

**Minutes of Friends of Combe Valley Countryside Park
Annual General Meeting on Thursday 22nd February 2026
at the Discovery Centre**

Attendees: See separate list:

1. **Welcome:** Pete opened the meeting and welcomed everyone
2. **Apologies:** Lindsay White, Annette Holmes, David Dennis, Will Kemp, Christine Sage, Jaye Brewerton
3. **Approval of Minutes of the AGM for the year ended September 2024 on 6th February 2025**

The Minutes of the Meeting were approved.

Proposed: Chris Dadswell Seconded: Julie Willard

4. Chair's Report

Peter thanked Julie Willard and Karl Beaney for the production of the Annual Report: particular points are:

- (a) The Friends reached the top 16 at the BBC Sussex and Surrey Make a Difference Awards. Julie, Cliff, and Virginia attended the finals to receive a Highly Commended Award in the Green Category.
- (b) Cappagh Browne, civil engineers supported the Friends with volunteers, expertise and an Excavator to assist in laying 100 1 x 1.5m rubber grass mats and excavating the path to the east side of the car park. They also put us forward for a grant of £2,500 from Enterprise Mobility.
- (c) Work has continued to manage Ash Die Back within the Long Wood along with the cutting up and removal of fallen trees on the dismantled railway, clearing and cutting back vegetation on footpaths, litter picks around the park and the beach.
- (d) Work has continued in the Community Garden and woodchip has regularly been laid at bridges etc. where they are particularly muddy.
- (e) We are planning to construct willow tunnels in the Community Garden and continue work on the mound.

The report was approved:

Proposed: Rita Drobner Seconded: Chris Dadswell

5. Report of Finances

The Financial Report was presented.

- (a) Much of the last year's work was funded by grants received in earlier years and the Grant money received was for the Beach Huts Project and from the sale of booklets,

which is being saved for publication of further booklets. Unrestricted income from subscriptions and donations was slightly larger than the previous year.

- (b) Details are available in the report. Our largest expenditure was for the Rainwater harvesting and the production of the booklets.

Unrestricted Funds: £2,875

Restrictive Funds: £3,221

Total funds: £6,096

Equipment: £ 975

Report approved:

Proposed: Anna Sabin

Seconded: Julie Willard

6. Election of Trustees:

- (a) Karl Beaney, Peter Clarke and Will Kemp were all up for re-election and were unanimously re-elected
- (b) We still have one vacancy which we will continue to try to fill.

7. Discussion of plans for the Bulverhythe recreation grounds

- (a) There was a consultation on the plans in 2025. It is proposed to develop a wet woodland on the lower tier which will rewild the area and help reduce/prevent flooding. Build up the walk/cycle way all along. This will improve active transport connectivity. Natural edges strategy will enhance biodiversity.
- (b) The plans are constrained by the playing fields strategy. This is being discussed with Hastings BC and Active Hastings. At present 4 of the 8 pitches are used regularly and there does not seem to be consistent management. The strategy talks of working with the Countryside Park to develop and improve the Discovery Centre and Pavilion, providing a proper café and meeting area.
- (c) Emma Ramsden reported that a micro wood is being developed near Sophie's playground. Work is due to start in the next few weeks.

8. Local Authority Reorganisation

- (a) There is still no certainty relating to the changes. It is possible that HBC will become a Town Council.
- (b) For the new unitary authority there are two main proposals
- i. East Sussex remains and becomes the Unitary Authority.
 - ii. The group of Hastings, Eastbourne, Brighton, and the southern part of Lewes form a Unitary Authority. The area has a population of 350,000 about the same size as London Boroughs.

9. Any Other Business

- (a) It could be possible to register the land in the park as an Asset of Community Value. It would have the advantage that land has to be offered to local community groups before being sold on the open market.
- (b) It is hoped that the CIC will be active in acquiring land, initially the disused railway and it is hoped in due course Coombe Wood, which is owned by Vistry who might be willing to dispose of it to the park when they have finished the housing development on boundary of the park.
- (c) Birdwatch – A group of Friends will be taking part in the annual bird count at the Discovery Centre on Sunday 25th January at 10.00.
- (d) Reimbursement of bus fares. At present bus fares for volunteers are reimbursed on an informal basis. It is suggested that this is continued and perhaps made more formal.
- (e) The meeting was informed that Helena Dolimore is holding a consultation on 12th February on local bus services – venue to be announced to those who register to attend the meeting.
- (f) The Amsterdam – The future of the Amsterdam is still being discussed. The Dutch Government wish to return the ship to Amsterdam. This would be an extremely expensive project but could be possible. If they do it could be a significant cultural event. We should be involved in discussions about the lifting of the Amsterdam, including marine biologists, Historic England etc. The next visit to the wreck will take place at 7.30 a.m. on Wednesday 4th February.

Pete thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 14.45

27 January 2026