



Pershore's Community Wetland & Local Nature Reserve

www.avonmeadows.org.uk

MINUTES OF AGM

held on Monday 9th September 2024 at 6.30pm

Committee Room, Pershore Civic Centre

Committee Members Present: Richard Stott (Chairman), Val Wood (Secretary), Bob Gillmor (Treasurer), Andy Miller, D. Wilson, G. Avison, S. Comely, C. Tucker and introducing Karen Rose WDCs Wildlife Sites and Projects Officer.

Friends present as per attached list.

1. Apologies:

A. Cother, J. Brumhead, S. Chandler, A. Edwards, L. Etheridge, S. Lynch, R. Mason, E. Miller, M. Rendall, J. Steady, C. Wright.

2. Minutes of last AGM meeting on 5th July 2023 agreed as a true record.

3. Chairman's Report: see Attachment 1.

4. Treasurer's report – see accounts & balance sheet already circulated.

- a. Total funds as of 31 March were £5078.77. None currently restricted.
- b. Designated funds £4005.93 of which Life membership subscriptions are £1341.00.
(Explanation: Provision is made to transfer just 10% of these one-off payments each year into unrestricted funds. The balance is held in reserve.)
- c. Funds remain stable.
- d. Insurance premium has been reduced as volunteers no longer using chainsaws.
- e. Online banking working well for all payments and many subscriptions. The Treasurer thanked members for who paid by standing order or "faster payments" and of course for their generosity.
- f. Thanks again to Peter Dann of Clifton Crick for independent examination and advice which is much appreciated.
- g. Registering for Gift Aid has triggered a demand for a Corporation Tax return which now has to use third party software for submission to the Revenue so we will need the accountants to handle it, even for a nil return (which is the case as we do not trade).
- h. Since our Membership Secretary, Tim, has moved away, I need help with membership admin – any offers?

Any questions? Robert Edwards, Paul Jenkins, David Wilson and a few others queried the financing arrangements of Avon Meadows between its owners and the Government under the Higher Tier Stewardship Scheme. As the required two weeks' notice of this question had not been given it was not possible to answer it fully during the meeting. It is not strictly a matter

for this AGM as FoAM is not responsible for these arrangements although we take an interest. Karen Rose offered to look into the matter and provide an answer after the meeting.

5. Election of Trustees:

- a. Trustees stepping down by rotation but eligible for re-election: S. Comely, V. Wood, C. Tucker.
The three trustees were proposed for re-election by Jean O'Loughlin, seconded by John Boon. Their re-election was unanimously agreed.
- b. Trustee stepping down by rotation but not seeking re-election: Tim Hutton.
Tim was membership secretary but has now left the area and is living in Somerset. Chairman offered thanks for his committee work over the years and wished him well in the future.
- c. For information
Current Trustees: Richard Stott (Chairman), Bob Gillmor (Treasurer), Val Wood (Secretary), S. Comely, C. Tucker.
Committee Members (appointed by the Board of Trustees):
G. Avison, L. Etheridge, A. Miller, K. Rose, D. Wilson.

6. AOB:

None.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next full Committee meeting is scheduled to take place on:

Tuesday 15th October at 2.00 – 4pm in the Committee Room, Pershore Civic Centre.

Meeting closed at 7.15pm and was followed by a very information talk by Wendy Bufton of Worcestershire County Council presenting National Food Management and possible habitat enhancements for Avon Meadows.

Attachment 1**Chairman's Report for 2024 AGM**

Presented to the AGM held in Pershore Civic Centre on
Monday, 9 September 2024

Welcome to this, the 14th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Avon Meadows.

Introduction: The most notable feature of this year has been the weather! What a wet start to the year! Amazingly, the scrape dried out this year at almost exactly the same time as it did in 2023 in spite of all this rain.

There have been wins and losses during the year. A win is the arrival of Karen Rose who I am delighted to say has recently joined Wychavon District Council as a Wildlife Sites and Projects Officer. We are looking forward to working with her in the coming years.

It is disappointing to note that another Mute Swan has been shot during the year, this one sadly died in spite of the best efforts of the Vale Wildlife Hospital.

The Committee continues to work hard to help keep the meadows in good shape and record what occurs thereon. I thank them for their support over the year, particularly Bob Gillmor our Treasurer and Val Wood our Secretary. It is noteworthy that both Bob and Val along with Charles Tucker were at our very first meeting, 14 years ago!

Finally, I would like to thank Peter Dann of Clifford, Crick & Sharp for inspecting our annual accounts once more and giving them the green light.

Funding: Again, I have to report that our Government funding comes from the Higher Tier Stewardship Scheme which has been kept going as other schemes are being devised. There will be a little delay as the new Government gets up to speed with what is going on so I have little to report that is new.

Site Management and Development:

Regular visitors to Avon Meadows will be aware that the contractors have been clearing the paths regularly this summer. This year I think the standard of path maintenance has been much improved as the contractors get to know our needs in detail.

The long-awaited contractors' work in laying gravel in gateways and other muddy patches has taken place together with some bridges being repaired or replaced.

Our regular volunteers are getting older! We need to boost our membership to increase the pool of possible volunteers. I would ask you to please make a special effort to get more people to join up. There are a lot of new houses and there must be people there who would be interested in membership. All I need to enrol someone as a member is a name and eMail address. We are looking for new Committee members too, people who can take on or lead particular activities.

This can be really interesting, sometimes involving the acquisition of new skills, and of course supporting a very worthwhile cause.

A number of projects were delayed because of the wet weather and the contractor's work was among them. Last year we arranged work parties starting on the first Saturday in October to clear the scrape. We made good progress over the first two Saturdays but then the rains came! It quickly became too wet to access and once the pools filled, the birds came so that was it until this year. We have planned work parties for each Saturday in SEPTEMBER this year in the hope history will not repeat itself. If any of you are able to help please get in touch after this meeting.

Volunteer Activities: Our Newsletter now goes out to 401 members a small increase on last year. Your subscriptions remain extremely useful. We have 43 life members and at least 61 Supporting Members which is roughly the same as last year. If you do decide to make a membership donation it does simplify the Membership Secretary's work if you pay by Standing Order.

So saying, our Tim Hutton has left the area and I would like to thank him for his efforts on the Committee and as a skillfull observer of our birds. Tim remains a member though and can still be contacted!

Other volunteer projects that were cancelled because of the weather were scrub clearance for Marsh Marigolds and the wild flower plug planting in plots. These tasks have been delayed, not cancelled! More recently we are setting up a project to test the water quality on Avon Meadows on a regular basis. This will confirm how pollutants are being dealt with by reed beds and the quantity of nutrients in the water that possibly allow duckweed to proliferate.

Forum:

I can at last hold my head up high and remind you that the long-promised Member's Forum is going ahead and will take place in this very room on Friday 27 September.

We are at a turning point on Avon Meadows and this will be discussed in detail at the Forum. We have been running for 14 years and the time has come for some more significant maintenance to take place if we are to keep Avon Meadows as it has been. Reedbeds need renovation and many of the willows need to be cleared. Looking at old photographs there were no willows at all in the core area of the wetland 14 years ago! The scrape too is in need of a careful look as the variety of wading birds visiting this year is down as the area has become overgrown. These are tasks that are mostly beyond the capability of our volunteer corps.

Bioblitz: This year the Bioblitz was run in conjunction with the charity, Heart of England Forest. We were supported by members of the Worcestershire Recorders which served to increase the count of tricky insects. Mercifully, the weather was kind, and it was a sunny day without too much wind. 242 species were logged on the day which was a respectable count. Numbers were down because of fewer than expected butterflies and moths which have had poor year generally in England.

Records: Our survey work on the meadows continues in spite of the weather and thanks to all those who contributed records.

The dragonfly transects continue to be carried out by Paul Jenkins and Kirstie Chippendale does the butterfly transect, and I would like to thank them for their continued work in these areas.

The total species count for Avon Meadows now stands at 1,226 species, 54 more than last year. Our bird list stood at 135 species at the beginning of this year so it is getting more difficult to discover new ones. Two surprising new species to visit were a Black Redstart and a Little Bunting, this last only the 6th record for Worcestershire. The Bioblitz added a further 14 species, mostly plants and insects.

Otherwise, bird numbers are down both in variety and quantity, just 86 species recorded this year so far and, other than the two new species I have just mentioned, it is all the usual suspects. Maintenance of the resident bird population is not a bad thing of course but it is interesting to see unusual visitors that might become the residents of the future. Still, as all birdwatchers know, the best bird will be seen on the next outing!

We have been collecting bird records systematically since 2011 and although our records are uploaded to the British Trust for Ornithology there is perhaps more we can do with these results. In order to display the results concisely I am putting together an Annotated Bird Checklist covering the records from 2011 to 2023. This will summarise the status of the birds that have visited Avon Meadows and where relevant show trends in the number of visits and the timing of visits. It will be published on the website in due course.

There is plenty of scope for new areas of investigation among insect groups and spiders. Botanists too can face challenges. In 2021 the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland published a new guide to Dandelions! It seems that there are 239 recognised species of dandelion in Britain and Ireland!!! We have recorded one on Avon Meadows put down as Dandelion aggregate. You will have guessed that it is tricky to distinguish between the species of dandelion but it is a challenge awaiting an enthusiast – you could become the County Expert!

We are all aware the weather patterns are changing, hotter, wetter, windier. Wildlife responds to these changes as best it can. What is really interesting now is to discover the changes in wildlife patterns on Avon Meadows which are due to the climate. Long-term records of as many different species groups are essential to be able to confirm any changes that take place.

Recently, Blackbird counts have been down on Avon Meadows. It seems that there is a virus, the Usutu virus, which kills Blackbirds, which might be a possible cause. This is a second order effect of warming weather as it is a mosquito borne virus spreading to the UK from the warmer parts of Europe. First noticed in London in 2020 it seems to have spread to other urban areas in the south of the country where there are big populations of Blackbirds. It is too early to say whether or not it is affecting our population but our records will provide the evidence.

We are interested in all wildlife on the meadows. Do send in your photographs of creatures you have seen on the meadows and cannot identify and we will try to work out what they are and let you know.

It is your Wetland to use and enjoy and our goal is to help you do that.

Richard Stott

Chairman
3 September 2024