

BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST
18th Annual General Meeting Saturday, November 12th 2022
Backwell Parish Hall 2.00pm

Present:

Diana Bramall, Ian Chambers, Roger Baddeley, Gillian Collinson, Marian Cornwell, Hugh Dale, Jill Dale, Jennifer Dyer, Jane Elliot, Christopher Elliot, Vivien French, Olwen Gillespie, Dave Gray, Jenny Greenslade, Carolyn Ireland, Peter Ireland, Helen MacDonald, Christine Ogborne, Elma Porter, Trevor Riddle, Jas Smallbone, Ted Smallbone, Andy Smith, Anne-Marie Smith, Peter Speight, Michelle Stagg, Andrew Stagg, Amanda Swannell, Thelma Trendell, Christopher Watkins, Colin Welch, Valerie Wells, Geoffrey Wells, Hilary West + 2 x grandchildren, Denis Wilmott, Janet Wilmott. Gil Martin (Speaker). (39 people)

Apologies from: Sue and Richard Ivens, Janet and Peter Longden.

Proceedings began with Peter Speight introducing himself and welcoming all members present.

He then stated that the 2021 Minutes had been reviewed by the Trustees and have been online since the last AGM. We have received no comments and I am happy to confirm that they are a correct record of the 2021 proceedings.

Chairman's Report

The past 12 months have really rushed by. During the year we kept on being surprised by the arrival of each new season, wondering where the previous season had gone. And here we are again, so soon, after another eventful year.

Coping with the effects of Ash dieback has continued to dominate our woodland management. This time last year we had just spent more than £37,000 having 100 high-risk trees felled along Cheston Combe Road. We expected to have to close the road again to complete this work at further considerable cost. However with the assistance of a different tree surgeon and the support of Backwell Logs we managed to significantly reduce the cost and the impact on the reserves.

We will need to continue to fell a proportion of affected Ash trees each winter, but we hope the working model we now have in place will allow us to manage this as cost-effectively and sympathetically as we can.

As we look at the reserves today the recovery from the initial felling is well underway. The increased light is stimulating regeneration and we have planted nearly 300 new saplings.

Our amazing volunteers have enthusiastically cleared up after the major felling and have tackled a lot of the smaller diseased trees. They have made a tremendous difference to the appearance of the reserves creating dead hedges along boundaries and restoring impressive stretches of dry stone walls.

We have been pleased to receive many messages of support for this work and thanks for all the efforts of our team of volunteers.

The only negative note I should record is the closure a few months ago of the unofficial path across the field to the Jubilee Stone. This closure was done by the neighbouring landowner without notice and has caused a lot of resentment amongst our members and visitors. We will talk more about this later on.

Thank you all for your continued support and for being here today.

Concluding his Chairman's report, Peter asked if there were any questions. Roger Baddeley then said if there was anything happening about the pathway problem. To this Peter replied that this matter would be discussed later in the programme.

Treasurer's Report and Accounts

I will now take you through a report on the accounts, as prepared by Andy. There are a dozen copies around if you want to see the detail.

Looking at the big numbers in the accounts it will be seen that it has been another different year financially, dominated by the costs of tackling Ash dieback on our reserves. In the previous financial year we embarked on serious fund raising and then had to contract for tree felling costing over £37,000 pounds. The invoice for that work was received in this last financial year, at which point we were able to claim the balance of the £35,000 grant we had been awarded by Tarmac for the work.

Moving on from those two big figures, which relate to work done in the previous September, the next large expenditure was £4,000 in February to complete tree felling along the road. This brought the total tree work costs for last autumn and winter to £41,495. This figure also appears in a separate column headed Restricted Funds. We received a large donation of £21,000 from Backwell Logs in the previous year and have followed best practice by setting this aside and only using it for Ash dieback related costs. The balance of those restricted funds is now £12k, which will help with our tree works for a few years.

The rest of the numbers are more in line with our normal receipts and payments. Our membership income has increased slightly after we raised subscriptions and we are very grateful for the additional generous donations received from our members. The membership subscription numbers in the right hand column are low because early in lockdown we changed membership renewal from April to October.

We would like to note that we do pursue additional sources of funding and don't just rely on you good folk. We generate income from other activities such as the Scything Workshops we offer. Presentations to other groups about BET and Peter's drone photography provide a useful revenue stream for us. We are also grateful to Nailsea Lions for a donation to buy two additional scythes for volunteers. A number of people take part in the Nailsea and Backwell Rotary Walks and Bike Ride events each summer and kindly nominate BET as their preferred charity. The Rotary Club top up the contributions which resulted in a total for BET of £300 last year. Thank you to all who took part.

It is worth pointing out the monies received from Smile Amazon. In the past we have mentioned that Amazon will contribute half a percent of purchases to your nominated charity – you just have to use their alternative website Smile.Amazon. To date we have received over £50 via this route – thank you.

There could now follow a lengthy saga of our attempts to change bank, after HSBC introduced charges on their so-called Charitable Bank Account. Suffice it to say that over several months our Treasurer and Secretary investigated various options, made multiple trips to Portishead and Broadmead in all weathers and battled with numerous officials by phone and email. The result is that we stayed with HSBC but now have online banking and received £50 compensation for their incompetence. The charges we incur are reducing as members increasingly use bank transfer. We have also moved £12,000 to a fixed rate charities savings account with the Cambridge and Counties Bank. This will yield £600 of interest over two years, more than covering the HSBC charges and providing a bit of protection against inflation.

Finally, we would like to thank Chris MacDonald for carrying out an independent examination of our accounts again this year and giving us a clean bill of health.

Could I ask for someone to propose that the accounts are accepted as an accurate statement of our finances? This was Proposed by Ted Smallbone; Seconded by Helen MacDonald. A vote was taken and passed unanimously.

The five elected trustees for the coming year are:

Ian Chambers:	proposed by Sarah Davies	seconded by Amanda Swannell
Jenny Greenslade:	proposed by Nicola Church	seconded by Viv French
Andy Smith:	proposed by Robert Lee	seconded by Diana Bramall
Anne-Marie Smith:	proposed by Roger Baddeley	seconded by Jas Smallbone.
Peter Speight:	proposed by Brian Smith	seconded by Ted Smallbone

Peter was elected to be Chairman, Anne-Marie Smith as Secretary and Andy Smith as Treasurer.

The election of the five trustees was put to a vote and accepted unanimously with no objections.

Due to our level of income last year, we had an additional level of reporting to make to the Charity Commission. This was a new experience and I am pleased to say that the reports were submitted without issue, thanks to Andy and Anne-Marie.

Reserves Manager Report

Ian began by reporting that it had been another busy year, and that he was going to explain what we had achieved over the last twelve months.

As with last year, Ash Dieback disease has been very high on the agenda. The situation is actually getting worse, as he hadn't seen a single Ash tree without symptoms. We have however come a long way in dealing with the matter as best we can, by removing the dangerous trees along the roadside, and

those near houses. This has required tree surgeons to use mechanised equipment for safety reasons, and has brought more expense with the necessary road closure during proceedings.

With the felling of trees comes the problem of removing the timber which has been done using tractor and trailer. In 2021, when the contractors ran out of time with eleven trees still to be made safe, we commissioned 'Nuthatch Trees' to complete the road tree work. This took place in February. Although the larger trees all needed to be removed by contractors, the BET volunteers have been tackling the smaller trees at big saving costs. Our partnership with 'Backwell Logs' has made it possible to remove and sell the wood, while brash has been burnt to kill the fungus. It has been agreed that the costs involved for felling trees will be paid by BET and then half this expenditure will be given to us by 'Backwell Logs' as payment for the wood.

This winter we will be focussing on dangerous trees next to the footpaths. All trees in striking distance of our paths have been professionally assessed and those with a crown loss of greater than 50% scheduled for removal. As increasing light into the woods is part of the ten year management plan, the Ash Dieback problem is not all negative. The positive side is the creation of more woodland glades, and wider, lighter footpaths. The regeneration has been dramatic with a wide range of tree species germinated this year to fill the gaps. In addition to this natural regeneration, 280 tree saplings have been planted to increase the biodiversity of the woodlands. The number of species on the reserves continues to rise, and is now at 856.

Numerous surveys are carried out throughout the year by volunteers. These include butterflies, bird and bird boxes, dormice and reptiles. These give us an indication on how we are managing. The highlight this year is that there has been a 93% increase in butterflies on last year.

A very important, ongoing summer task is that of keeping the footpaths clear of vegetation encroachment, and also the replacement of steps before becoming unsafe.

Another big project this year has been to restore two sections of the dry stone walls next to Cheston Combe Road. The wall demarcates the edge of BET's land and was probably constructed in the early 1800's. A special thanks goes out to Brian Smith for his many hours of hard work on this project. Many complements have been made by visitors on the upper section of dry stone wall extension. However, as the building of these walls takes a long while to construct, to secure boundaries, dead hedges are being put in place. It is hoped that they will be replaced with more stone walls at a future time.

Another important activity has been to clear one of the ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood which had become badly silted up, and heavily shaded. This work was achieved in late summer as it is important for the pond's health, especially as it is a significant breeding pond for newts.

This brings us on to the scything season when every year the BET volunteers hand scythe the meadows of approximately two acres which now takes around three months to complete. This is important to prevent scrub encroachment, and to reduce the fertility of the soil.

This year most of the rustic benches needed replacing. Thanks go to Peter Speight and Nicola Church for their work dealing with this. The typical lifespan of Ash benches is about seven years, however this year we are trying out a seat made of recycled plastic which has a projected lifespan of over 50 years.

This year we have had a second visit from about a dozen botanists from the Somerset Rare Plants Group. They have given us the good news of 12 new plant species discovered on our reserves.

This year we have been confronted with a problem concerning the upper reserve access, and lack of car park facility. Back in 2019 the ageing stile was replaced with a kissing gate. This has now been dismantled by the land owner with whom we are now having confrontations. The battle to resume access is still underway and will probably take a year to conclude.

As scything is an annual activity for BET volunteers, many have become experienced in scything techniques. Because of this we ran a course for Chew Magna Community Farm for the third year running. The weather was good and the views stunning. This has two benefits; it passes on our knowledge, and is a source of income for our voluntary organisation. A big thanks to Peter for most of the work on this.

Finally, it needs to be said that all the work achieved this year on our reserves would not have happened without the incredible commitment of the trusty BET volunteers. In fact the total number of volunteer hours for 2022 is a staggering 3,225.

Any Questions?

With the request for any questions Ian was asked by Michelle Stagg what happens to the stumps of the cut down trees. Ian went on to explain the fungal effects of the disease and how it blocks off nutrients and water supply getting into the tree. Whilst the tree stumps will initially send out healthy shoots, these will typically die from the disease within 1 - 2 years. Hugh Dale then asked the question whether the Ash spores spread during transportation from the trees not burnt. It was explained that there was negligible effect from transporting timber, and Peter said there were no lawful restrictions. Roger Baddeley then asked the question of where we were now at with the Ten Year Management Plan. Ian said that Ash Die Back was around when it was written, so the forecast was to cover this work in the plan and we have made good progress with it. The next question was asked by Elma Porter, who remarked on the alarming report on Country File of squirrels causing damage by bark stripping. It was explained that there was not a lot we could do about damage done by squirrels, but an encouragement of bramble has helped to discourage deer grazing. Andrew Stagg brought up the matter of a butterfly survey in Kent concerning the Box Moth. The caterpillars have a devastating affect on Box hedges, and on a recent survey as many as 20 - 30 were found on one small bush.

Peter then thanked Ian for his presentation.

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To continue, Peter put up a reference slide on the footpath closure back in June. He explained that in the past the footpath had never actually been a Public Right of Way. Now Hilary Power, who is on the Parish Council, is submitting a PROW application on behalf of the village next week. Although we have been trying to be good neighbours, meetings over the issue have been somewhat unpleasant. There have been eighty statements made on the number of years this pathway has been used by the general public with no questions asked. Although an inconvenience, it is requested that no damage is caused to the obstructions, as this could compromise the application. As there are now sheep and cows grazing, dog walkers letting many dogs together off leads, could create a problem. Also there has been a CCTV camera put up. Peter showed a map signalling the right paths to use, and to suggest that we are tolerant and all keep to them until we have this problem sorted legally.

Hugh then mentioned that he knew the husband of Nicola Lake, Gary, who was very supportive of BET in the early days. They actually bought the field in order for it not to be used for building development, and also helped BET with its original funding.

Peter then announced that with business complete, there would be a short break for refreshments. After this there would be a presentation by Gil Martin from Belmont Estate on the rewilding project at nearby Watercress Farm.

Backwell Environment Trust Accounts 2021/2022

BET Cashflow					
2021/22	UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	RESTRICTED FUNDS	TOTAL FUNDS	2020/21	2019/20
RECEIPTS					
Membership	1,190.00		1,190.00	950.00	360.00
Donations with Membership	1,113.00		1,113.00	3,970.00	535.00
General Donations & Fundraising	1,989.90	-	1,989.90	22,569.74	1,424.45
Grants	-	34,217.60	34,217.60	782.40	-
Interest	1.06		1.06	1.19	22.83
Gift Aid	1,371.50		1,371.50	182.86	785.25
TOTAL RECEIPTS	5,665.46	34,217.60	39,883.06	28,456.19	3,127.53
PAYMENTS					
Woodland Maintenance					
Tree Work	-	41,495.00	41,495.00	2,580.00	-
Bird & Dormice Boxes	-	-	-	-	135.00
Materials	548.20	-	548.20	57.05	64.21
Tools	242.00	50.96	292.96	182.40	222.92
Other Payments					
Grant Contribution	-	1,649.79	1,649.79	2,199.71	
Website Hosting	59.75		59.75	54.39	53.23
Printing	266.00		266.00	303.00	334.00
Insurance	523.90		523.90	261.95	-
AGM	54.00		54.00	-	64.10
Stationery & Postage	31.51		31.51	56.20	22.44
Bank charges	34.99		34.99		
Car Park Rent	-		-	-	10.00
TOTAL PAYMENTS	1,760.35	43,195.75	44,956.10	5,694.70	905.90
RECEIPTS LESS PAYMENTS	3,905.11	-8,978.15	-5,073.04	22,761.49	2,221.63
Balance b/f at 30 Sept	18,523.51	21,000.00	39,523.51	16,762.02	14,540.39
BALANCE AT BANKS	22,428.62	12,021.85	34,450.47	39,523.51	16,762.02

BET Balance Sheet at 30 September 2022				BET Balance Sheet at 30 September 2021			
Assets				Assets			
Land	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds	Land	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£		£	£	£
Woodlands - cost	101657.66		101657.66	Woodlands - cost	101657.66		101657.66
Tools - estimated	1500.00		1500.00	Tools - estimated	1500.00		1500.00
	103157.66		103157.66		103157.66		103157.66
Banks				Banks			
HSBC Current	10428.62	12,021.85	22450.47	HSBC Current	6472.95	21000.00	27472.95
HSBC Deposit	0.00		0.00	HSBC Deposit	12050.56		12050.56
Cambridge & Counties Bank	12000.00		12000.00				
Paypal	0.00		0.00				
	22428.62	12021.85	34450.47		18523.51	21000.00	39523.51
Debtors and Prepayments (1.)	0.00	0.00	0.00	Debtors and Prepayments (1.)	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total Assets	125586.28	12021.85	137608.13	Total Assets	121681.17	21000.00	142681.17
Liabilities				Liabilities			
Creditors and accruals (1.)	0.00	0.00	0.00	Creditors and accruals (1.)	0.00	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS	125586.28	12021.85	137608.13	NET ASSETS	121681.17	21000.00	142681.17
NOTES							
1. There are no Debtors or Creditors detailed on the Balance Sheet as BET accounts are currently run on a cash basis.							



Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/
members of

Charity Name
Backwell Environmental Trust

On accounts for the year
ended

30 September 2022

Charity no
(if any)

1109406

Set out on pages

1

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 30/09/2022.

Responsibilities and
basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent
examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:

Date:

8 November 2022

Name:

Chris MacDonald

Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):

ACA

Address:

106A Church Lane

Backwell

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