



## RECORD OF MINUTES FROM FoTF AGM 2016 13<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER

### AGENDA FOR 2016

- 1) Apologies
- 2) Record of attendance
- 3) Minutes of 2015 AGM
- 4) Matters arising
- 5) Treasurer's Report / Financial Statement
- 6) Secretary's Report
- 7) Chair's Report
- 8) Committee Elections \*\*
- 9) AOB
- 10) Any comments from the Floor

**\*\* To be eligible for the committee a person must have been a member for 2 consecutive years and remain as a member whilst serving.**

**Tea, coffee and cakes served after the AGM**

**was followed with a presentation:**

John Weir of the Forestry Commission on 'Climate Change and our Forests'.

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Meeting commenced 1900 H

Apologies received.

Minutes from 2015 meeting were presented to the meeting and proposed for acceptance by O. Moore and R Fletcher.

Matters arising not dealt with elsewhere:

Paul Morgan (Corporate Member) offered to pay daily subscription for anyone who wished to attend volunteering, but who was unable to pay themselves at a previous meeting, no one having come forward he kindly offered to pay for the Monday Group of volunteers. His kind offer was accepted and has been subsequently put into place.

Treasurer's & Membership report presented – attached.

Anne Mason thanked Alan for his efforts since taking over this role.

Secretary's report – attached

Arboretum report from Owen Moore, Anne Mason thanked the Arboretum and Conservation groups for their work in the previous year

Chairs report – attached.

At this point Tim Frost of FC gave a brief rundown on the progress of the HLF bid for the Heritage Trail at High Lodge. The route has been chosen, site investigations ongoing, use of the record centre and many other aspects that are needed to satisfy the criteria for the award.

Jim Lyon gave a brief resume of his 40+ years with the FC, and the last 17 at Thetford. He thanked FoTF for their ongoing support for the campaign against the forest sell-off plan.

Committee Elections:

Bob Greef is retiring from the committee

Anne Mason, Dave Goodrum, Alan Spidy, Katherine Jones, Owen Moore all agreed to continue in Post.

Benedict Maher agreed to join the committee.

This make up was proposed for acceptance by Paul Morgan and seconded by Colin Lang.

The Volunteer agreement between FoTF and FC was accepted by the committee and duly signed by the chair and Jim Lyon as FMD of FC.

The meeting closed at 1945.

Refreshments were served and the event closed with the presentation by John Weir, which was both fascinating and at times alarming with some of the side effects of the climate change.

**Below follow the 3 reports from the committee:**

### **Treasurer / Membership**

Having taken over the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary in April this year, my first duty tonight is to put on record my thanks to Sheila Hume for her hard work over many years as my predecessor. Sheila spent many hours earlier this year showing me the ropes – for which I am very grateful - and left Friends in a strong position financially and also in terms of membership numbers.

The period of this report covers the financial year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 and as such is a record of Sheila's last act as Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

Membership numbers at 31<sup>st</sup> March this year stood at 964 via Discovery Passes (down from 1212 the previous year) and 62 direct members (down from 64) giving a total of 1026, a decline of around 20% on last year's figure of 1276. This decline had been identified by Sheila in her report last year as a consequence of the change to encouraging more on-line renewals of Discovery Passes. Working with Megan Bradsworth at High Lodge - to whom we remain ever grateful for her continued support - the prominence of the on-line option for Discovery Pass holders to join Friends was heightened. This has proved so successful that the decline in memberships has been halted and is on course to be completely reversed by the end of this current financial year.

It is also encouraging to report that we continue to attract new members who join us directly, (15 since April). This is important as it provides a steady stream of volunteers for all our activities and I

am indebted to the work of the committee for making joining Friends so attractive, particularly Dave Goodrum for keeping the web-site up-to-date and dealing with initial membership enquiries and Katherine Jones who has been developing links within the community in Thetford. Katherine has also worked with FC to administer the new benefit that we have been able to offer our volunteers this year, a free Discovery Pass on completion of 30 hours volunteering. We have also benefited from articles published in the local press, thanks to Anne Mason, which helps to maintain our profile locally and has directly led to more volunteers.

Turning to the financial side of things, you should all have a copy of last year's accounts on your chairs. I would like to thank Kevin Parsons of SPC Printers for verifying these accounts.

You will note the increase in membership income despite a fall in numbers over the course of the year. This is because part of the membership payments for March '16 (29 of 122) were paid in the financial year covered by this report rather than being held over to the new financial year as would normally have been the case. Similarly, the Lynford Grant from FC records the payment of two grants in one financial year, hence the significant increase from the previous year. However, in real terms this grant has reduced from £500 to £300 per year. Newsletter expenditure increased because three editions fell into this financial year as opposed to only one last year. This also accounts for the increase in postage costs. The other significant increase was the one-off purchase of tools and equipment for conservation and archaeological projects. Insurance costs have fallen due to a change in provider. Projects accounted for in this report centred on five new benches at High Lodge and a similar number at Lynford, plus repairs to existing benches.

Any questions?

## **SECRETARY REPORT**

Since the last AGM we have again had eleven full Committee meeting's. FC representative(s) have been at all of them and we are very grateful to Rachel Riley for her vital role as liaison person and to Jim Lyon for attending nearly every meeting.

FoTF have continued our involvement in the ongoing campaign to keep our forests in public ownership which, despite the lack of any real progress from the government, is not something we are going to leave alone. Obviously recently the many changes that have befallen our leaders have had an effect on progress with yet another change of persons in charge of the relevant departments but we have written to all of them and invited some to visit the area to re-inforce our views on the subject. Both Anne and Alan have attended meetings during the last 12 months for which we are grateful to them giving up their time to do so.

Conservation Group – This last 12 months has seen an increase in the numbers attending and we have visited some new sites and ramped up the work at others. It is pleasing to see that we have attracted some younger members, and have received expressions of interest from yet more for the coming months. As ever I'm grateful to Neal & Rachel of the FC for their participation, and especially to our regular worker who turn up month after month eager to get working.

The Arboretum Group has seen some changes over the last 12 months

with the departure of Mike & Sheila, but work continues apace and you will hear more about it from Owen who has taken over leadership of the group.

The last 12 months have seen many changes on the digital side of our presence, with much increased use of Facebook and twitter to give out information. The website was re coded as it was becoming obvious that many people were accessing from handheld devices , and the old style pages were not very friendly for a smaller display.

My job as secretary involves the sending out of many messages, and I'm indebted to Alan as membership office for the updated lists for contacts etc. and his success at taking over from Sheila the financial side of the group.

And on that note, I hand over to Owen for his report on the happenings at Lynford Arboretum, followed by our chairs report on the last 12 months of the group.

## **CHAIR REPORT**

Yet again, we've had a very busy and active year helping everyone access and enjoy the Forest and supporting the Forestry Commission.

For Discovery Day on 20 March, FOTF led on publicity for the event and organised the displays and activities in the two marquees, showcasing the timber production, wildlife, and archaeology of Thetford Forest. It was fantastic to have a forwarder and harvester on site, with the Forest Operations Team demonstrating what these machines could do. Wildlife Rangers joined us to talk about deer management and explain to the public how to identify the deer they see in the Forest.

Sunday 29 May was the joint open day at Mildenhall Warren Lodge and the Rex Graham Military Orchid Reserve, notable for having four new members join at the lodge. Two weeks later, FOTF members and Forestry Commission Staff visited the Enterprise Building at the University of East Anglia, Britain's greenest building and one of the most sustainable buildings in Europe. Especially significant for us is that its timber frame is of Corsican Pine from Thetford Forest.

In May, a group of volunteers from a government office in Cambridge worked with us and FC to refurbish the facilities at Lynford Stag car park. The first weekend in July saw seventeen FOTF volunteers helping at the concerts, both with car parking for the disabled and in the Information Marquee in the arena and we gave 120 hours of our time over the four evenings.

Seven FOTF members helped at the High Lodge Open Day on 21 July and then thirty attended the heritage walk at Lynford Arboretum on 3 August. Special thanks are also due to Owen and Carol Moore who organised wine, coffee, biscuits and cake at the Friends' Lodge after the walk.

We'll be publishing a leaflet related to Lynford's historic landscape next year.

A new event was a Moth Evening on 24 August at High Lodge, led for us by Tim (High Lodge Manager) and Teresa Frost. They had set up traps in four locations and so we were able to see at first hand (literally, as the moths rested on palms and fingers) this fascinating night-time world as well as receiving expert guidance in identification of the various amazing species. Another new event was our attendance at the community day at the Charles Burrell Centre in Thetford and thank you to Katherine Jones for organising our stall there. Katherine has also taken on the role of volunteer co-ordinator and is keeping all our volunteering records meticulously up-to-date.

With so many events happening, it is a wonderful testament to the strength of volunteering that the conservation work has continued one Sunday a month; that Lynford Arboretum has been cared for as diligently as ever, that the 'Meet and Greet' role is carried out at High Lodge and the walking trails are regularly checked - we've taken over the administration of meet and greet and of checking the Forest's walking trails - each one of these is now checked by a FOTF volunteer.

We are still campaigning and lobbying for the safeguarding of our Public Forest Estate and will continue to do so until the PFE is protected in law. We're attending the national forestry forums and writing to the Prime Minister and the DEFRA Ministers but are conscious that we lost our 'best hope' when both Elizabeth Truss and Rory Stewart were moved in Theresa May's reshuffle.

We did have one encouraging outcome as we arranged for two members of the DEFRA Forestry Team to visit Thetford and be shown round by FC staff. They described their visit as 'truly inspirational'.

As Chair, I'm incredibly proud of all that FOTF achieves and the support we have from our members and from our corporate members. The committee works incredibly hard but we simply wouldn't be able to do so much for the forest without you all.

Of course, we need the help of FC too and truly value how we work together, with special thanks to Nicky Russell and Terry Jennings and the apprentices at the arboretum; Neal Armour-Chelu and Rachel Riley for conservation and Rachel also for being our official liaison with FC. Megan Bradsworth and Owen Manson have helped us at High Lodge and Tim Frost, in his first year as High Lodge Manager, has definitely won our approval as he understood very quickly the nature of our partnership and has been incredibly supportive.

Jim Lyon is retiring next year so this is his last AGM as Forest Management Director. Jim – it is much too soon for any goodbyes but nevertheless, thank you for your unwavering and steadfast support over the years; it is very difficult to think of Thetford Forest and Friends without you.

**End of reports**