

## **Walden Countryside AGM**

### **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

Present: David Corke; Elaine Corke; Peter Savic; Suzanne Walker; Nicky Sammons; Emma Horton; Jan Wrigley; Sue Powell; Susie Boatman; Jeff Burke; David Buckley; Karen Cannon

Apologies: Mike Hibbs; Steve Jenkins; David Philips; John Hall, David Wrigley; Andrew Urquart; Dave Law; Michael Chappell

#### **1. 2023 Minutes**

- a. Minutes approved
- b. Matters arising
  - b.i. Tree survey should be every 5 years
  - b.ii. Should check policies annually. Insurers need to be informed if anything previously stated is changed e.g. new activities. DC sent revised version of document which updated numbers people involved. Insurers have not changed amount. > insurers have accepted changes. Data protection policy needs checking. DC said that Each person responsible needs to check
  - b.iii. Put a notice on sheep pen. Action: ACTION

#### **2. Report by Elaine Corke Nature Reserve Report 2024**

##### **Conservation**

This is our main purpose, whether by managing the reserves for the benefit of wildlife or by teaching others, especially children about conservation and the importance of loving and caring for the countryside.

Andrew has been running work parties every month this year, tackling the hedges, trees and scrub in the winter and managing pathways, grassland and everything else in the summer. Work parties run on the third Sunday of each month – do join him if you fancy a lovely day in the open among friends, and with the added allure of tea, coffee and biscuits. Last winter, he and his team cut back the encroaching bushes along the hedge at the back of the meadow to allow light to reach the ground to promote new growth of the hedge trees and wildflowers. Their most recent achievements have been replacing the huge gatepost that leads into the car park – that was a mighty job, the creation of a cosy and spacious family home for grass snakes – ideal for the discerning reptile looking for place to hibernate or breed, and the restoration of the path around the so-called roundabout beside the car park. Many thanks to Andrew and to all the work party enthusiasts.

We know that the management work is worthwhile because of the amount of animal and plant species that we get. A few animal highlights that I know about are bullfinches at Noakes Grove, a lizard at Kings Field, fantastic numbers of great-crested newts as well as common newts, dizzying numbers of dragonflies and damselflies, and although butterfly numbers were down this year in common with the rest of the country, we had a good lot of marbled whites, blues and the spectacular silver-washed fritillary.

Thanks to rain this year (not many farmers would say that), the bridge pond did not dry up and we had a good growth of grass and flowers. I have been particularly proud of the quarter of the meadow at NG that has been our wildflower meadow. This year it has been more outstanding even than last year, with loads of grass vetchling (rarish) yellow rattle (newly arrived) yellow wort (rare), bee orchids (sporadic), many hundreds of pyramidal orchids and carpets of the lovely dog daisies, tufted vetch, self-heal, fairy flax and many, many more. It was beautiful.

So why was this field so wonderful for flowers? Well, low-density sheep-grazing early in the year, then left to grow, then cut in September or thereabouts probably provide the ideal conditions for a terrific display of flowers.

Again, at Kings Field a whole new field was created last year on the north side of the river. Marvellous work mostly by David Buckley, Peter Savic and John Bagley tackling the emerging thorns and the tough, rank, waist-high vegetation allowing the grass and shorter plants to flourish. This year it provided a good home for Remus the ram and his companion, Amy. Their presence over the spring and summer will have helped the growth of grass and wildflowers. Meanwhile on the other side of the river, a combination of grazing and mowing has created yet another flowery meadow, which is invaluable to insects, beautiful to look at and delicious for sheep. Huge thanks to the Kings Field team, who seem to be able to turn their hands to anything – building sheds, erecting gates, towing the water tank and sweet-talking Remus and always with immense good humour.

So sheep are a good part of the management plan, and anyway we love them.

## **Sheep**

At the moment we have 25 sheep: 13 lambs, 1 ram and 11 ewes. In January this year I had to say goodbye to the last of our very first, original flock. Dear old Stephanie died at the age of 15; the end of a very happy life, but also the end of an era. On the plus side, this May we saved the life of one of Dora's little boys and the life of Florence, who, uncharacteristically had trouble giving birth and then suffered appallingly with infected and ulcerated back feet all the while feeding her surviving lamb. Emma and I along with Jean, had to nurse her daily with foot washing and injections. Now she is bouncing around with all the others.

An important innovation this year has been to move away from using electric fencing, which consistently failed to keep any of the lambs and some ewes the right side of the fence. Also, it took about two days to be able to move the sheep from one part of the meadow to another, so we invested in sufficient hurdles to enclose a single quarter of the meadow at Noakes Grove, then those hurdles can be moved to create the next quarter in a matter of one or two hours depending on how many helpers we have. It's a joy! We have used this system at Kings Field for some time, and so far, only Remus has discovered a way of opening the hurdles like a gate – but he doesn't do it often.

Here at Noakes Grove we had a wonderful response to our call for more shepherds, and now we have several new volunteers who are not only good at looking after the sheep but are willing to help with the donkey work as well. Thank you, all of you, we couldn't do without you.

Finally, Peter's 'Adopt a Sheep' scheme is still going strong, but I think that sweet Florence is now looking for a new foster 'parent' having recently been 'orphaned'. It only costs £36 a year, so if anybody is interested, please talk to Peter.

## **Children's activities**

Those of us involved in keeping both reserves going are aware that there needs to be continuity through generations. Young people are important: if they learn to love wildlife and the countryside they might well contribute to conservation when they grow up. So Dave Law and David Corke are

doing their level best to get kids involved, and between the two of them they are educating children from the age of 2 to the age of 11 (some of the Wild Child children don't want to leave when they get to 11). We also play host to squirrels, beavers, brownies, cubs and scouts, so that takes the age range up to 14. Education in this wonderfully exciting and fun way is a part of our mission, but we could do with more help leading the Wild Child Club, so if anybody with a good knowledge of wildlife and conservation would like to help, do please talk to David.

Meanwhile, Nikki's mindfulness sessions are helping troubled youngsters cope better with the world, helped by being out in the countryside surrounded by nature.

## Events

Our 'Lambs and Bluebells' day was knocked on the head this year by a late lambing (because David and I were away in April) and by the wet weather. Instead, I held a very low key 'Meet the Lambs' Sunday in May, where just one or two of us were on duty to show visitors around and meet the lambs. To my enormous surprise, on that very rainy Sunday morning, quite a lot of families came and we raised a bit of money.

Then in July we held a summer open day. And guess what – it rained! But actually it didn't rain that much so we had a fair turnout of visitors but nothing like the numbers in previous years.

It seems that over the last 12 years or so, the whole Walden Countryside project has been extremely popular. The sheep have contributed to this popularity and the whole organization relies on its wonderful and enthusiastic volunteers and directors. But we need to look to the future and think about how these lovely nature reserves can survive, be managed for wildlife and above all, to be preserved. If you haven't already and would like to join us, please do. (*end of EC report*)

Discussion following report: ACTION EC to add gatepost to report. Special mention of King's Field team . Peter and David spoke about owls. Two sheep need sponsor - PS thought it would be easy to find sponsors. Appeal for new directors and volunteers. Special thanks to Suzanne and Gillian

3. **CIC Report** which goes to Companies House (see Report CIC 34). Proposed by Jan W. and seconded by Peter that document should be accepted.
4. **Accounts.** Two sets of account provided - one with less info for Companies House. DC gave supplementary info. Grant from Defra is to pay for fencing for Kings Field. Fencing counts as capital asset.
  - a. Sheep: low numbers in account year is due to lambs being sent in March rather than January > period of 14 months with no income. DC stressed that next year numbers should be as before
  - b. Consumables includes food for sheep
  - c. Vet fees lower than 2022
  - d. Assets: mostly land and buildings; and fences
  - e. There is still a loan to be covered by future shareholders
  - f. Accounts were passed at meeting proposed by Elaine C. and seconded by S. W.
5. **Directors** confirmed they wished to continue. Q: do we need more directors? ACTION: SB asked that Dave Law send details to Susie Boatman

6. AOB

- a. Whatsapp group for work party set up by Andrew U.
- b. Kings Field Whatsapp set up by David Buckley
- c. Peter set up Noakes sheep whatsapp
- d. **Safeguarding** DB: said that DBS checks do not need renewing but it is prudent to renew them every 5 years. EH said that Automatic update can be done for free for volunteers. EH asked if paper copy could be kept by others. DBS is kept by individual. DB said it is possible to see online who is checked. SB said that old ones should be destroyed by anyone other than individual