country Park Ranger service**, especially **Tom Hamilton**, who gets us all out in the fresh air and tries to ensure that work parties remain interesting.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee and himself, Alan offered a big thank you to **all Friends' volunteers** whether on Flitch Way, P3 work parties, or in the carriage and to **all members** for their support over the last year. An enormous amount of work has been undertaken and without volunteers and members none of this would have been possible.

There were no questions to the Chairman from the members present at the meeting.

Treasurer's report:

Margaret referred to the copy of the balance sheet which everybody had and which she said had been checked and signed off by the Independent Examiner and which showed a credit balance of £7,028 being carried forward to the next year.

Treasurer said that the carriage was paying for itself with donations from visitors averaging £24 per week. In addition, £165.19 had been received from the donation boxes in the café. We continue to monitor electricity usage in the carriage by taking weekly readings to ensure such costs are kept to a minimum. The Santa event in the carriage was a success again with a profit of £184, helped by using some of the presents left over from the previous year.

Margaret said that she had full details of income and expenditure if anybody wished to see them.

The meeting had no questions to put to the Treasurer.

A proposal to accept the charity's Annual Accounts was made, accepted unanimously and signed accordingly by the Chairman.

Social report:

Margaret said that the 2018 Christmas lunch at Wildens restaurant had been a complete success as in previous years and the venue has been booked again for Wednesday 18th December 2019. Menus will be sent to members when available, together with a request for a deposit to ensure places which will be allocated on a first come, first served basis as usual.

The trip to Harlow and the Gibberd Gardens in June had been a great success, Margaret said. Everybody had enjoyed the mini bus tour of Harlow and members had been surprised at the cultural side of the town revealed by the tour. Lunch and a tour of the Gibberd Garden had ended the day nicely, it was felt.

The summer outing to Parsonage Farm, a late mediaeval Tudor timber-framed farmhouse and its extensive gardens had been enjoyed by everyone who went, Margaret said.

The recent outing to Coggeshall Abbey had been very interesting and the owner had been very enthusiastic about his home and its history. The lunch at the White Hart beforehand had also been successful.

The forthcoming evening walk at Quendon in a couple of weeks' time was looked forward to and Margaret asked anybody who would like to join the walk to speak to her after the AGM.

The next planned outing would be to Tiptree Jam factory on 4th July which would involve a tractor tour of the farm followed by a cream tea, the total cost of which would be £10 per person. Margaret said that she would shortly be sending out details of the Tiptree outing to members but asked people to speak to her after the meeting if they wished to go.

Chairman thanked Margaret, and Wendy in her absence, for the work done in organising outings for members. Most of the places visited were open "by invitation only" and were selected only after they had undertaken research. There were no questions from the floor for Margaret on social matters.

Secretary's report:

Sandra reported membership as 76 with a net addition of 3 new members this year. The number of followers on Facebook has increased to over 1150 people.

Protecting the Flitch Way from over development had become even more important this year and a Public Inquiry was held in September regarding the 1600 house Brook Green development between Rayne and Braintree. Representations at the 3 week inquiry were made on the Friends' behalf by Andrew Adair, Wendy Moss and Sandra while Pam Maskell and John West attended many of the sessions and kept the committee up to date with the matters discussed. The Inspector's report to the Secretary of State is still pending and we are very hopeful that the news that Braintree Council can now demonstrate a 5 year housing supply will mean the application will be refused. Our friends in the No Brook Green group keep us updated regularly on progress and many thanks are given to all the Friends who have contributed so much to this campaign.

Secretary said that there had been so many planning applications in the last year that she had resorted to preparing a spreadsheet to manage them all. In the last 18 months there have been applications to build over 5,700 houses directly alongside the Flitch Way. Most applications would not go through but the figures show the scale of what we are up against. The next Public Inquiry is scheduled for 21st May against 135 houses at Takeley on land west of Canfield Road which Sandra will attend on behalf of the Friends. Where planning permission has been agreed by local authorities, we are now seeing wider buffer strips being included as part of the approval which shows that our efforts to protect the Flitch are helping.

We have also started to refresh and extend our information boards along the track, thanks to a donation from the Free Festival run by the Booking Hall café at Rayne station as mentioned earlier by Alan . New boards have been installed at Rayne level crossing and at Felsted ramp and the existing boards at Bannister Green and Stane Street have been replaced. We are now looking to create new boards at Felsted, Little Dunmow, Little Canfield, Takeley station and Stansted airport to show the wildlife to be seen in those areas together with historical details and other relevant information. Sandra asked members if they had any suggestions for alternative locations and to let her know if they had any interesting and relevant information to be shown on the boards.

Secretary said that Tom Hamilton had been unable to attend the AGM but had asked her to express his appreciation for the work of the volunteers. He continued to be impressed by the amount of work which the volunteers did on work parties each week. Tom also wanted to advise members that the Flitch Way has now been listed with the Land Registry and Essex County Council is steadily progressing the work needed to get the Flitch Way declared as a Local Nature Reserve. As a result, new bylaws have been drafted for the Flitch Way which follow the most recent legislation and guidance.

In response to a request for questions for the secretary, Dick Hughes asked for an update on the long term plans to extend the Flitch Way which would join the two ends of the track at Great Dunmow. Being part of the Flitch Way Action Group, Sandra was able to advise that positive progress was being made and the route for the new bridleway had been agreed, to run parallel to the A120. Part of the path at the eastern end had been completed by one of the developers. Sandra confirmed that when completed, the bridleway would re-join the Flitch Way at Buttleys Lane. Sandra also commented on the protective work being done on the byway at Dunmow to prevent damage being caused by irresponsible off-roaders.

P3 Footpath Workgroup report:

Pete said that the group continued to have good support with up to 9 volunteers on some work parties. 1,610 man hours had been worked during the year with 1,340 miles covered in travelling to and from different sites all over the county.

A variety of tasks continued to be undertaken during the year with 37 waymarkers installed, 3 bridges and 2 gates as well as 18 sets of steps. A number of work parties had involved substantial clearance of badly overgrown paths such as at Purleigh which had taken up 16 weeks work clearing a byway of approximately 1 mile long.

It was not always apparent while out on work parties how much interest the public had in the work being done, Pete said, but it was very satisfying to see subsequent responses made to the photographs put on Facebook which showed the work done by the group. There had been 6,500 responses to the work done on the bridleway at Elsenham, for example, and 5,500 to the much needed clearance of the footpath to Notley High School.

The release of funds by the committee was acknowledged by Pete which had enabled the purchase of a hedge-trimmer during the year and which was proving to be of great benefit on P3 work parties.

Pete concluded by thanking the P3 volunteers for all the hard work done during the year and thanked the committee for their continuing support.

Volunteer Co-ordinator's report.

In view of Wendy's unavoidable absence from the AGM, Alan read the report prepared earlier, as follows.

76 active members, of which 70 are regular volunteers. A total of 9 individuals have worked on the P3 group, 70 on Flich Way work parties and 30 as carriage stewards during the year. Some people work across multiple groups.

Flich Way Volunteers

Wendy had prepared a schedule of FW work parties which showed 19 different sites having been visited during the year. In numerical terms, 658 volunteer days were worked by the Flich Way group and there had been 56 work parties with an average attendance of 11.75 (*56 last year with an average of 11.14*). That equates to 658 x 5 hours = 3290 hours (*624 last year, totalling 3120 hours*)

Carriage Stewards.

Pam had asked Wendy to extend her thanks to everyone who had volunteered to keep the carriage open through all weathers for so many days. The carriage had opened on 204 days with 395 morning and/or afternoon sessions (*Last year's figures 191 and 343*). That equates to 395 x 2.5 hours = 987.5 hours (*Last year 343 x 2.5 = 857.5 hours*) 5,174 visitors were welcomed to the carriage during the year (*4,766 last year*)

The number of visitors started to be counted in April 2015, since when we have welcomed 20,180 visitors to the carriage and we continue to be the number one visitor attraction in Rayne. Long may that continue.

Following normal practice, Chairman and Secretary stepped down from their posts at the end of the financial year. There were no new candidates put forward for either role and, both being prepared to stand again, Alan and Sandra were re-appointed as Chairman and Secretary respectively for the year to April 2020.

Alan said that he would be entering his fourth year as Chairman and reminded members that he could continue in that role for a maximum of 5 years. A new Chairman would therefore need to be found to take over from him in 2021 at the latest.

Chairman confirmed that current committee members were willing to continue and, there being no other expressions of interest from members, all were re-appointed unanimously. Alan said that the full committee for 2019-2020 would therefore be: -

Chairman - Alan Trigg

Vice Chairman - Stan Davies

Secretary - Sandra Reynolds

Treasurer - Margaret James

Committee members - Val Blamire, Bob Lucas, John Moss, Wendy Moss.

Sandra put forward a proposed resolution for members' approval to amend Clause 8.1b of the Constitution from 4 members to 7. In effect, therefore, it gave scope for an increase in the number of members on the committee. Members voted unanimously to accept the resolution as proposed.

Alan said that new members would be made most welcome and encouraged anyone who felt that they might be interested to speak informally with himself or another member of the current committee.

Secretary reported that there had been no further proposed resolutions received from members.

There being no other matters to discuss, Chairman thanked everyone once again for attending and brought the Annual General Meeting to a close.

Persons present

Susan Baumbach	Angela Fuller	Bob Lucas
Carl Blamire	Mike Fuller	Sue Lucas
Val Blamire (C)	Gordon Glanfield	Pamela Maskell
Andrew Bloomfield	Keith Hind	Elizabeth Miller
Pauline Broomfield	Andy Horder	Sandra Reynolds (C)
Marina Breed	Carole Horder	Michael Scade
Barry Brighton	Dick Hughes	John Scates
Derek Cottis	Pat Hughes	Pamela Scates
Ian Cresshul	Margaret James (C)	Alan Trigg (C)
Ian Crouchman	Pete Lane	Richard Wansbury
Stan Davies (C)	Ann Lane	John West

(C) denotes Committee member