

**MEETING MINUTES****Ninth Annual General Meeting of the Surrey Hills Society**

Saturday, 28 October 2017 at 2.00 pm

Stepping Stones School, Undershaw, Portsmouth Road, Hindhead GU26 6AQ

1. **Welcome** – The President, Neil Maltby, welcomed members to the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting and thanked them for their continuing support. He explained how this coming year will be a very important one, as it is going to be our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. It was ten years ago at Denbies that the question was raised as to whether it would be worth having a Society to promote and engage the AONB to a wider audience –and now here we are ten years later! Neil thanked our Chairman, Chris Howard for her dedication, time and effort she puts into the Society. He also welcomed Cllr Mike Goodman, Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Planning, to the meeting and thanked him for his continual support.

2. **Apologies for Absence** – Mr and Mrs Brookes, Rob Fairbanks, Cllr Gordon Jackson, Anthony Wakefield, Mr and Mrs Paull and Mr and Mrs Mark Turner

50 members present.

3. **Minutes of the AGM held on 29 October 2016**

Sall Baring proposed and Peter Salisbury seconded and the Minutes were approved unanimously. No matters arising.

4. **Chairman's Report** – a copy of the full text of the Chairman's Report is attached.

5. **Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016** – Copies of the accounts were available at the meeting and had been published on the website.

The Finance Director, Martin Cantor summarised the year as a solid year with a small surplus of £2211.00. The Society's membership income has grown and we had 72 new members joining us this year. Our current membership is 471 memberships, which includes individual, family and affiliates. It also includes most of the parish and town councils within the Surrey Hills.

However, with our increasing membership, we need new volunteers to balance to manage more events and activities. Our new website with online payments is now fit for purpose. The key decision for Trustees at present time is to create a good balance between resources and expenditure.

**Richard Jameson** asked about the Society's reserves and where they were invested? Martin Cantor replied that they are on a Virgin Money bank account with interest, so not an investment as such, but that it was difficult for charities to invest in many places due to charity commission regulations.

**Peter Arnold** asked about the heavy level of depreciation of Society's assets? Martin Cantor replied that it was the Trustees' decision to depreciate them to zero as they don't really have commercial value anymore.

**Karin Jameson** asked whether any of assets would be replaced in the future? Ken Bare replied that the trailer does not need to be replaced yet. The gazebo will need to be replaced if the Society will continue to attend local shows, fairs and fetes. This will be made clear in the next business plan.

No other questions arose.

The Accounts were approved unanimously. James Dubois proposed and Karin Jameson seconded.

6. **To confirm the appointment of the independent financial examiner for 2017/18** - The President expressed thanks and appreciation to Margaret Brett of Bullimore's for examining the accounts for the year to March 2017. Martin Cantor explained that Margaret Brett, who has acted as our independent auditor since the beginning, has now retired and there is a need for a new auditor. At the current moment we have not yet secured a new financial examiner.
7. **To set the annual membership subscription for 2017/18** – The Chairman proposed that the membership fee remained unchanged for the coming year, which was agreed unanimously.
8. **To appoint and reappoint Trustees of the Society** (there should be no fewer than 5 nor more than 12).
  - a) To confirm the reappointment of the following Trustees: Ken Bare (vice-Chairman), Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Christine Howard (Chairman), Martin Cantor and Stella Cantor. This was agreed unanimously.
  - b) To confirm the appointment of Andrew Povey as a new Trustee, having joined on 7 February 2017. This was agreed unanimously.
  - c) To confirm the appointment of Mun-Ling Logue as a new Trustee, having joined on 7 February 2017. This was agreed unanimously.
  - d) To nominate and appoint Peter Salisbury as a new Trustee. He was nominated by Ken Bare and seconded by Andrew Povey. This was agreed unanimously.
  - e) To nominate and appoint Terry Driscoll as a new Trustee. He was nominated by Neil Maltby and seconded by Gail Oxley-Crawford. This was agreed unanimously.
  - f) To note the reappointment of the Chairman, Chris Howard and the Vice-Chairman, Ken Bare by the Trustees for 2017/18. This was agreed unanimously.
9. **Any other business** – None

The meeting closed at 3.10pm.

#### **Surrey Hills Society Chairman's report for AGM – October 2017**

Welcome to our 9th AGM. I am very grateful to Ken Bare and Marika Elzinga for organising for us to be at this very special building, which was the home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes. As you will know from our last newsletter, he was one of the many writers who took inspiration from the stunning landscape of the Surrey Hills and also, like most of us, found it a most pleasant and special place to live.

Thank you too to the headmistress and staff at what is now Stepping Stones School. A place for children with special learning needs. There was a huge public debate as to what was to become this, by then derelict building. Many people campaigned to keep it as a public building for visitors to be able to come and celebrate the life and work of this internationally famous author. Unfortunately though, public funding is not what it used to be and the costs involved in renovating the building was enormous. Also, as we found in the east of the County at Lord Beaverbrook amazing historic home, the attempts to turn that into a Trust open to the public failed and again, after much controversy, it has been turned into a very upmarket hotel-restaurant and golf course. I have been told recently that even some of the objectors, having now seen the final outcome agree that it has been a success. Similarly, here at Undershaw, the building has been maintained and yet new life and purpose has been breathed into the building by it being redesigned as a

school. And, although there is no general public access, the school is keen to engage with the community and continue to tell the story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his connection with this area. Thank you for allowing us to have our AGM here today.

I am delighted to welcome Cllr Mike Goodman, Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Planning, here again this year. Thank you so much for your continued support for the Society and the Surrey Hills. Thank you to our President, Neil Maltby for your continued support.

Finally a huge welcome to all our wonderfully supportive members here today. Without you, none of the fantastic work that we in the Surrey Hills do, could happen. Thank you for your continued support of this important charity, dedicated to looking after this beautiful iconic landscape known as the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We now have a dedicated band of volunteers who have found where their strengths and energies can be targeted within the organisation. Like any business, the first few years are critical and many organisations never manage to bear the growing pains of the organisation becoming a much larger beast. Due to the team work and flexibility of our volunteers we have been able to do that.

This year has been particularly marked by huge debate on the future of the Society in the run up to its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. One growing pain was the need for a more sophisticated website to need membership requests for electronic payments for events and membership and as our organisation is now involved in so many projects and managing HLF projects, we needed a more sophisticated accounting system. Terry Driscoll, our Treasurer is a founder member of the Society and has been my guiding rock on all things financial during my time as Chairman. However, with the move to an electronic Sage system this year we experienced our first redundancy issue! The online system is now managed directly by our Finance Director, Martin Cantor and has proved much simpler to prepare this year's accounts. As you might expect from me though... I have not let Terry escape and am delighted that he has agreed to become one of the Society Trustees, which you will see comes up later in the agenda. I did though just want to mark the incredible hard work that Terry has done for the Society during its early years. Terry, please accept our Surrey Hills Society whisky/water glass as a little token of appreciation from us. Also, a huge thank you to his wife Lois, for being such a supportive member yourself and for hosting us in your home for many meetings.

As part of our growth plans, we are currently developing our new three year business plan, which has included much debate about what happens when Ken Bare and I are no longer Chairman and Vice Chairman. It is laid down in our Constitution that Trustees can only serve for 9 years in total and it is right that there is continued "new blood" arriving on the Board to give new perspectives and vigour to our organisation. You will see that we have three other new Trustees to appoint this year, Peter Salisbury, who is already a very active volunteer and works as our Administrator. We also have Mun-Ling Longue, who is an ex- corporate lawyer and young mum. Andrew Povey, became a volunteer for us some 18 months ago and then at the last election also became a Surrey County Council, but he is being proposed as a Trustee in a purely personal capacity.

Now, last year you may remember some of you challenged us on our financial position because you quite rightly pointed out that we were sitting on a healthy reserve. I did tell you though that we have plans for this money and also as the organisation becomes bigger you needed bigger reserves to protect yourself against unforeseen emergency costs. Our Trustee Board took up your challenge, in fact I think I told you that we already had ambitious plans for the money.

It has included some considerable expense as well as human effort to deliver our new website, which we have been delighted with. A huge thank you to Marika Elzinga, our only paid member of staff, who led on the website project and has done a fabulous job. Also a huge thanks to Stella Cantor and Piers Plummer, whose technical abilities gave the rest of us reassurance that we were making the right decisions and also were there to assist when things were not working as they should. This was a huge project for the Society and had input from so many I cannot thank you all personally but thank you for everyone who helped on this project.

I am incredibly grateful to Martin Cantor for agreeing to take over as Finance Director last year, and what a difference he has made! It has been an absolute pleasure to work with him. He is extremely experienced and has a realistic and practical approach to everything, including slimming down the number of meetings we have each year and taking a very practical, simple approach to each issue we face. More from Martin later.

Can I also thank our key sponsor, Anthony Wakefield from Anthony Wakefield & Co, specialising in the arrangement of Antique and Fine Art Insurance for Dealers, Auctioneers, Corporate Collectors and Private clients? His company offers policies to Commercial and Retail concerns, and for Household and other Personal Insurance requirements – indeed, he acts as broker for our Society's insurance. He not only sponsors our newsletter, but is also an active member of our Society, chairing our Newsletter Committee. You may also remember he organised a fascinating visit to Pixham Patchworking Garden and Lady Wedgwood's delightful home in Dorking last year.

Well I am now going to give you an example of why our organisation is so special....

On that event was a local resident, Susie Turner. She was a new member to our Society (who signed up after reading about us in Surrey Life magazine). She had no idea this project was happening so close to where she lived and she promptly started to volunteer for them. Her career was in Marketing and Events management and she took on the role of managing their publicity, which included in her first year, a Royal Visit from the HRH Duke of Gloucester. She called on our volunteer marketing team to help her with contacts for the local press and did a wonderful job I hear. She has also now joined our newsletter team and is busy working with Marika on our winter edition.

I think this example, and I could give you many more, shows that from our original concept discussed at the meeting of over 200 people at Denbies about this time 10 years ago, where we agreed about an over-arching "umbrella" organisation that could co-ordinate and assist others to support lots of various activities across the AONB has worked.

Anyway, back to Anthony Wakefield. Thank you so much for your valuable work for the Society, which includes your fantastic knowledge of the area and the network of people which make up this area. I am also pleased that our previous sponsor Sall Baring is still with us as an active volunteer on several committees. She is here today serving teas and generally supporting the team. Huge thank you to Sall!

2017 has been a reflective year. I think many of us were very tired after our very hectic 2016 with the delivery of the Tales of the Tillingbourne project, Inspiring Views Project supporting Ali Clarke at Surrey Hills Arts, the fund raising with the Mayor of Guildford, Gordon Jackson and the Chairman of Mole Valley DC, David Mir and the huge fundraiser at Great Tangle Manor- which raised £6000 and the launch of the new Surrey Hills Challenge Marathon across the Greensands Way. All to support the newly formed Surrey Hills Trust Fund. Over all I am pleased to report that we raised well over £30,000 for the Trust Fund last year. Thank you to all those who supported us.

During our early debates about how to spend our surpluses and deliver real projects that benefit the Surrey Hills on the ground, we realised that this was a huge specialised area of work. It would involve dedicated people with time and expertise in this area to handle the applications for projects from organisations delivering projects across the AONB. They would then need to assess the relevance and capability of each organisation to deliver the project and evaluate its delivery and success during and after the project was completed. A huge task. This is when we were introduced to the Community Foundation for Surrey - an organisation explicitly set up to do this work – and hence the Surrey Hills Trust Fund was born. Neil is the Chairman of the Trust Fund. I sit on the Committee, representing the SHS and we have found the support the Society gives to the Trust has enabled it to raise the funds to be able to deliver real projects on the ground. All these projects have been written up in our newsletter. It is all open and accountable and is working very well.

Anyway, back to the Society in 2017.... we were coming to the end of our current business plan - all of which I am pleased to report we delivered on! So 2017 has been a reflective year with much debate and away days as part of the development of our new Business Plan.

Although this was a steady as she goes year, we have continued to expand our programme of events and our walks programme. We continue to support the Guildford Walkfest and their Heritage Open Day programme in September. We were also asked to lead a walk along the North Downs Way as part of the new Farnham Walkfest and I have now been asked to meet with a group in Mole Valley who have set up a Walkfest in that area. I believe that was one of the ambitions identified as part of the Surrey Countryside & Rural Enterprise Forum objectives – and it is being delivered.

A huge thank you to all my walk leaders and back markers, Pete Lambert, Steve Peacock, Diane Cooper, Ken Bare, Edward Turner, Helen Barnsley and Jeff Holliday... to name but a few...

I am also delighted to see Graham Butler here with us today. Graham is a founder member of the Society and our original Chairman for the Events team. He taught me such a lot about leading walks in the Surrey Hills, Rights of Way issues, introduced me to The Ramblers Association, and generally was a huge influence on how the Society developed in the early stages. Thank you Graham for all your help and we are delighted to see you back with us after your recent illness. Good luck with your forthcoming operations.

In 2016 we also identified a project in the east of the County - the Gatton Park Trust - the original home of the family who ran the Colman's mustard company. This family had commissioned Lancelot "Capability" Brown to landscape the grounds, which had fallen into a parlous state. The 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Capability Brown was an ideal opportunity to develop a project to restore these grounds. The SHS supported the bid with letters and voluntary work leading up to the bid and in 2017. We also raised funds to clear a view around the lake, and to buy new gardening tools for their volunteers. Stella Cantor sits on their Management Board and is another example of how our organisation links with other relevant bodies across the AONB.

I would now like to take you pictorially through a few of the other highlights of 2017.

On the membership front, our Society continues to grow organically. We are however, limited by the number of key volunteers available to manage the organisation. We have put on more events than ever before but we are very aware that some of our popular events get booked up very quickly and some members are disappointed. If you feel you would like to get involved in the Events Committee please do talk to Jeff Holliday, the Chairman of Events or Marika about joining us. You may want to do just one event a year, so it is not a huge burden.

Last year Ken Bare also announced that he was standing down from his role leading on going out to shows with the trailer or gazebo. I am very grateful to the volunteers that have set up to the mark to help with the 2017 programme. We are still looking for more volunteers and it would be great to find someone willing to take the lead on co-ordinating this programme. Please speak to me if you would like to consider getting involved with our shows programme.

As I mentioned earlier, it is Ken's and my last year leading the Society. We will be advertising in the coming months to find a new Chairman to lead the organisation, so if you know of someone who might be suitable to lead this organisation into the next decade, then do let them know and come and talk to me. Ken continues in his role giving talks across the County to many different organisations and brings us many new members. Thank you Ken for your continued support! We could not do it without you.

Later in this agenda we will be presenting the Trustees Report and Financial Statement for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. I would like to thank Margaret Brett from Bullimores of Dorking for her continued support, acting as our external examiner. Margaret has announced her retirement from Bullimores and so this will be her last year with us.

There is not enough time here today to thank everyone I should for all the amazing things they do for this wonderful charity, but thank you to all of you. I love working with you, I love meeting all our lovely members and I look forward to working with you and enjoying the Surrey Hills with you again in our very special 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in 2018.

It is going to be another busy year. We are working closely with Rob Fairbanks and the SH Board to come up with a series of events throughout the year. We have secured Surrey Life magazine as our media partner and they are running a photographic competition for their 2018 calendar based on the AONB. There will be a launch event at Denbies in January. We have also secured Speakers House at Westminster for an event with MPs on the anniversary of the dedication of the Surrey Hills as an AONB and are planning a big Surrey event for all our members in July. We are also holding discussions with the University of Surrey about a scientific forum at the university in October. There is also a Marketing Plan to promote "60 Things to Do" in the AONB in 2018.

The Events committee will be charged with creating a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary themed 2018 programme so I think we are in for a very busy but very enjoyable year in 2018. I look forward to sharing it with you all.

As always, I would like to ask you all to be ambassadors for the Surrey Hills Society and try and get at least one new friend or family member to join the Society this year. That would double our numbers. Can I ask for your help please? Christmas is coming and our gift packs would make an unusual and year-long gift for that "hard to buy for" relative or friend. Also, what about a fleece or t-shirt or perhaps a badge? Do see Peter Salisbury at our stand later. We are about to do an order for new shirts and fleeces, so get your order in now.

*Chris Howard, Chairman Surrey Hills Society, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017*