

The Friends of the Ridgeway

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Vale & Downland Museum, Wantage, at 2.00 pm on Sunday, 26th April, 2015

Open Session:

The Chairman, Ian Ritchie, welcomed members and others to the Meeting, which is to commence with a briefing to members and discussion of the plans for the future management of The Ridgeway National Trail.

Ian explained that the Trail was until March this year managed in common with the Thames Path, by arrangement with Natural England (NE) acting for Government, by a Management Group comprising all the Highways Authorities along both routes. This rather cumbersome structure was not helped by increasingly stringent financial austerity. Users and other stakeholders were consulted only through an annual Ridgeway Forum, which had no powers and fell into increasing disregard. NE's New Deal proposals to cede responsibility to new independent bodies, with greater stakeholder involvement, a form of public/private partnership, were at first seen as the thin edge of the wedge. However, the opportunities offered by the new plans were soon recognised and widely welcomed. The key points are the separation of The Ridgeway from the Thames Path, and the inclusion of stakeholders in a broader Partnership base.

The new Ridgeway Partnership comprises Oxfordshire CC as Lead Partner, NE, the six local authorities and both AONBs concerned, plus ten stakeholder representatives, including the Association. Ian has accepted election as first Partnership Chairman, and a full time Ridgeway Officer has been recruited, to supervise both maintenance and development. Plans for promotion and enhancement of the Trail will focus on five themes, being the Natural, Ancient, Sporting, Living and Creative aspects of The Ridgeway.

In response to questions, Ian confirmed that priority will be given to involving Scouts & Guides and other youth organisations. The role of the Association within the Partnership will be to provide support, which may extend to social activities, but is likely to focus on fund-raising, through sponsorship, supporters groups, licence income and access charging. The new role is expected to enhance rather than diminish the influence and effectiveness of the Association, and should enlarge its membership.

The AGM:

The Attendance Register showed the number present as 26, and the Chairman declared the Meeting quorate and called those present to order.

1. **Apologies:** The Chairman asked the Secretary to read the list of members who had expressed their apologies for non-attendance. This comprised 15 names, including Sally Barnes, Trustee, who is unwell and to whom sympathies were extended.
2. **Minutes:** The Chairman noted that the Minutes of the 2014 AGM, held on 10th May, 2014, had been approved as a correct record by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 1st July, 2014, and signed by him then, in accordance with the Constitution. He invited any questions, and it was noted with an apology that an apology by Richard Duggan should have been recorded.

3. **Matters Arising:** The Chairman noted that the 2014 AGM was inquorate, and at his request it was proposed by Janet Hierons, seconded by Barry Hierons and agreed unanimously that the proceedings of last year's meeting be ratified.
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 2014, the Hon Examiner's Report, and the full AGM Notice and Agenda, have been provided to members attending today.

The Chairman recorded that we have in the Open Session enjoyed a good discussion of the formation of the Ridgeway Partnership, and the implications of this for the future role of the Association. He noted that our move to a largely web-based pattern of communications with members is now effective, but that members may apply to receive hard copies of Newsletters. A printed Annual Report and Accounts will continue to be produced and distributed. We are not running a Ridgeway Day this year, but are hopeful that a similar event will be organised by the Ridgeway Partnership.

Ian observed that The Great Stones Way (GSW) project is unfinished business for him, although a Guide-book by Cicerone, and a web-site for the route have both been published during the year. He has recently been engaged in discussions with a new local organisation, the Pewsey Community Area Partnership, that is taking a more realistic approach, and he intends to remain involved in the project, which he hopes will continue to move forward.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for their contributions during the year, particularly Sally Barnes, who has signalled her wish to step down as Membership Secretary. He also mentioned our Treasurer, John Edgerton; Independent Examiner Steve Sherman; Planning Adviser Ian MacPherson; and the members of the Vale of White Horse Local Group Committee. Ian then thanked David Axford, who is stepping down after 7 years as a Trustee, for his efforts, including stiffening Ian's backbone when needed; and he presented him with a book on behalf of the Committee.

A resolution to adopt and approve the Annual report of the Trustees was proposed by Susan Suchopar, seconded by Wendy Tobitt, and carried unanimously

5. **Annual Accounts:** The Chairman called on our Treasurer, John Edgerton, to present the Annual Accounts for 2014. John noted that these show a good year for the Association's finances, largely due to the very generous donations by one of our members. He also mentioned the move of our main bank account to CAF Bank, and improvements to our on-line systems for membership registration and subscription. With reserves now replenished we should be able to weather any leaner years.
No questions on the Accounts being raised, adoption of the Annual Accounts for 2013 was proposed by Wendy Tobitt, seconded by Jane Archer, and agreed unanimously.
6. **Honorary Auditor/Independent Examiner:** The re-appointment of Stephen Sherman FCA, as Hon Auditor/Independent Examiner, who has confirmed his willingness to serve for another year in that capacity, was proposed by the President of the Association, Lord Bradshaw, seconded by Susan Suchopar, and agreed unanimously.
7. **Election of President and Vice-Presidents:** The Chairman thanked the President and Vice-Presidents for their continued support, noting, however, that the forthcoming General Election may affect the term of office of some of them. A resolution for their re-appointment was proposed by Barry Hierons, seconded by Jenny Goddard and carried unanimously.

8 **Election of Officers and Committee Members/Trustees**

Secretary: Jeff Goddard, proposed by John Edgerton and seconded by Sally Barnes, was re-elected as Secretary.

Treasurer: John Edgerton, proposed by Sally Barnes and seconded by Ian Ritchie, was re-elected as Treasurer.

Members: Sally Barnes, Geoff Dare and Jim Gunter, all having been duly proposed and seconded, were re-elected as Trustees and Committee members.

9 **Chairman:** Ian Ritchie noted that he is now stepping down as Chairman. He has enjoyed a fascinating time and leaves the Association at a time when it has an intriguing future. He will remain closely associated with it, however, through his Chairmanship of the new Ridgeway Partnership. As to a successor as Chairman, he has good news, as a suitable candidate has come forward through REACH; and, having met him, Ian and the Secretary will be recommending his appointment to the Committee at its next Meeting. Ian will continue to act as Chairman until then.

The President, Lord Bradshaw, then spoke, noting that Ian’s retirement marks the end of an era., and commending him for his tireless efforts. His success in obtaining the protection needed by The Ridgeway and other green lanes was an enormous achievement, on which the current campaign for further protective legislation will seek to build.

A presentation was made to Ian Ritchie of a framed and mounted print of a painting of a Ridgeway scene at Avebury by Anna Dillon, subscribed for by many of the members. Ian responded thanking the contributors and all his past colleagues, and most specially his partner, Susan Suchopar, who was also presented with a bouquet.

10 **Other Business:** No other business was raised.

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

Signed:Chairman

Date: