

FRIENDS OF OAKFRITH WOOD (FOW)

MINUTES of the AGM - 22nd AUG 2023 - 18.00 hrs

URCHFONT VILLAGE HALL

Attendees :

Gen. Public : Bob Ward, Paul Melhuish, Linda Jennings, Colin Whitehead, Simon Bell, Emma Bell, Joyce Organ, Richard Kemp

Trustees : Nick Pritchard (NP), Peter Newell (PN), Peter Winkley (PW), Martin Follett (MF), Robert Organ (RO), Graham Creasey (GC), Maria Kemp (MK)

1. MF extended a warm welcome to all and expressed thanks for the continued interest and support shown to the FOW for the work that is done.

2. Apologies for absence had been received from Kevin Crofts, and Steve Russell. *It was noted that PW was unavoidably delayed and the treasurers' report would be deferred until later in the meeting.*

3. Minutes of the 2022 AGM were accepted and approved as a correct record. It was noted that minutes were not generally circulated to those attending meetings, it was agreed that this could be done in future, by email, to those who wished for a copy.

4. Chairmans' Report (MF) :

This has been a year during which Oakfrith Wood has continued to be much used by many from the parish and beyond, including the usual dog walkers and 10,000 steppers but also Urchfont School's Forest School, Lavington Scouts and many others.

Nick Pritchard has continued his contributions to Redhorn News with articles including the biology of bluebells and the skills of hedge laying, for which many thanks. Maria Kemp organised successful walks in the spring led by Steve Russell and Malcolm Turner, also for which many thanks. I think it is important for people to appreciate the wonderful asset on their doorstep and these are ways of encouraging this.

We organised the planking of a large storm damaged oak tree we had felled, and we now have 30 two inch planks being seasoned under cover for use as benches in the wood. If successful, this may be a further source of funds in the future.

The Scarecrow Festival Charity generously awarded us £800 for various projects and I thank all of you who lobbied the trustees of that charity. Hopefully the importance of Oakfrith Wood to the community, and of the Friends in maintaining it, are appreciated.

Peter Winkley is standing down as treasurer and Graham Creasey is standing down as secretary. Both have faithfully undertaken largely unseen but essential work for the Friends and I hope you will all join me in thanking them for the important work they have done for us over many years. I'm pleased to say that Simon Bell and Richard Kemp have come forward to offer themselves as replacements, subject of course to your approval.

I would like to finally thank the two people whose time, energy and support continue to be vital for the work of the Friends, namely Bob Organ and Steve Russell. Bob works tirelessly for the Friends, not only in organising the Woodland Cooperative for its Tuesday sessions but also in maintaining our vehicles and equipment and looking after the interests of the flora and fauna. Steve is our vital professional, giving us guidance and encouragement, without which we could not operate. Thank you to both.

6. Woodland Co-Operative Report 2022 -23 (RO) :

The season commenced on 6th September with the production and delivery of logs which continued throughout the month.

The number of days lost to the weather was low this season, only 3 and none to the lack of personnel. Attendance was very good throughout the year.

The number of loads sold to customers, I believe, was about 17. But the accounts may tell us better.

Steve Russell carried out an unannounced H&S question and answer session after the Christmas break which highlighted several areas of concern and the need to adhere to the training and procedures that have seen the group safely through the previous 25 years plus. All concerns have been taken on board.

There was a First Aid Training day held in the village hall on Friday 10th March for all those who could attend. Future training sessions need to consider the inclusion of other members of the Friends of Oakfrith Wood, perhaps.

The season ended on 28th March.

16th May, had a number of the group back in Oakfrith to deal with a fallen Oak near the centre crossroads and over the track heading east.

The truck has had its MOT and service and is now good to go. The mileage last year was 500 miles. To pass its MOT a front headlight needed replacing, wiper blades and wheel bearings attended to. A big thank you to Jason and Tracy Wildman for all their help and support.

The quad now resides with a member of the group within the village which may need a review of its insurance and security costs .

Note : Discussion followed in this regard, PW noted that the current insurance cover would not be affected by the change of location. The new keeper noted that the quad was kept out of sight and practically very difficult to move.

All other equipment is serviceable and ready to go.

The truck has been used to help other groups in the village i.e.:

1). the Rights of Way group, to transport equipment to the end of Marsh Lane. *(Paul Melhuish added a note of thanks in this regard and offered to assist with fuel costs if reqd.)*

2). Friends and Neighbours to move chairs for a garden party .

The intention is to start the new season on Tuesday 5th September, where there are several trees that need attending to due to the weather and trees being trees.

RO recorded continued thanks to Pat Putland for allowing FOW to utilise her driveway and garage,

N.B. PW joined the meeting

5. Treasurers' Report - Financial Year ending 31st March 2023 (PW) :

Compared to the previous year (2022) our income is up. Firewood sales have totalled £3000, a level not seen since the end of the 2018 financial year. The Covid lockdowns obviously had a lot to do with this decline. Firewood prices for this season were at £95 per load, up from the previous year, but the first increase for many years and necessary because of the rise in fuel costs. We received a Scarecrow Festival grant of £375.

Expenditure was up on the previous year but largely due to £1000 spent on training for new chain saw operatives and a first aid refresher course. However, having more trained volunteers should help us to catch up with felling requirements and with processing firewood sales, as in the past, lack of numbers has limited the level of firewood orders we can process and hence the potential income.

Vehicle tax and insurance continues to gradually rise, but this is a common theme with many charities and businesses. Truck maintenance continues (hopefully) without too many issues apart from the increased difficulty at sourcing parts.

For the past few years, so since the Year End 2017/18, we have been without the previous grants from various organisations and this gap in income poses the greatest challenge to maintaining a healthy bank balance and reserve. An increase in the levels of firewood sales could help along with future grants, but other sources of income may have to be explored.

Again I would like to express our thanks to Gillian Hill who audits our accounts. Gillian has kindly agreed to continue this for the current year.

7. Working Party report (MF) :

There have been five meetings of the group this year, including our winter BBQ. We have undertaken the usual coppicing and clearing up and in addition we laid the hedge between the pond and Witchell Lane. Particular thanks are due to Simon Bell for sterling work in the pouring rain to finish the hedge laying.

Sadly Linda Jennings was seriously injured during the February session when her foot was caught in a tough bramble and her ankle and her knee were broken, requiring the calling of an ambulance, emergency surgery and a stay in hospital. She is slowly recovering and we hope she's back to full mobility as soon as possible. It must have been a very frightening experience for her.

8. Election of Officers :

MF proposed Simon Bell (SB) and Richard Kemp (RK) be elected as treasurer and secretary respectively replacing Peter Winkley and Graham Creasey, the appointments were approved.

9. Trustees 2033 - 2024 :

PW, GC and KC would continue as trustees, in addition SB and RK were also elected as trustees.

10. Independent Accounts Auditor :

Per PRs' report Gillian Hill has agreed to continue in this role.

There being no comments from members of the public or AOB the meeting was closed.

Friends of Oakfrith Wood
Accounts for Period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Income

Chain saw sales	150.00	
Donations	125.00	
Grants	375.00	
Bird Plot Rent	238.00	See refund
Firewood Sales - public	2,320.00	
Firewood sales - volunteers	680.00	3,888.00

Expenditure

Trustee & General Insurance	506.82	
Fuel and oil	304.45	
Safety Equipment	70.00	
Chainsaw R and R (less £693 for new saw)	110.37	
Vehicles Tax and Insurance	1,158.88	
Vehicles maintenance	496.90	
Materials & tools	646.98	
Training	1,000.00	
Tree surgery at high level	180.00	
less UPC grant		
Printing and stationery	0.00	
Sign boards refurbishment		
Sundry	259.71	4,734.11
Trading surplus		-846.11

Depreciation

Quad	151.09	
Trailer	34.87	
Truck	56.49	
Chain saws	566.59	809.04
Operating surplus		-1,655.15
Add surplus brought forward		22,867.21
Accumulated surplus		21,212.06

Represented by

Cash in bank			18,652.31
Quad	Cost	3,900.00	
	Less depreciation	2,540.15	1,359.85
Trailer	Cost	900.00	
	Less depreciation	586.19	313.81
Toyota	Initial value	2,000.00	
	less depreciation	1,491.63	508.37
Chainsaws	Cost	4,354.00	
	less depreciation	3,976.28	377.72
			2,559.75
			21,212.06