

FRIENDS OF COOMBE WOOD



Chairman Gwyn Jordan

Treasurer T. Isherwood

Secretary John Rostron

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Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Coombe Wood held on Thursday January 5th 2023 at 7.30pm at St George's Small Hall, Thundersley

Present

Terry Isherwood, John Rostron, Alan Morley, Margaret Rostron, John and Brenda Cerny, Melvyn Westlake, Roy Sweetland and Rosemary & Douglas Francis.

In Attendance

Councillor Steven Cole, Deputy Leader of Castle Point Borough Council.

[2023].01 Welcome and Apologies

The Chairman, Gwyn Jordan had sent apologies. The Secretary, John Rostron took the chair and welcomed members to this AGM. Sue Speakman, Beryl Hayes and Eileen Peck had also sent apologies.

[2023].02 Minutes of the Previous Annual General Meeting on October 12th 2021

There were no matters of accuracy and no matters arising not otherwise covered.

Alan Morley proposed and Melvyn Westlake seconded that the minutes be accepted. Members agreed to this. **Accepted**

The Acting Chairman signed and dated the minutes an accurate record.

[2023].03 Chairman's Report

The secretary, John Rostron, provided a report compiled from the chairman's articles in the recent newsletters, with the chairman's approval.

It began by saying how important the Village Green status, together with the two Article 4 Directives were in asserting the boundaries of the wood.

Two infringements of such regulations were brought to the attention of the local Council by member Alan Morley requesting that the Council should make an Enforcement Order for each. The Council has issued such an order for the new fence in the wood near the A13 by the property opposite the Wheelers Restaurant which was erected without planning permission. The owners of the property appealed and the Council brought this to everyone's attention by placing notices near the new fence in the wood. Friends of Coombe Wood have written in to make the case for the illegality of such new fencing on Village Green and on land under an article 4 direction. We await the response from the Planning Inspectorate.

The other infringement is the misplaced fence by bridleway 58, which is around the private woodland

plot at the end of Lake Drive. Planning permission had been granted for the fence, but not for the position that the fence was erected. We have been waiting for clarification of the Council’s intentions on this issue for much of this last year and two of our committee members have been talking to Councillors to help find out what stage (if any) the Council has reached in regard to this issue.

We hope that everyone who enjoys Coombe Wood will see that the intention of the Friends of Coombe Wood is simply to secure the freedoms granted in the Village Green Status and under the Article 4 Directions for all users of the Wood and hopefully protect such privileges for the future. Although, in English law, anyone can make a claim for what is called “squatters rights” or “adverse possession” this requires fencing in and claiming land for exclusive use and it is hoped that Coombe Wood will be protected from such losses by the continued watchfulness of the users and by the publicising of the existence of the Village Green status and the Article 4 Directions. Why the Council does not support enforcement is most puzzling.

[2023].04 Treasurer

The Treasurer, Terry Isherwood tabled a report:

FoC has a community account that requires two signatories, one of which was Terry Tokley, our previous reasurer. Just before Terry Tokley, relinquished the post due to ill health in early 2021, Terry Isherwood took over as treasurer. Terry Isherwood opened a personal account and we transferred £2000, the bulk of the funds in the community account, into this account, which Terry ring fenced, so FoC could continue to operate. When Terry Tokley died the community account was frozen and since then we have been able to pay into it but unable to withdraw funds from it. We are finalising the process of changing the community account to internet banking with two signatories on the mandate, the current secretary and the treasurer. When complete we will transfer the funds from Terry Isherwood’s ring-fenced account into the FoC community account and close the aforementioned account.

FoC community account

Activity 2021, opening balance, £2013.33, deposits £186, withdrawals £2,000, closing balance £199.33.

Activity 2022, opening balance £199.33, deposits £20, withdrawals £0, closing balance £218.33.

FoC ring-fenced account

Activity 2021, opening balance, £0, deposits £2,345, withdrawals £358.28, closing balance £1986.72.

Activity 2022, opening balance £1986.72, deposits £270, withdrawals £206, closing balance £2050.72.

Total funds at the close of 2022, £2269.05.

Income for the two years is membership and donations to FoC.

Expenditure for the two years is printing newsletters, leaflets and posters and purchase of leaflet boxes.

The Treasurer’s report was accepted, proposed by Roy Sweetland and seconded by Melvyn Westlake.

[2023].05 Report on Enforcement Notices

At this point, Councillor Steven Cole, Deputy Leader of Castle Point Borough Council arrived and requested that he could attend. The acting chair invited him to stay. Since it was very relevant to his attendance, the chair asked Alan Morley to provide the background to enforcement notices.

The Enforcement Notice to the occupiers of 445 London Road is currently with the Planning Inspectorate and we will have to wait their decision. Cllr Cole said that he would see if it was possible for his Council officers to expedite this matter. **Action: Cllr Cole**

Alan then provided Steven with the background to the Lake Drive fencing infringement. He had been pressing the Council to take action to have the fence removed and was dismayed that the Friends committee had not been pursuing this as they ought.

In the past few months the land on which the fence sits has changed hands. It is now owned by Adam Swainsbury, the occupant of *Cartref* on Lake Drive. Any enforcement needs now to be directed to them. Members agreed that the best way forward would be to enter into a dialogue with the new owner.

Action: Chairman and new Committee

[2023].06 Newsletters

The Newsletter Editor, John Rostron invited comment from the floor on the recent newsletters. The feeling from the floor was very positive and encouraging. Terry Isherwood commented that receiving a newsletter helped remind members to renew their subscriptions.

[2023].07 Election of Officers and Committee

Alan Morley stated that he was willing to stand as Chairman in order to expedite the matters raised above. He stated that he had not renewed his subscription, but would do so if elected. He invited members from the floor to nominate him. The chair then asked if anyone would nominate Alan for the Chair. Melvyn Westlake proposed, and Brenda Cerny seconded the nomination. John Rostron then nominated Gwyn Jordan for chair and asked for a seconder. No seconder was forthcoming so the chair asked for a show of hands in support of Alan Morley. A majority of those present supported him and he was declared chairman-elect.

The acting chair then invited the members to elect the remaining committee members (Gwyn Jordan, John Rostron, Terry Isherwood and Sue Speakman) *en block*. Members agreed with a show of hands to do so. The chair then asked Roy Sweetland, who had expressed an interest in helping, if he would be willing to join the committee. He agreed to do so and the members agreed to elect him by a show of hands.

[2023].08 Questions from the floor / Any Other Business

The chair asked for questions from the floor. He said that these could not be resolved at the AGM, but the new committee would address any matters. Matters for the committee to address are flagged with **Action** at the end.

- Councillor Cole said that the Council was promoting a ‘No Doors Down’ scheme to provide a place for charities to advertise themselves. He said that the Friends of Coombe Wood would be welcome to advertise there. **Action**
- Roy Sweetland asked about our use of QR codes to provide quick links that would encourage younger people to access our website pages. John Rostron said that there was a QR code on the notices at the wood entrance (leading to the website) and also on the newsletter (leading to the subscription page).
- Members also asked for clarification as to the ownership of the wood. This is a mosaic with many owners (including the Council) and some with no known ownership. **Action**

- A member raised the possibility of managing the wood in conjunction with a larger organisation, such as the Woodland Trust. **Action**
- Roy asked if there was a common archive of information available as it seemed that some knowledge such as details of the ownership of the land was known to a couple of long standing members and he was concerned that the information could be lost if members leave or die. **Action**
- A member asked about Commoners' rights. Do the people living in the Neighbourhood (as defined in the Village Green application documents) have any rights? They do have rights of access to all parts of the Village Green as approved. It does not include such traditional commoners' rights as turbary, pannage or estover.
- Roy asked about the fence along the northern boundary with the churchyard. Alan responded that the fence was on a narrow strip of land gifted by the original owner to St Peter's Church. The church does not wish for this fence to be removed.
- Members asked about managing the wood. In general, the management is the right (and duty) of the landowner. Since much of this is unknown, this is a problem. Over time, various individuals have undertaken management off their own bat, such as clearing a fallen tree from a path, or erecting a bridge. The Friends has no responsibility for this. Any management we did do would render us liable in the case of any subsequent accidents. Members felt that if the Friends were making something dangerous to be safe, then this would be acceptable in law.

The meeting finished at 8.45pm.