



Rottingdean Parish Council

Minutes of the Beacon Hill Nature Reserve Stewardship Group Annual General Meeting on 23rd of October 2024

Present Cllr Nixon (Chair), Cllr Evans, Neil Doyle, Louise Arnold, Russ Greenwood, Bernard Turnbull, Dave Harris, Bernadette Skinner.

C Hayes, Parish Clerk

1. **Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 13th October 2024.** The Minutes were agreed.
2. Matters Arising.
 - (i). **Cllr Nixon** asked if any progress had been made on the refurbishment of the Beacon Hill notice boards that were in a bad state of repair. Louise Arnold said the Friends of Beacon Hill (FoBH) were looking for a carpenter to provide advice on repair. Bernard Turnbull provided a contact. **Cllr Evans** said if FoBH obtained a quote the Parish Council would consider a grant towards the cost.
3. Health of the Nature Reserve
 - (i). **Dave Harris** said that the reserve was generally in a good health although insect numbers were down and there were fewer nesting skylarks, the latter probably caused the weather, lack of insect life, predator bird activity and nest disturbance. He then provided a synopsis of the reports on the birds, butterflies and plants that he and Jay Butler had compiled and that will be published in the 2024 Nature Report. **Cllr Nixon** thanked Dave and Jay Butler, along with Heather Ball and Pete Varnham for their work on the report.
 - (ii). **Louise Arnold** said the FoBH had been concentrating on scrub bashing and popping trees prior to grass cutting. They regularly had 6-10 volunteers for their sessions but had recently lost 3 key members so were looking for additional volunteers. **Neil Doyle** said he would put Louise in touch with the South Downs National Park volunteers' group who may be able to provide additional help.

- (iii). **Bernard Turnbull** asked for an update on the Ash die back work and advised the group that Rottingdean Heritage (RH) wanted to include the reserve in their nature trails and wanted to speak to the FoBH. On Ash dieback **Neil Doyle** said a number of ash trees had been removed and that new Ash Dieback officer had been appointed to continue the work. **Louise Arnold** agreed to speak to RH about the proposed nature trail.

The following points were made in discussion.

- **Bernadette Skinner** said it would be helpful to talk to the owner of the field at the western boundary to ensure that his mowing and crop spraying work complemented the work on the Reserve. She also asked that entrances from Ovingdean were kept clear of foliage and that Ovingdean residents be kept in touch with plans for the Reserve. **Neil Doyle** said he would speak to the field owner.
 - It would be useful to remind people of the importance of keeping to the mown paths during Skylark nesting season and keeping dogs on leads. It was agreed that reminders would be put on notice boards, in local magazines articles and on social media, These would be reinforced by Parish Council communications including on their Instagram account.
 - Measures could be introduced to encourage birds, for example by attracting more insects by planting around the Dew Pond, at the edge of the woods and where the soil was more exposed. **Louise Arnold** said FoBH had some funds available for planting and would consider this.
4. Autumn 24/Spring 25 Management Plan. **Neil Doyle**, the City Parks Ranger provided the following update
- Grazing would take place from January to April when the grass starts growing again.
 - A Cutting Plan had been agreed to be undertaken a number of phases starting on the former golf course, then the main paths to the eastern side, followed by paths at the western side then the eastern side and then the edge of the woods. The cutting would take place over a 4 month period as agreed and notices about the cutting plan placed on the notice boards just prior to cutting.
 - As scrub has been steadily encroaching from the woods into the reserve along the eastern border it was agreed to apply mechanical scrub bashing to support the work of FoBH. This would take place before the end of October and would require volunteer support to remove the cuttings afterwards.
5. Friends of Beacon Hill plans for 24/25. **Louise Arnold** said the FoBH would continue their seasonally based programme of work; scrub bashing until April, helping to move the fences during sheep grazing and then removing invasive plants and weeds during May to July.

6. Autumn/Spring Communication plan. Communication would focus on raising awareness of Skylark nesting and advising people of the cutting plan nearer the time. Articles would also continue to be placed in the Rottingdean Village News, Ovingdean News and the Deans magazine that was delivered to Ovingdean Residents.
7. Beacon Hub. **Bernard Turnbull** set out the key points from a report of a recent Beacon Hub Trustees meeting. This included;
 - plans to repair the Hub building structure,
 - resurrection of the programme of events in the existing building and surrounding area,
 - continuing to pursue the long-term objective of a 35 capacity classroom
 - seeking someone to help get the café operating.

The issue of opening the car park, without vehicles being able to gain unauthorised access to the reserve, and finding an effective means of providing access to the Hub and Reserve for people with limited mobility remain to be resolved.

8. Annual report finalisation and timing. Louise Arnold agreed to coordinate the compilation of the report and requested contributions by the 31st of October.
9. Date of Next Annual Meeting. The 2025 AGM will be held at **1 pm on the 15th of October 2025**.

Parish Clerk

October 2024