



## RECORD OF MINUTES FROM FoTF AGM 2017 12<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER

### AGENDA FOR 2017

- 1) Apologies
- 2) Record of attendance
- 3) Minutes of 2016 AGM
- 4) Matters arising
- 5) Treasurer's Report / Financial Statement
- 6) Secretary's Report
- 7) Chair's Report
- 8) Update from Tim Frost (HLF project)
- 9) Comments from Tristram Hilborn
- 10) Committee Elections \*\*
- 11) AOB
- 12) 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, followed by a presentation:**

Mike Toms of the BTO: "Hoots and Churrs: researching the birds of Thetford Forest"

Meeting commenced 19h00

- 1) Attendance was recorded
- 2) Apologies were received
- 3) Minutes from the 2016 meeting were proposed for acceptance by Colin Lang, seconded by Owen Moore.
- 4) There were no matters arising.
- 5) The treasurer and membership reports were presented by Alan Spidy (attached). Anne Mason thanked Alan for all his efforts in these roles.
- 6) The secretary report (attached) was prepared in advance by Dave Goodrum, and read on his behalf by Katherine Jones. Anne thanked Dave for all his efforts in his role.
- 7) The chair's report was presented by Anne Mason (attached).
- 8) Tim Frost (Forestry Commission, High Lodge Manager) gave a brief update on the progress of the HLF project, including that the 4.2 km loop trail is now under construction, and that the workshop and activities have also started. Tim thanked FoTF for their donation to the project, and also for all the help of all the FoTF members who volunteer at High

Lodge. Anne Mason passed on FoTF's thanks to Tim and the High Lodge staff for all their work supporting FoTF.

9) Tristram Hilborn (Forestry Commission, East of England Forest Management Director) reflected on the achievements of FoTF over the last 12 months, and looked ahead to the opportunities and challenges to come. Tristram thanked all the FoTF volunteers on behalf of the Forestry Commission, and the East of England team, for all the hard work they put in. The volunteering agreement between FC and FoTF was then signed by Tristram Hilborn and Anne Mason.

10) The current committee (Anne Mason, Alan Spidy, Dave Goodrum, Owen Moore, Katherine Jones, Benedict Maher) all agreed to continue in post. Re-election was proposed by Paul Morgan, seconded by Morag Truscott, and supported by the majority in the room. Bob Greef also stood for election onto the committee, proposed by Judy, seconded by Sally Goodrum, also supported by the majority in the room.

11) AOB – there was no AOB.

12) Comments from the floor. Paul Morgan asked the FoTF committee for their position on the consultation on the site at St Helen's, and for Tristram to respond on behalf of FC. Anne Mason summarised the committee position, which is that FoTF should work with FC to find a solution that does not compromise public access to the forest, which includes access to car parking. Tristram commented that FC will not charge for car parking, but that where there are additional facilities present such as toilets they would usually charge. Tristram also commented that an alternative solution which is sustainable would be welcome, and FC are prepared to work with FoTF to see if one can be found.

The meeting was closed at 19h40.

Refreshments were served and the event closed with the presentation by Mike Toms, which gave a fascinating insight into the wide range of research undertaken by the BTO in Thetford Forest.

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

### **Treasurers report**

This report covers the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 and is a record of my first year as Membership Secretary and Treasurer of the Friends of Thetford Forest. Although I have largely followed the methods of my predecessor, Sheila Hume, I have instigated a number of small changes. These mainly revolve around the welcoming information I send to new members and improved communication with existing members so that they are more aware of what we do. It is the hard work of others on the Committee that enables our events to be a success, but we work more cohesively and, as a consequence, our events are now well supported and sometimes even oversubscribed.

As at 31<sup>st</sup> March this year, membership figures stood at 1211 via the Discovery Pass (from 964 last year) and 79 from direct memberships (from 62) giving a total of 1290 (1026). This represents an increase of 264 or almost 26% over the previous year. The increase in Discovery Pass members is important because this provides the financial strength of Friends. But it is the increase in direct membership that is more encouraging because these members provide our volunteers who are the backbone of our organisation. Some of them are here tonight, so thank you for your continuing support.

Although my tenure as Membership Secretary began with an immediate loss of 8% of the direct membership in the first month, this position had recovered so much that by the year's end we had not only reversed this loss but increased our direct membership by 27% over the full year. This success is down to the hard work of all the members of the Committee for the benefit of the whole organisation.

You should all have a copy of the financial summary before you. You will see that both income and expenditure for the year covered by this report are significantly lower than the preceding year. Although membership increased, payments were down by almost £2,000. This is because the fourth quarterly payment for Discovery Pass members was paid early in the current financial year rather than the one covered by this report. Similarly, 'Corporate Other' income (the income we receive from corporate members for additional concert tickets and hampers) is less because most will also appear in the accounts for 2017-18. This is echoed in 'Corporate Expenditure' (the money we pay for concert tickets, hampers and Christmas trees). The reason why most corporate transactions will appear in the next set of accounts was the later announcements of the artists featuring in this summer's concerts. This meant that most transactions surrounding the concerts in summer 2016 were dealt with in financial year 2015/16, whereas for summer 2017 they will appear in the 2017/18 summary.

The other main change in income concerns Lynford Arboretum. We no longer receive anything from the Tree Fund or from a FC grant. The Tree Fund was paid from members of the public wishing to plant trees in the memory of loved ones. This is not an FC policy and has been discontinued. As far as the FC grant is concerned, the continued pressure on public resources combined with the increased financial strength of Friends makes it harder for us to justify asking for additional money. Consequently, our volunteers at the Arboretum are now entirely funded by us and a small number of donations made specifically to help our work there. We are fully committed to maintaining this level of support.

Continuing with expenditure, the lower cost of postage and stationery despite an increase in membership reflects our efforts to use electronic forms of communication more. The reduced amount for the newsletter is because only one edition appears in these accounts as opposed to three in last year's.

Volunteer clothing/PPE makes an appearance because the Committee decided to standardise a level of clothing that would be available to all volunteers. After a few years of ad hoc purchases, we have offered all of our volunteers the same items of clothing and this offer has been enthusiastically taken up and continues to be so.

The projects funded by Friends in these accounts include benches at High Lodge, a contribution to the Mike Taylor memorial sculpture and repairs to the interpretation panels at Mildenhall Warren Lodge.

In a change from previous years we no longer reserve any money for project funding as such. In future we will make decisions on project funding based upon their merits and funds available at the time. A prime example of this is the Heritage Lottery Funded project 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge' where we are committed to spending £3,000 over the next two financial years. This is accounted for in 'Funds Set Aside'.

Finally I would like to thank the Committee for their support over the last year, Megan Bradsworth for dealing so efficiently with membership data and Kevin Parsons of SPC Printers for kindly verifying these accounts.

Any questions.

## AGM 2017 – SECRETARY'S 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 continuing her vital role as liaison person, and to Tristram for continuing the local FC management support for the group.

FoTF have continued our involvement in the ongoing campaign to retain the PFE in public ownership, but the meetings are few and far between these days with bigger things on the horizon for the government, never the less our thanks go to Alan and Anne for keeping the flag flying at any opportunity.

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 (than most of us anyway) members,. As ever I'm grateful to Neal & Rachel of the FC for their participation, and especially to our regular workers who turn up month after month eager to get working.

The Arboretum Group continues in good health and was the recipient of an award this year, more of that later from Anne.

The social media presence of Friends has greatly increased over the last 12 months , and we are making more and more use of those channels of communication, but our newsletter will continue to be published although we have moved the publication dates slightly to what we feel is a better period for information to be included, and I'm personally grateful to SPC for their assistance with tidying up my efforts in setting the document out so that it all makes sense and looks right.

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. on a regular basis.

When I took over as secretary more than 20 years ago , never in my wildest dreams did I ever think it would lead to an invitation to Buckingham Palace, but that came to pass this year as a result of the Queens Award of Voluntary Service , but again more of that from Anne.

On that note I close my report and hand over.

Since our last AGM in 2016, it has been rather an exciting year for Friends. In the midst of all the excitement, we've continued with all our 'usual work' – conservation to improve habitats; care of Lynford Arboretum; checking the walking trails at High Lodge and across the Forest; Meet and Greet at High Lodge; leading on Discovery Day and helping at events. I'd particularly like to mention the volunteers at the concerts this year as they had some challenging situations to deal with (not of their making, I hasten to add) and they used their initiative to quietly and efficiently prevent the problems from becoming much worse. I was really proud of them. Our 'special event' for members was a visit to the Battle Area which enthralled everyone.

As Alan mentioned, we haven't forgotten the need to remind government of protection for the Public Forest Estate with sustainable funding – crucial to ensure that the PFE continues to deliver public benefits, so important to us here in Thetford.

In May, we celebrated ten years of involvement at Lynford Arboretum , with guided walks by the volunteers and then a tea party, attended by almost forty people. We're helping FC with a management plan which should be beneficial for the volunteers and the site too.

The tea party was the last Friends 'event attended by Jim Lyon who retired as Forest Management Director in June. Jim couldn't have been more supportive of us but we were absolutely delighted when Tristram Hilborn became the new East England Director. He has shown how fully committed he is to working with us and already we are beginning to explore more ways in which to develop our partnership.

I couldn't possibly give my report without mentioning 'warrens' and this year we've investigated the site of Santon Warren Lodge, though without finding any conclusive proof of a medieval building. We're planning a return to Reed Fen Lodge to do more there, early next year.

So – what has made 2017 so memorable – the evidence is here – two incredible awards !

The first is from the Royal Forestry Society, in recognition of our work at Lynford Arboretum. The RFS is the largest and longest established education charity promoting the sustainable management of woods in the UK. Terry Jennings, FC Establishment Manager, nominated Friends' volunteers at the Arboretum for the award as it had to be site-specific.

Two RFS judges visited the Arboretum with Terry Jennings and myself as Chair to learn about how it is cared for by the dedicated volunteers. They awarded Lynford Arboretum joint second in the Urban and Community Forestry Awards Category. They wrote:

*Lynford Arboretum is probably the most unusual community woodland ever visited by the judges – and it is truly delightful. In 2007 the Friends of Thetford Forest took over the management and this was clearly the best thing to happen to it as it is now the third most important arboretum in England as well as having Grade 1 Listed Parkland status. Located in what, at first, appears to be a fairly remote part of Thetford Forest, it soon becomes apparent that it enjoys a phenomenal level of use in no small way entirely attributable to the efforts of the Friends.*

The second award was announced on 2 June: the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service is the equivalent of an MBE and the highest award a volunteer group can achieve. It included an invitation to a Royal Garden Party so Dave and Sally Goodrum went to Buckingham Palace; we have the right to use the award logo for 'evermore'. The Countess of Euston, as the Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk and therefore the Queen's representative in the county, presented us with the certificate signed by Her Majesty the Queen and the crystal at a ceremony here at Oak Lodge yesterday, attended by members of the Committee, volunteers and those FC staff who work most closely with us and it was a incredible occasion. The letter announcing our award stated:  
*The work your group does for the community was very much admired by the independent Assessment Committee, chaired by Sir Martyn Lewis CBE. This is a tremendous achievement for your organisation. We hope that everyone involved, and particularly your volunteers, feel immensely proud of the recognition that this Award represents.*

I'd like to personally thank all our volunteers for their commitment and enthusiasm and their generosity in giving so many hours of their time to the Forest. Those volunteers who serve on the Committee deserve a special mention as it is their dedication which has enabled Friends to thrive, supported by our wonderful partnership with the Forestry Commission.

Thank you.

Before I end this formal AGM, I'd like to read you the final part of the judges' citation for the RFS award.

*The Friends are active throughout the forest and have over 1500 paid-up members, run numerous events and have a philosophy that promotes 'enjoyment and understanding'. They are efficiently run, effective in their aims and have good governance which will guarantee a secure future. This is an outstanding success story brought about by an equally outstanding organisation which works closely with the Forestry Commission in a mutually beneficial manner. It is clear that both organisations have the utmost respect for each other. We would recommend that all similar organisations with similar aspirations take time to see how effectively the Friends of Thetford Forest operates –*

*so we have a very positive endorsement to take us into the future.*