

## **MELTON & OAKHAM WATERWAYS SOCIETY AGM - 17 NOVEMBER 2018**

Minutes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting held at 10.30am on Saturday 17 November 2018 at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, Melton Mowbray.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the AGM.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from J Dadford, P Dadford, J Evans, I Butler-Stoney, C McDonald, I McDonald, M Murray, P Posnett, D Rudman, J Rudman, P Winterton.

### **2. Minutes of the 20th AGM held on Saturday 11 November 2017**

Accepted as a true record and signed by the chairman.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

None.

### **4. Chairman's Report (Michael Clowes)**

The chairman gave his review of the Society's activities during the past year.

He began by saying how disappointed he and the committee were by the Waterway Recovery Group in their promise to oversee the preliminary work, speak on our behalf with the council and make applications for project funding. A small amount of this work had happened, but with the planning deadline looming closer, no other option was available but to apply to the council for a change of materials, which was suggested by WRG several months, and would ensure, once passed, another three year stay of grace to allow us the time to apply for funding.

Once the council and Environment Agency are satisfied with our plans, we will have the time to concentrate on obtaining quotes and look for that all important funding.

Something else that robbed us of valuable time during the year was the ongoing saga of the engine troubles on the Mole workboat. After a lot of head scratching, cleaning of every possible problem area and a new petrol pipe and filters, the boat is now as good as new.

Earlier in the year we lost the use of the old away bowls team changing room, endearingly known as 'Toad Hall', in Wilton Park. The new incumbent of the café there believed he had use of the building and we were advised, unofficially, to remove our kit as the door was not locked at night. However, the Town Estate have recently told us we are allowed back.

Our committee received a setback in February when Hugh Butler stood down. His drive, and tenaciousness over a number of years, will be missed, and I would like to say thanks for many years of dedicated service, and wish him well for the future. One of our wonderful volunteers, Jerry Filor, has stepped forward to fill the position and was co-opted on to the committee recently. We welcome him and look forward to his input.

Our committee meetings are held about every six weeks and we would embrace more new committee members. Members can be co-opted at any time and if anyone wishes to attend a meeting to see if it is your kind of thing, you would be more than welcome.

The new Melton distributor road has been looming over us for nigh on two years. It became instantly clear from those initial drawings and documents that the road planners had no desire to include the line of the Oakham Canal in their scheme. Myself and committee member Paul Dadford arranged a meeting with Andy Jackson from Leicestershire County Council, to ask why this should be. Following the get together we did leave in better spirits, but still really no clearer as to what was happening and very apprehensive for the future. Our suspicions were confirmed when the full planning application was revealed, with no provision for the Oakham Canal line. Through social media we have managed to mobilise many people to comment and object to this situation. If you or your family or friends and neighbours have not done so yet you have until 18 November to go on-line and fill in a comment form and tell County Hall to include the Oakham Canal line in their plans. As always, money seems to be the issue, but just a small proportion of what they have already spent on draughtmen, designers, solicitors, land

acquisition, hydrologists and geologists would have seen the line protected. We, for our part, have engaged the services of the IWA consultant engineers, and produced our own report, which has been submitted with four pages of comments and proposals, in support of protecting the line.

I understand that this application will be decided by council planning officers, instead of a public enquiry, which given the enormity of the scheme and the impact it will have, seems small potatoes in the grand scheme of things. We now have to wait and see what happens, but if this episode has brought one thing home to me, that is the power and effect of social media.

Speaking of which, I am well known for being a bit of a dinosaur, so I took some convincing that social media would help our cause. But help it has with the website providing vital information world-wide and Facebook spreading the word about the aforementioned distributor road problems like wildfire. It raises people's awareness of vital issues and does it quickly and efficiently.

One of the successes of this last year has been the permission from the Grove School to allow us to use and improve as we see fit, their landing stage and storage container. When we first chanced upon the area, it was overgrown, full of rubbish, insecure and the river at this point was obstructed and silted up. Thanks to volunteer efforts, a transformation has taken place, with a totally clear space, treated landing stage, working container and security gate. A second mooring position has been created to cater for both boats and the whole area has been re seeded and landscaped.

The initial idea to approach the school and all subsequent negotiations have come from just one of our volunteers, Gavin Simpson, who was a pupil there. We are grateful to him, and the school for allowing us to bring the area back to life, and it is proving a great asset along with Toad Hall in the park. However, we can only see this as a transitory position as it may be taken away as quickly as it came, and our main focus has to be the building of the double dock.

In mentioning the container there, we say a big thank you to all the people who responded to our Tool Appeal. We have been overwhelmed by the generosity, and the container is now at bursting point, so much so that each volunteer can have their own personal spade!

Our membership remains somewhat static. We are desperate to encourage youngsters (ie. anyone under 40!) who will become the future of the society. However, I have noticed a reversal of this trend in other spheres, and hope this new wave permeates through to the societies like ours. I know first-hand that people like the Waterway Recovery Group take on schoolchildren and students which can only bode well for the future.

Amongst new members are our core of Footpath Rangers, which is an initiative started by committee member, Paul Dadford, whereby in taking their daily constitutional, they can keep their eye on a certain stretch of waterway and report back with any problems. This, in its first full season has worked well, and we thank all the participants who have been our eyes and ears for the past year. New rangers are always required so let us know if you are interested.

Throughout today's review you have heard mention, here and there, about that much put-upon group our MOWS volunteers. We have a database of many volunteers but there is a hardcore of about ten, who regularly drag themselves out of a warm bed on a Sunday morning and give the society that greatest of all gifts-their time. You all have mine and the committee's undying admiration.

The society's boats, Mole and Badger, should soon be leaving Sysonby, on their way to their new home in the town. This will be an action tinged with sadness, as they have been moored here since they were built. All our equipment has been stored in the garage and we have received nothing but the best of co-operation from the owners and staff here at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, with whom we have such a wonderful rapport and we say thank you for another year of co-operation and friendship. I know we have to see this as a positive step but I am seeking permission to mark this long-held friendship with a parting gift.

Our relationship with the Town Estate, which is vital for our future development of the waterway, remains as strong as ever, and the many ties that this fosters down the line also remain buoyant.

We are now just appearing on the radar of both the Melton Times and the Local council, and we have tried long and hard to get noticed by both down the years, but now thankfully things are starting to happen there.

And last, but not least, thank you to the society members.

The chairman also read out a report from Paul Dadford, who was unable to attend, regarding the following:

**a) Guided Walks**

Due to other commitments, we were unable to provide a programme of guided walks this year. Paul Dadford will however be planning a series of walks for 2019. These will be advertised on the website and in our newsletter.

**b) Wreake Valley Way**

Our footpath Rangers carried out a detailed survey of the footpaths making up the Wreake Valley Way in the spring and early summer. We have mapped the locations of all the gates, stiles and waymarkers along the route and the Rangers will be monitoring their condition and helping to keep the footpaths open.

We continue to work with Leicestershire County Council as and when problems arise.

We still intend to produce a more detailed guide to the Wreake Valley Way before the spring of next year.

Longer term we would like to have the footpath officially marked as the Wreake Valley Way.

**c) Oakham Canal Green Corridor**

Our plans for the Green Corridor north of Oakham continue to be developed. Rutland County council are very supportive of the initiative and we now have support from the Sustainable Land Trust to help take the project forward.

There are plans to set up a Community Trust to own or lease the land and to drive the project forward. MOWS will be a strategic partner in the Trust, helping to secure the best future for what remains of the canal at the Oakham end.

**5. Treasurer's Report (Jan Dadford)**

In Jan Dadford's absence, the chairman presented the Society's accounts for year ending 31 August 2018 and he read out her report:

- Subscriptions / donations – These are down on the previous year, however 2016/17 included a life membership payment which slightly distorts the figures.
  - Expenses – These are lower this year since we did not have the survey expenditure re the boat dock planning application.
  - Merchandise – The loss reflects that items were sold at last year's AGM below cost price.
- Overall, we made a small profit which carries forward to the increase in our balance sheet.

The accounts were accepted and approved by the meeting.

**6. Election of Committee Members**

Retiring committee members: D Andow, J Dadford and P Dadford. All agreed to stand for re-election and were re-elected by unanimous vote. Jerry Filor, who had been co-opted on to the committee during the year, was elected and now becomes a permanent member.

**7. AOB**

No other business.

**8. Open Discussion**

Following a short break, the attendees were shown a short video "How Water Adds Value" which was made by Canal and River Trust. This short but inspirational film highlights the value a restored waterway adds to an area.

Open discussions then took place regarding the Scouting Association's "one million hands" scheme; more on the proposed distributor road and the proposals for Syston Junction, which have yet to obtain planning permission.

Peter Swift, a long-standing member had taken the trouble to make six bat boxes for the dock site, and received the thanks of everyone at the meeting.

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The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting. A light lunch was available for those wishing to stay and chat.