

The Friends of the Ridgeway

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Court Hill Centre, Wantage, at 3.00 pm on Saturday, 10th May, 2014

Open Session:

The Chairman, Ian Ritchie, welcomed members and others to the Meeting, and noted that nearly 60 members and visitors have turned out for The Ridgeway Day, despite the inclement weather. He thanked Jim Gunter in particular for leading walkers to Segsbury Camp, and commended his timing in getting back just before the rain arrived.

Ian gave a brief resume of Natural England's (NE's) New Deal proposals, against the background of declining financial resources for the National Trails. The present arrangement of management of The Ridgeway and Thames Path by the responsible Highways Authorities is now proposed to change to separate independent bodies, with greater stakeholder involvement. The two AONBs concerned with The Ridgeway, namely North Wessex Downs AONB and the Chilterns Conservation Board, have joined the group and we have agreed to do so. A Review led by consultants is in progress. We met them two days ago and found them very receptive to the ideas we have put forward. The new body is likely to have significant budgets for promotion and development, and to be constituted as a charitable body able to raise new funds.

In response to questions, Ian confirmed that the consultants, Kent Downs AONB, are employed and funded under the existing management arrangements, led for this purpose by CCB, using NE grant money supplemented by CCB and NWDAONB contributions. There was discussion of the volunteer scheme and its value for money, which is also being reviewed. Questions were also raised as to who would take real responsibility for The Ridgeway in future, and concern expressed as to the possibility of its being taken over.

The AGM:

The Attendance Register showed the number of members attending as 21, below that quorum of 25. The Chairman proposed that the Meeting should continue with decisions subject to ratification at the next Meeting, and this was accepted. The Chairman then called the Meeting to order.

1. **Apologies:** The Chairman asked the Secretary to read the short list of members who had expressed their apologies for non-attendance, comprising Phyllis, Lady Treitel; John Templeton; and our Vice-President, Richard Benyon MP, to whom our sympathy was extended on the loss of his father.
2. **Minutes:** The Chairman noted that the Minutes of the 2013 AGM, held on 8th April, 2013, had been approved as a correct record by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 4th June, 2013, and signed by him then, in accordance with the Constitution. He invited any questions, but none were raised.

3. **Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising from the Minutes.
4. **Annual Report:** The Chairman observed that a short letter from him and other information, including a Notice of this Meeting, had been published in the printed Annual Report circulated to members, and that copies of the formal Trustees' Annual Report, the Annual Accounts for 2012, the Hon Examiner's Report, and the full AGM Notice and Agenda, have been provided to members attending today.

The Chairman recalled our efforts to launch The Great Stones Way (GSW) project and referred to the Cicerone poster on display today for a new Guide-book, due out in mid-July. We have provided much of the information in this Guide, and look forward to its publication as an effective launch for the route. He also announced plans for the re-launch of an expanded web-site for the new route, to be funded from the GSW restricted fund.

The Committee has moved this year towards greater reliance on e-mail newsletters and a revised, more inter-active web-site for communications with members, in response to rising postal and printing costs, but members may still apply to the Secretary to receive copies of e-Newsletters by post.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for their contributions during the year, particularly Sally Barnes and Michael McQueen, who are standing down as Treasurer and Membership Secretary respectively. He was grateful to Sally, who has agreed to take on the task of Membership Secretary, and continue on the Committee. He welcomed John Edgerton, who has volunteered to take over as Treasurer, and invited John to introduce himself.

John related his background of 40 years in finance, as an accountant and internal auditor, with local government and latterly the Royal British Legion. He is currently Treasurer of Swindon U3A. He feels well qualified to take on the task of Treasurer, and will be working closely with Sally.

The Chairman thanked Geoff Dare, who is standing down as Communications Secretary, but continuing on the Committee, for his work in that capacity. We are now seeking a replacement as Communications Secretary, and also as Engagement Secretary. He also thanked Sally and David and their colleagues on the Vale of White Horse Local Group for another year of great activities and good meetings, mainly held in Faringdon.

Ian thanked Sally Barnes, our Treasurer, and Steve Sherman, the Independent Examiner, for their efficiency in preparing the Accounts once again; and also thanked Ian McPherson for his continuing support and good advice on a number of planning issues arising during the year.

5. **Annual Accounts:** The Chairman called on Sally Barnes, as out-going Treasurer, to present the Annual Accounts for 2013, and she invited any questions on them; but none were raised. Sally then addressed the main issue disclosed, the excess of expenses over income for a second year, which had been raised also by Stephen as Examiner. The Trustees need to make the operations more sustainable, by reducing costs or increasing income. Ian as Chairman endorsed this call, but was pleased to announce the recent receipt of a very generous donation by a long-standing member, which will go far to remove our current financial restraints. Ian warmly thanked Stephen Sherman,

our Independent Examiner, for his Report, and Sally thanked him for being so helpful to work with.

No questions on the Accounts being raised, adoption of the Annual Accounts for 2013 was proposed by David Axford, seconded by Geoff Dare, and agreed unanimously.

6 Election of President and Vice-Presidents:

The Chairman thanked the President and Vice-Presidents for their continued support, and requested a proposal from the floor for their re-election.

The re-election *en bloc* of the President, Lord Bradshaw, and of Vice-Presidents Richard Benyon MP, Robert Buckland MP, David Gauke MP, John Howell MP, David Lidington MP, Claire Perry MP, and Edward Vaizey MP was proposed by Sally Barnes, seconded by Bridget Benn, and agreed unanimously.

7 Election of Officers and Committee Members/Trustees

- **Chairman:** The Chairman, Ian Ritchie, stood down at this point, and the Secretary, Jeff Goddard, took over. He was pleased to report that Ian Ritchie had agreed to continue to serve, and that his re-election had been proposed by Jim Gunter, and seconded by himself. Ian was unanimously elected, and resumed the Chair.
- **Secretary:** Jeff Goddard, proposed by Ian Ritchie and seconded by Geoff Dare, was re-elected as Secretary.
- **Treasurer:** John Edgerton was proposed by Sally Barnes, seconded by Ian Ritchie, and duly elected as our new Treasurer.
- **Members:** Sally Barnes, David Axford, Geoff Dare and Jim Gunter, having been duly proposed and seconded, were all re-elected as Trustees and Committee members.

8 Honorary Auditor/Independent Examiner: The Chairman proposed Stephen Sherman FCA, seconded by Sally Barnes, as Hon Auditor/Independent Examiner.

9 Other Business: Kate Crennell raised a question as to the poor state of public transport services for The Ridgeway, and called for a digest of available services. Ian endorsed the call, and believed that this issue is likely to be addressed by the new Ridgeway Trail Partnership.

10 There being no further business, the Chairman declared the Meeting closed, and thanked members for their attendance.

Signed:Chairman

Date: