

Friends of the Flich Way and Associated Woodlands

Notes from Annual General Meeting

Date	Friday 4 th May 2018
Venue	Discovery Centre, Great Notley Country Park
Present	See footnote

Chairman welcomed those present to the 14th Annual General Meeting of the Friends. Alan explained the format for the evening and introduced the guest speaker, Mike Bardell who would be giving a talk on "Braintree and Bocking-The History you can see". Alan said that Mike's talk would be followed by a short break for refreshments before starting the formal part of the meeting, primarily the acceptance of the charity's annual accounts and the election of trustees for the following year, 2018-2019.

There followed an interesting, informative and entertaining presentation by Mike, a local historian on Braintree and Bocking from its earliest Iron Age occupation up to the present day.

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

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

Chairman's report

Chairman 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 speakers as the meeting progressed. Alan said that it was pleasing to report that the objectives set out in the Friends Constitution continue to be met.

Chairman thanked Committee members for their support over the previous 12 months and wished to record special thanks to the following individuals:

Wendy Moss, Volunteer Co-ordinator and chief organizer of work parties for keeping everyone in line. Alan added that Wendy was one of the founder members of the Friends and continues to be the person to contact about all things connected to the group. A valued committee member and a committed volunteer.

Margaret James, Treasurer and Social Secretary who continues to manage our increasingly complicated finances and organize our very enjoyable group outings.

Sandra Reynolds, Secretary, who continues to do a tremendous job re-vamping and improving the Friends website. Sandra is also instrumental in pushing forward the case to get the Flich Way declared as a Local Nature Reserve and keeps her eyes on proposed developments which continue to threaten the Flich Way, putting in objections on our behalf.

Peter and Ann Lane for their sterling work in organizing P3 work parties which have received many plaudits and messages of thanks from around Essex. As well as leading work parties, a lot of work is done by Peter and Ann behind the scenes in surveying prospective sites etc.

Pam Maskell, co-ordinator for carriage stewards who has the often frustrating task of organizing people to fill the rota. Carriage volunteers play an important role in the Friends and continue to be needed, mainly at weekends but also during school holidays. Alan urged members to keep in touch with Pam if they have any time to help. Full explanations of what's involved are given to anyone looking to volunteer in the carriage for the first time. Pam said that volunteers were needed for the coming Bank Holiday weekend sessions.

Andrew Adair for all the work he has put in on the Friends' behalf in lodging objections to the proposed Brook Green development and, together with Sandra, dealing with matters arising from the application to have the Flich Way listed along with a few encroachment issues.

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

The Country Park Ranger service, especially Tom who tries to ensure that work parties remain interesting and varied and gives us all the opportunity to get out in the fresh air.

Alan said that an application for grant funding of £50,000 had recently been submitted to the Garfield Weston Foundation to cover replacement of the boardwalk at Dunmow and to improve drainage within the Cutting. A decision on the success or otherwise of the application was not expected before August.

In conclusion, Chairman thanked all the volunteers whether on Flich Way work parties, in the carriage or on P3 duties. Alan said that an enormous amount of work had been undertaken over the last 12 months and questioned where we would be without our volunteers. A big thank you was given to everybody.

Treasurer's report

Margaret confirmed that everyone had a copy of the charity's balance sheet which showed a credit balance of £8,800 being carried forward to the next year.

Income during the year showed the sale of the wood chipper which was sold for £6,250 as well as a grant of £6,500 having been received, that being the remainder of the Tesco Bags of Help grant which was received at the start of the year and used for the work done at Langford Halt.

The carriage paid for itself during the year with donations totalling £1,518 received from visitors. The biggest single outlay on the carriage was just under £400, paid to set up a digital system on the model which has added to the enjoyment of visitors and operators alike. Margaret said that John Moss monitors electricity usage in the carriage, resulting in payments to our supplier having been reduced from £75 to £62 each month.

We continue to allocate £400 each year to a carriage contingency/emergency account, the balance of which stands at £2,400.

There were no questions from the floor for the treasurer.

Secretary's report

Sandra told the meeting that membership currently stands at 73, a net addition of 3 members during the year.

The number of followers on Facebook has also increased to nearly 900 and people use this to receive updates on all our work parties and activities as well as getting information on wildlife matters. Some of the popular posts have reached 2,500 to 3,000 people as information is shared to interested parties.

The Friends website has continued to be enhanced throughout the year and is now getting almost 500 visitors each week, double last year's figure, with around 1,500 page views, the most popular being the Flitch Way, the Blackwater Rail Trail and the Downloads pages.

Secretary told the meeting that protecting the Flitch Way has become more important and 7 objections to Planning Applications for developments adjacent to the Flitch Way have been made during the year. Sandra thanked Andrew Adair for his tireless efforts on the Friends' behalf in the fight against the 1,600 home Brook Green Development application.

Essex County Council are nearing the end of the process to get the different sections of the Flitch Way listed with the Land Registry. Once that process is complete greater protection can be put into place, declaring the Flitch Way as a Local Nature Reserve, for example.

Volunteer Co-ordinator's report

Wendy said that of the active members, 62 were volunteers. The split between groups was P3 9, Flitch Way 47 and Carriage 23. (Note: some volunteers work across multiple groups).

Wendy distributed a schedule of work parties undertaken by the Flitch Way group during the year which showed a reduction in the number of work parties and volunteer days when compared with the previous year. This was due in no small part to the extremely bad weather and a reduction in Ranger availability due to staff cuts at Notley. Having said that, the figures didn't show the full picture, Tom having managed to give us a really full programme of work. Wendy said that we had achieved a huge work load which she felt we could all be very proud of. 624 volunteer days were worked by the Flitch Way group and 56 work parties had taken place averaging 11.14 volunteers on each occasion. That equated to $624 \times 5 \text{ hours} = 3120 \text{ hours}$ (688 last year, totalling 3440 hours).

On Carriage Stewards, we struggled a bit at times, but most weekends have been fully manned and at worst have only been one session short which Wendy suggested was very good considering the small number of volunteers who regularly commit. More volunteers are needed for carriage duties. Figures showed a slight improvement on last year when the carriage was open on fewer days. 4766 visitors were welcomed to the carriage (4433 last year). The carriage was open on 191 days with stewards attending on 343 occasions (171 days and 342 sessions last year). Those figures equate to $343 \times 2.5 \text{ hours} = 857.5 \text{ hours}$ (Last year $342 \times 2.5 \text{ hours} = 855 \text{ hours}$).

P3 Team report

Peter Lane said that the team had had another very good year despite losing 2 experienced volunteers in Pat and Ian who had moved away from the area. Replacements had come in, however, and an average of 9 volunteers attend each work party.

A lot of heavy work was involved in what the group did and with greater emphasis on health and safety issues than before. A survey now needs to be done before any work is started, for example, to ensure no utilities are located below the surface in the places being worked.

The team continue to work at a variety of sites across Essex, Peter said, many for the first time, using the full range of volunteers' skills for tasks such as building steps, bridgebuilding, installing kissing gates and way marker posts, all to improve public access. Heavy clearance also needs to be done, particularly on those footpaths which had become blocked and fallen into misuse. As an example, 5 bridges were installed and a lot of clearance done at Takeley this year.

A total of 1764 man hours were done by the team over the year and Peter offered his thanks to everyone who had taken part.

Social Secretary's report

Margaret said that, as in past years, Christmas lunch at Wildens restaurant had been a complete success and had been re-booked for Wednesday 19th December 2018. Menus will be sent out when available. Early booking with a deposit will be required and members were encouraged to book early to ensure their places.

The outing to Layer Marney in July was a great success and everyone enjoyed the private tour of the tower and lunch in the stable restaurant.

The visit to West Street Vineyard in Coggeshall was less successful, Margaret said, and was a little disappointing to say the least. Lunch in the nearby pub and the visit to Paycockes afterwards made up for it, however, and the day finished on a positive note. Ideas for outings come from Essex Tourism and feedback on the visit was given to them at their recent travel show which Margaret and Val had attended.

The next planned visit for the group will to Hoses Hall, on 18th May.

A future outing to be arranged is at the Gibberd Gardens in Harlow, meeting at the gardens and departing by minibus from there at 9.30am for a visit to the art gallery followed by a sculpture walk and a bus tour of the town's interesting sights. The group will then return to the Gibberd Gardens for lunch and a talk, followed by a visit to the Gibberd rooms with free time to explore the gardens. Margaret said that the visit is planned for Wednesday 27th June with an inclusive cost of £32 per person. Wendy will send out a detailed itinerary in the next few days.

Rangers report

No Rangers were in attendance due to unforeseen circumstances, but a written report had been left by Claire Bunn, Senior Ranger at Great Notley, as follows.

"Myself and Tom would like to thank you for your continued support and efforts on the work parties and with the background work that goes on in order to pull the work parties together. Even though I haven't been out with you all I have seen all the hard work that has been taking place via the Facebook posts and I am always impressed by the high standards of work you all have. Myself and Tom share an ongoing commitment to the volunteers and would like to see these work parties continue for many years.

As we cannot be here tonight we wanted to fill you in on a few points along the Flitch Way. The work parties will continue for a few more weeks before we break for the summer period. The clearance work has pretty much stopped for the summer so there will be a few weeks of working at Maldon along the BWRT and a week in Garnetts clearing the encampment.

Later in the year Tom will be looking at getting a quote to have the banks at Dunmow cut so then they only need to be raked.

We also wanted to update you on the Felsted area of the Flitch Way. There have been ongoing meetings between a number of bodies including Essex Police, Uttlesford and Essex Councils. The most recent meeting was last Monday which Tom attended. Tom and I will be producing some signs to inform people about the area and to give people contact numbers and advice on who to contact should an incident occur.

If anyone has any questions for either myself or Tom please do get in contact with us at either Claire.bunn@essex.gov.uk or tom.hamilton@essex.gov.uk “

Appointment/re-appointment of Trustees.

Chairman referred to the list of current Trustees. He confirmed that all were prepared to continue and asked whether there were any further nominations. Sandra said that none had been received and, there being none from those present at the AGM, Alan asked for a show of hands in support of the current committee continuing. A unanimous vote in favour was made.

Both Chairman and Secretary advised that there had been no resolutions put forward by the membership.

Any Other Business.

Dick Hughes referred to the Chairman's earlier comments regarding the £50,000 grant application to cover the cost of replacing of the boardwalk at Dunmow and said that while he was not criticising the intention behind the application, he had concerns that money was being spent un-necessarily at that particular place which he had measured at 163 paces long. Dick's view was that, except for the section damaged by tree roots, the boardwalk was generally in good order. The estimated cost to replace the whole boardwalk was £30,000 and he questioned whether that was a good use of funds when other sections of the Flitch Way needed work. Using his experience in land drainage, Dick said that he had recently surveyed the site and the adjoining cutting with Alan and Tom. The cutting was almost unusable in winter due to poor drainage, particularly at the Buttleys Lane end, Dick said, and that was where he felt that funds would be better directed.

Alan responded by saying that he acknowledged Dick's concerns which would be discussed at the first committee meeting of the new year. He agreed the worsening problem with invasive tree roots undermining the boardwalk which had been measured as 170 metres long. Although maintenance had been done on the boardwalk in the last 12 months, its condition was expected to deteriorate over the next couple of years which was why the grant application had been submitted now. There was no certainty that it would be approved, either wholly or in part, however, and the proposed plan might need to be re-visited when the result was forthcoming.

Wendy pointed out to the meeting that money from any successful grant application could only be used for the purposes contained in the application and could not be allocated elsewhere without the express permission of the funding organization. Wendy added that one of the criteria for this grant was that it had to be for a structure and, as such, the boardwalk fitted the bill and also gave us an opportunity to improve the drainage of the cutting. Grants of this size did not come along too often and we have wanted to improve the boardwalk for some time. As said by Alan, it might be reasonably safe at present but with health and safety regulations being as they are, that will not be the case for much longer. This grant will probably be the only opportunity to replace the boardwalk while making it longer at the same time. As well as replacing the existing structure and undertaking drainage work in the cutting, our application also proposed improvements such as installing an information panel and seating along the boardwalk.

In answer to a question from Carl, Dick expressed his opinion on the type of drainage which would need to be installed in the cutting in order to improve the path.

Alan said that he wanted to take account of the views of the members present and he asked for a show of hands on whether people supported the proposed work on the boardwalk. All in attendance showed their support.

John Moss referred to the appeal by the Brook Green developer against the decision by Braintree Planning to turn down the application for 1600 houses. He said that the "No Brook Green" group were raising funds to engage a barrister to argue against the appeal before the Planning Inspectorate. It was proposed and agreed by the members present that a donation of £500 be made from Friends funds.

Wendy had aggregated volunteer figures from the Flich Way, P3 and Carriage and said that a total of 5741 hours had been worked during the year, a tremendous achievement it was agreed.

There being no further business to discuss, Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.30pm.

Persons attending AGM

Carl Blamire
Val Blamire (C)
Andrew Bloomfield
Pauline Bloomfield
Barry Brighton
William Chastell
Mrs Chastell
Mr Chastell
Derek Cottis
Barry Crawford
Stan Davies (C)
Lesley Gillman
Gordon Glanfield
Alan Harris
Keith Hind
Andy Horder
Carol Horder
Dick Hughes
Pat Hughes
Margaret James (C)
Peter Lane
Ann Lane
Malcolm Lees
Bob Lucas (C)
Sue Lucas
Pam Maskell
John Moss (C)
Wendy Moss (C)
Sandra Reynolds (C)
John Scates
Pamela Scates
Wendy Taylor
Alan Trigg (C)
Carol Vinton
Richard Wansbury
John West

(C) denotes Committee member