

Minutes of annual general meeting of Greenham and Crookham Conservation Volunteers

21 Jun 2009

Members present: Derek Cutt, Derek Emes, Andy Gove, Nick Hughes, Kath Osborn, John Parker, Laurence Parker, Dean Pawlyn, Pam Pickett, Neil Rickman.

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the AGM on 15 June 2008 were agreed and the Chairman signed a file copy.

Actions from the previous minutes

Ade to obtain a replacement Silky Fox saw blade, to replace one stolen from the workshop, at WBC's cost. **Completed.**

Derek Cutt to provide a link from our website to the development website for the new management plan. **Completed.**

Derek Cutt to circulate the URL for members to comment online on the Prologis planning application. **Completed.**

Derek Cutt to amend the group's constitution on the website, following the resolution to remove references to our objectives being *wholly charitable under English law*. **Completed.**

Election of officers for year 2009-10

Derek Emes offered his resignation as Chairman, to make way for anyone else who may want to serve. There being no alternative nomination, Derek was proposed, seconded and unanimously re-elected. Derek Cutt and John Parker were also re-elected by a unanimous show of hands.

Officers for the coming year are therefore...

Chairman: Derek Emes
Secretary: Derek Cutt
Treasurer: John Parker

Derek Emes also offered his resignation as our appointee on the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission. Again, there being no alternative nomination, Derek was proposed, seconded and unanimously re-elected. Derek Emes therefore remains our appointed Commissioner.

Chairman's report on activities since the previous AGM

Derek Emes reported another successful year, with an average of 8.1 volunteers per month (slightly down on last year's 9.8). The lowest turnout was 3 and the highest was 13. There are currently 26 people on the e-mail reminder list.

For a list of specific tasks and number of volunteers attending, please visit our website at www.gccv.org.uk and navigate via "History" and then "Task record".

During the past year, we have been mentioned in articles in Country Living and Current Biology.

Report from the Greenham & Crookham Commons Commission

1) The Chairman changed at the start of the year when Tony Ferguson resigned and Chris Austin the previous vice-chairman was elected to the chair. Tony was elected as vice chairman.

The whole Commission is shortly up for election, there are 10 places for commoners to fill. At present there are two vacancies and so even if all present commoners put their names forward there will still be room for two more. To make a good democratic election, a full card of over 10 candidates is hoped for.

2) Over the last four quarterly meetings there have been general discussions on several topics. The two most debated subjects however have been protection of ground nesting birds from the public and uncontrolled dogs from wandering over sensitive areas, and low flying aircraft over the common.

3) The numbers of people letting their dogs run loose and even encouraging them to run over open areas has increased extensively lately. The Council therefore have appointed two new wardens and posted new notices at all main access gates to the common to requiring owners to keep their dogs on a lead during the period 1st March to 31st July. The wardens have usually met with good response from members of the public when approached by them but there have been incidents of more aggressive reaction. The Commission has been investigating the possible legal powers available to provide a positive imposition of this requirement. The Commons' Act of 2002 sets out the authority under which the Commission gives rights of public access. (Part 3, section 11). It gives powers to restrict these rights in certain circumstances (section 14). It requires regulations to be defined where these restrictions are to be imposed. Under (section 15) the Council may make byelaws for stipulated purposes of regulating these restrictions. It was agreed that regulations be set based on the C.R.O.W. Act restrictions to access plus certain additional ones specific to the common. i.e. no model aircraft flying or model car running in the restricted period. These regulations have not been published as actual byelaws and there lies the conundrum as to whether these regulations can be legally enforced. The opinion has been expressed that as these regulations are laid down under the powers of an Act of Parliament they could reasonably be expected to be enforceable. The Council's legal department is investigating this matter.

4) With regard to low flying aircraft, these mainly consist of military helicopters. They fly between RAF Odiham and RAF Welford and the Common is close to the direct route. The pilots are usually on training runs and occasionally fly so low they disturb the ground nests and raise dust and debris. The M.O.D. has been approached and they provided the Council with a paper that sets out their policy for overflying inland areas. In short it states that they can fly wherever they need for training and operational purposes. It does set out restricted areas however for Station Commanders to observe. These include urban areas, nuclear power stations, and certain agreed protected conservation areas. The Greenham and Crookham Common is not one of these areas. The Council was informed that no aircraft should fly lower than 500 feet, but there have been occasions when they have passed over far below that height. On complaints raised the response has been that dispensation can be given for training flights based on access below radar screens. However if information can be given on the identity of such aircraft then the RAF would investigate! A request has now been made for a meeting with the Station Commander of RAF Odiham. There are other aircraft frequently flying over the common, such as Police helicopters, a helicopter often landing in the GAMA site, private light aircraft, publicity photographer helicopters etc. There have been occasions of unidentified helicopters actually touching down on the common. These events are hard to control but the public is requested to keep an eye out if possible to identify such aircraft. These latter, generally spontaneous events, are virtually impossible to control.

5) The grazing committee regulations are awaiting DEFRA approval but are being worked to. The major subject under debate has been whether there is a need to cull the rabbit population. See below in the GCCV 2009 AGM minutes for details and the Volunteers response.

6) The planning committee communicates electronically. Major points of concern relate to Flying A Services on the GAMA site, Prologis Site on New Greenham Park, and obnoxious odours from English Provender Company.

The current economic recession is affecting the development of plans of the first two. Flying A Services has not started implementing their permission to create a new car distribution centre, but is advertising temporary storage available. Prologis expected to get planning permission for manufacture and storage of concrete formwork on a large area at the West of their site. This has fallen through. They have not started any work on the major part of their site and at present it is doubtful if they intend

to go ahead with the project as it stands. They are advertising temporary storage available. – a small housing site at Elizabeth Farm, Thornford Road that does not come within the scrutiny of the Planning committee, also is on hold. It is advertising temporary storage available!
There have been complaints raised by many residents around the common at the smells emanating from English Provender Company factory on the New Greenham Park. The company says that they have put in an expensive filtering system to minimise this. They stated that it had to be adjusted and is now done, but residents state that odours still arise at times. This is an ongoing situation.

7) Management Plan Committee have met a few times in the last year but the bulk of the work has been carried out by Ade Wallington, Simon Barnett and our Derek Cutt. As the Council employees have a good deal of other work to carry out the progress has been regrettably slow. The electronic plan is well established with detail overlays. Compartments' details 1 and 2 are complete and compartment 3 is in hand. A revised completion date is now necessary.

8) The Commission's website is now published. Go to greenham.ccc.org.uk (not linked in these minutes). This is a comprehensive site consisting of 15 pages. These are the Home Page; Background: The Act; The commission; Meetings; Committees; Regulations; Geology and Ecology; Commoners Rights; General; Events; Photographs; Contact Us; FAQs; Links. The Committees page is sub-divided into a page for each Committee. The Meetings page is waiting for past minutes from the Council. Web control will be by a Council employee and emails will pass along three paths to Chris Austin, Tony Ferguson and Paul Hendry. Any one of them can give an anonymous reply.

If members want anything raised at any future Commission meeting, please let Derek Emes know.

Following the report from the Commission, there was further discussion of rabbits, and the fact that despite the Commission having voted not to cull, certain Commissioners persist in raising the issue. Derek Cutt outlined some objections to a cull in the absence of any evidence that rabbits are damaging to the conservation interest of the Commons. He proposed that as our Commissioner, we should request Derek Emes to vote against culling, until such time as we may change that mandate. This was seconded by Pam Pickett and accepted by a unanimous show of hands.

Treasurer's report and financial matters

John circulated a balance sheet as of 21 June 2009. These were accepted as a true statement of our financial position, with the single note that items shown as "to be paid" have in fact all now been paid. Therefore we have no current liabilities.

John reported continuing problems with getting full electronic access to the account, and the general bureaucracy of the Co-operative Bank. With limited electronic access, there is the further inconvenience of the nearest branch being in Reading. Having researched several alternatives, he now proposed moving to a Barclays Community account. This is a no-fees account, allowing e-banking as well as access via any Barclays branch, and supports multiple signatories. This proposal was accepted by a unanimous show of hands.

It was proposed that the three account signatories should be the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. This was also accepted by a unanimous show of hands.

ACTION: John Parker to open the new Barclays account, organise the signing authorities, transfer all funds, and then close the Co-op account.

Other business

Derek Emes expressed a desire, which was supported by several members, to do more rural craft tasks. Coppicing, hedge laying, broom and hurdle making were all mentioned. It was agreed that future task programmes should try to accommodate some of these kinds of work.

Derek Cutt raised a concern about tasks which are not properly followed through. For example, birch-bashing without treating the stumps, or bracken clearance which is not followed as intended, by a programme of spraying. Neil mentioned the "steps to nowhere" – in fact the intended boardwalk will be started in August, but this is an example of a task which was not followed up as intended in a timely manner.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 18:40.