



Friends of Combe Valley
Combe Valley Countryside Park
Café & Discovery Centre
Freshfields, Bexhill,
East Sussex, TN38 8FB
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Please reply to William Ackroyd
501 Bexhill Road
St Leonards on Sea TN38 8AT

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on December 5 2023

Present:

Trustees: William Ackroyd, Chris Dadswell, Will Kemp, Emma Ramsden, Cliff Willard, Virginia Vilela, Karl Beaney, Anna Sabin

Speakers: Mark Monk-Terry

Members and invitees: Evelyn Murray, Cllr Tony Collins, Cllr Gareth Delaney

1. Welcome and introductions – by Chris Dadswell
2. Apologies: Pete Clarke, Stevie Collins, Jay Brewerton, Virginia Pullan, Julie Willard, Shelley Pletsch, Cllr Chas Pearce, Dean Morrison, David Dennis, Katy Bourne PCC, Helena Dollimore, Amy Loaring, Cllr Alan Roberts, Sally Ann Hart MP, Julia Hilton, Andrew Colquhoun, Huw Merriman, Annette Holmes (RVA), Barney Green
3. The minutes of the AGM of December 6 2022: Proposed Cliff, Seconded by Karl - approved.
4. Annual Report: This had been circulated in advance.

Chris introduced the Annual Report, setting out the work achieved by FCV over the last year, thanks to William and Julie, for preparing it, and over the year particular thanks to the Thursday group of volunteers and to Julie and Cliff for leading it, to Emma for her work for the park in her work with Groundwork South, Pete H for his many contributions and the wardens with the other volunteers for their work in repairing, improving and protecting the park. Finally to William for his background support.

He noted in particular that the new signs for the park are being printed and will be being installed on the existing posts in the New Year. It is hoped that during the coming year progress will be made on the tier 1, the Bulverhythe Recreation ground. Work will also continue on the Community Garden, see below under section 8.

The adoption of the report was proposed by Tony, Seconded by Gareth, accepted unanimously.

5. Report on finances with the annual accounts to September 30 2023 by William:

The final report following the independent examination by Lorraine Brown of Blue Ridge Accounting Services had been circulated:

Restricted funds	£3,559
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Friends of Combe Valley is a Registered (in England) Charity Number: 1163581

Cash funds	£3,441
Total	£7,000
Equipment	£6,934

There had been less fundraising as the funds already obtained were used and the work of FCV was consolidated. Most of the funding obtained in the year related to the Beach Hut project, run by Jay Brewerton with the support of FCV.

William reported that the repayment of tax under the gift aid scheme had been finally accepted by HMRC and a refund would be received in due course.

William reported that the grant for the Defibrillator by the DHSS had been approved and that the matched funds of £750 from FCV had been paid. The Defibrillator should arrive in the next few weeks.

The adoption of the report was proposed by Cliff, Seconded by Emma, accepted unanimously.

6. Election of trustees

William Ackroyd and Chris Dadswell had completed their terms on the Board of Trustees and had been proposed for re-election:

Their election was approved unanimously

Elise Liversedge had also completed her term, but because of other commitments would not be standing again. She was thanked for her support of FCV.

This leaves one vacancy on the board of trustees: members will be invited to consider attending trustee meetings with a view to one of them being co opted onto the committee during the year.

7. Talk by Mark Monk-Terry: Mark is the newly appointed warden for the reserves owned / or managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust in East Sussex, from Brighton to Rye Harbour. He was previously for many years working in reserves in West Sussex. In particular he is in charge of Filsham Reed Bed, which was leased to SWT under a lease from Hastings BC, which expires in 2032: SWT have been managing the site since the 1970s. A map of the reed bed site is attached as Annex 1. It is one of the biggest reed beds in the country.

The site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest: there have been substantial interventions over the years, but there is a continuous growth of willow and scrub which intrude on the reed beds, and the reeds encroach on the open water. Now about 20% of the site is scrub and woodland, which impinges on its designation as an SSSI.

A detailed plan has been prepared for the work of restoration. The plan is attached as annex 2. This relies on volunteers, who can carry out reed cutting and scrub removal as well as contractors to carry out heavy works, including mechanical cutting of reeds, willow removal, with the roots etc and that in turn relies on funding. In addition to the expense of outside contractors, there is a question of whether and how it is possible to bring in machinery without damaging the ecology of the reed bed.

A new ecologist has been appointed by SWT, Alex Worsley, who lives in Hastings. He has only been in post for a short while and is new to the area, having moved from Devon for the job. He with Mark will be carrying out surveys – of the flora and fauna and also the water systems. They have a drone which greatly assists the surveying and enables the same areas to be photographed at regular intervals to chart the extent of the reed / scrub encroachment.

Work in 2023 was delayed because of restructuring of SWT, and then by the heavy rains in the summer. Ideally reed fen should be cut back in July/August; this allow for new growth which can be graze down by ponies. It also helps if water can be retained for longer periods to kill off the scrub roots. Another problem is the invasive water plant *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand Pygmy weed)

It was noted in questions that other parts of the park could well benefit from the advice of Alex, in particular the long wood on the upper tier at the Discovery Centre and the plans to control flooding.

8. Talk by Cliff Willard, on behalf of Julie: A plan showing proposals for the community garden is attached as annex 3. Cliff explained that Hastings BC had granted a new lease to the CIC, extending the area under the lease to the drainage ditches to the east and south of the Discovery Centre. The proposals in the plan were put together by Annie Brown and are continuing to be developed and implemented.

During 2023 a pavement along the side of the car park has been created, surfaced with hoggin and the bank on the side has been planted with 6 semi mature birches and wild flower turf. The path gives safe and easy access for wheel chair users and pushchairs to the Discovery Centre. Also raised beds have been installed and benches are in the process of being installed by the mound. The main open area has largely been allow to grow on, with paths being cut for access as well as an area being kept mown in front of the Discovery Centre for events.

A monolith has been installed beside the centre, with a cabinet for temporary notices: a map of the park will be installed on the other side. In the opposite corner of the site sleepers, with anti-slip bars have been installed to span a muddy but very shallow part of the drainage ditch.

The area is also used at least a few times a year as a landing site for the air ambulance and Pete with Chris as back up has the keys for the gates for access for ambulances to the park.

Much of this work has been funded from the Green Recovery Fund grant to the CIC.

The container largely funded by the Police Commissioner of Sussex is now fully equipped and the area on the north side has been cleared, levelled and surface with wood chips as an outdoor working area.

Currently work is underway to instal fences along the sides of the ditches, to provide support for hedging, to be planted in the New Year. In the north side of the garden area, raised areas are being created with spoil from other works and these are proposed for willow structures.

Emma has produced a planting plan for trees along the drainage ditch running East from the garden area, where trees were planted in about 1970. Only a few of the trees survived because they had been planted when the ground was froze. It is hoped that Hastings will agree to this proposal.

9. AOB

William outlined the project of Charinee Vacarri to produce booklets of photos and information of flora and fauna in the park, to be given out free to visitors. With the assistance and support of FCV she has applied to the Wild Isles - Aviva fund for a grant. Under this scheme funds raised by crowdfunding are matched by Aviva. A second matching fund has also been promised by ESCC.

There has been good support, and everyone who has not contributed it is encouraged to do so: leaflets were available for distribution.

10. After thanks to the speakers and participants the meeting was closed at 20h

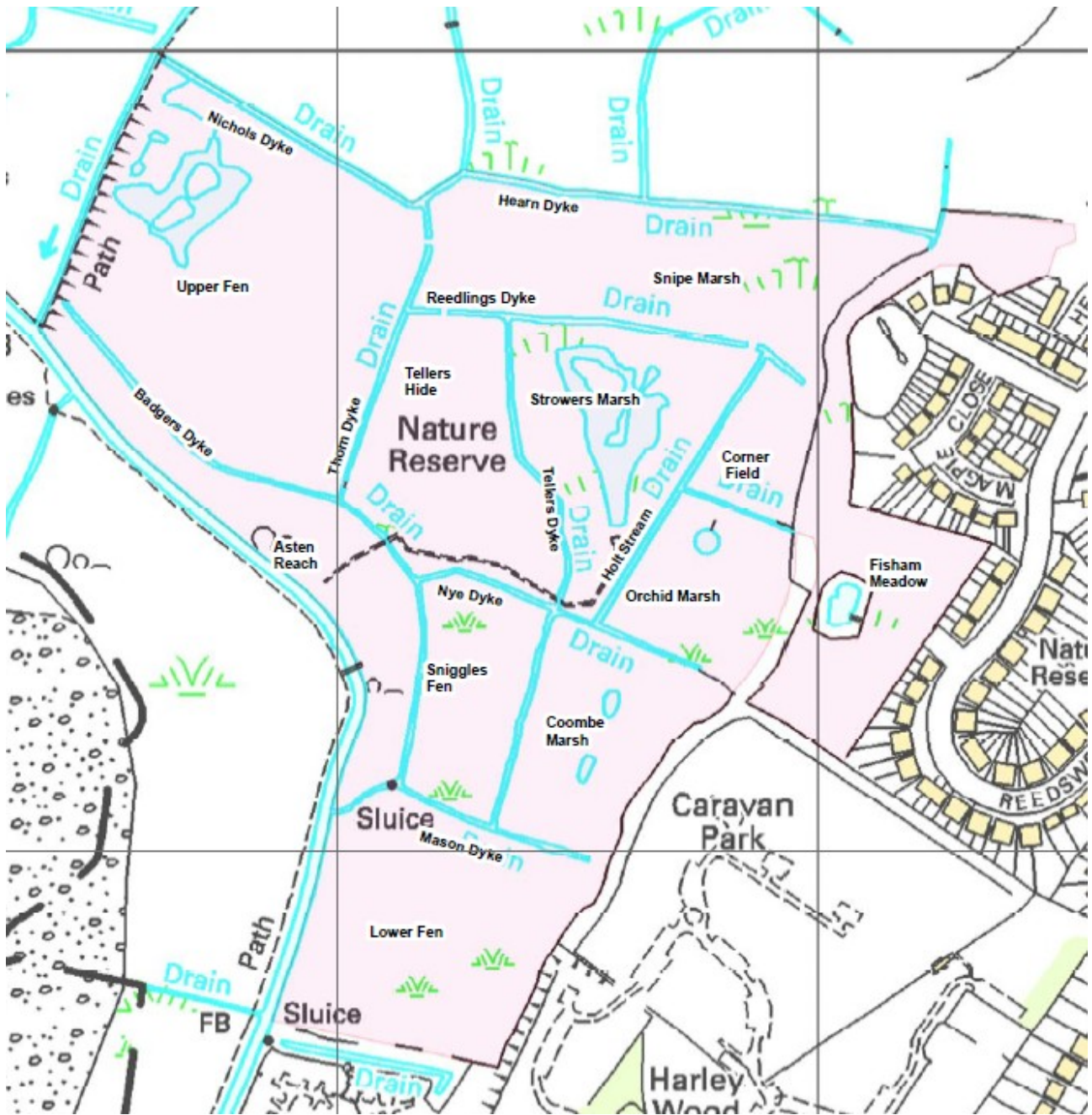
Minutes approved

signed

Pete Clarke Chair

minutes prepared by William Ackroyd using notes taken by Virginia Vilela

Annex 1 - Plan of Filsham Reed Bed



Annex 2 - schedule of works 2023 - 2027

Volunteers	Reed cutting 0.5ha	Reed cutting 0.5ha	Reed cutting 0.5ha	Reed cutting 0.5ha	Reed cutting 0.5ha
	Lower Fen 0.25ha Sniggles Fen 0.25ha	Combe Marsh 0.25ha Lower Fen 0.25ha	Lower Fen 0.25ha Sniggles Fen 0.25ha	Lower Fen 0.25ha Sniggles Fen 0.25ha	Combe Marsh 0.5ha
	Fen cutting 0.3ha	Fen cutting 0.3ha	Fen cutting 0.3ha	Fen cutting 0.3ha	Fen cutting 0.3ha
	Orchid Marsh +Grazing	Orchid Marsh +Grazing	Orchid Marsh +Grazing	Orchid Marsh +Grazing	Orchid Marsh +Grazing
	Scrub clearance 0.2ha	Scrub clearance 0.2ha	Scrub clearance 0.2ha	Scrub clearance 0.2ha	Scrub clearance 0.2ha
	Whole Site	Upper Fen	Snipe Marsh	Strowers Marsh	Snipe Marsh
Contractors	Scrub clearance, reed cutting and scrapes/ditch. Strowers Marsh 3ha	Scrub clearance Lower Fen 0.6ha	Reed cutting 1ha Upper Fen	Reed cutting 1ha Snipe Marsh	Reed cutting 1ha Upper Fen
	Meadow cut & Collect Filsham Meadow 0.2ha	Meadow cut & Collect Filsham Meadow 0.2ha	Meadow cut & Collect Filsham Meadow 0.2ha	Meadow cut & Collect Filsham Meadow 0.2ha	Meadow cut & Collect Filsham Meadow 0.2ha

Annex 3 – Proposals for the community garden

- KEY**
- PHASE 1
 - PHASE 2
 - PHASE 3
- RANGE OF PROPOSALS**
- 1 Outdoor Teaching Bases
Willow dome for shelter and amphitheater mound for informal play and group lessons.
 - 2 New Native Flowering Hedge & Planting for Wildlife
 - 3 Community Allotment Space
 - 4 Cafe Terrace
A multi-functional accessible space with tree shelter and seating around the perimeter. Small scale natural play for younger children.
 - 5 Extended Areas of Wildflower (Turf) for Pollinators
 - 6 Native Tree Nursery
 - 7 Enhanced Woodland Edge Structure for Biodiversity
 - 8 Hoggin Path to Improve Accessibility
 - 9 New Tree Planting
 - 10 Natural Play Elements
- EXISTING FEATURES**
- 1 Wild Flower Mound
 - 2 Raised Planters
 - 3 Access Path
 - 4 Stream / Ditch with Footbridge
 - 5 Car Park

DISCOVERY CENTRE COMMUNITY GARDEN Range of Proposals

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