

Annex 1

Organic Countryside Community Interest Company

Company Number 06794848

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 20.00 on 13 October 2015 at the Almshouses, Saffron Walden, Essex

Present

S = Shareholder, D = Director

Susie Boatman (SB)	S D	
Elaine Corke (EC)	S D	Chair
Liz Goddard (LG)		
Patrick Hawke-Smith (PH-S)		
Emma Horton (EH)	D	
Peter Sanders (PS)	S	
Vyvyan Veal (VV)		
David Wrigley (DW)	S D	Minutes
Jan Wrigley (JW)	S D	

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

EC took the Chair and welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

Belinda Irons, David Corke, Norma Chapman, Sandie Phillips and Mike Hibbs.

2 Approval of 2014 Minutes

The meeting approved these as an accurate record; proposed by EC, seconded by JW. There were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

3 Financial Report

SB reported that the Company Accounts for the Year ending 31 January 2015 had been approved by the Directors, and received and accepted by Companies House. The compulsory Community Interest Company Report (CIC 34), outlining the ways in which the company continues to benefit the community had also been updated, submitted and accepted. Copies of both were tabled at the meeting; SB indicated that more detail regarding the accounts was always available to shareholders on request.

Commenting on the overall financial picture, SB noted that there was again a loss for the year, although this was not as big as some previous years. This was due both to lower costs (especially veterinary fees) and to improved income, despite the absence of stock (lamb)

sales. The latter came from a significant VAT repayment as well as a small surplus from the event run at Easter. SB reminded the meeting that in 2009 the Shareholders' Funds had stood at £11,500, but that successive losses had reduced this to £3,700 by the end of the year in question. Looking to the current year, it was possible that, with income from lamb sales and with reduced certification costs (see Item 8) that the year could break even.

SB also explained some specific items in the accounts:

The income from shares sold in the year was a book transaction following an agreement with EC, who had stood as a significant creditor in the accounts. She had accepted reimbursement of the main part of the sum owed to her in the form of shares in the company.

The Board had decided to revalue the ewes as they were now 6 years old. They are being depreciated by 25% per annum and will thus reach zero value in the accounts when they are 10.

SB also highlighted the need for changes to the Land Registry entry for Noake's Grove to permit the easier sale of shares in the Company in future.

The meeting proposed a huge vote of thanks to SB for obtaining the VAT refund, and for all her other diligent work on the company accounts during the year.

4 Nature Reserve Report

VV presented the following report:

We started an ambitious project in 2014, which was to reclaim meadowland from the encroaching scrub. Ostensibly our indicators were a small colony of Pyramidal orchids on the southern edge of the work site. The site was approximately ¼ of an acre in extent. The site was cleared by January 2015, which was accomplished by our group of loyal and hardworking volunteers meeting once a month, Accuro and a Woodsmanship Skills Course run for Dig-it volunteers.

The way was then clear for volunteers to switch their attention to ride maintenance, which encourages a free pedestrian access and promotes regeneration of wildflowers along the sunlight filled rides. We successfully cleared scrub back from the edge of some 50 meters and this also increased the opportunities for colonisation by insect life. Keith Glover mowed the rides with his tractor to promote visitor access and wildlife diversity.

We also introduced a new working model for the summer of volunteer picnics. The objective was to loosely disguise a laborious task with more of a social occasion. This was well received and we had good attendances and achieved a remarkable amount of work. The tasks undertaken were ragwort and thorn removal from the sheep pasture.

The results were beyond expectations: between 40 and 50 flowering spikes of Pyramidal orchid (numbers varied depending on who counted them) emerged in the area that we had cleared, along with Yellow wort, an uncommon Essex flower. This was a fitting result for all who had joined in the continuing conservation management at Noakes Grove. I would like to say a very big "thank-you" to everyone who took part. Your contribution, no matter how

small, through your volunteering makes all the difference and you are to be congratulated for your enthusiasm and support.

Proposals for Autumn and Winter 2015/16:

If the reclamation of meadow and therefore extra winter grazing for the sheep is to continue, then the new area needs cutting. We proposed to ask Keith Glover to do this when he cuts the rides with his tractor.

The other tasks to be undertaken this year are ride widening initially on the eastern end of the Blackthorn scrub. This will encourage public access and further biological diversification of the site.

EC proposed a vote of thanks to VV for his enormous – and warmly given – contribution to the work on the Reserve.

5 Activities Report and Tree Survey

EC delivered the following activities report:

Over the winter, the usual activities continued, with the regular Forest School days and the more sporadic outdoor days with the home schooling group. We also had visits from the Accuro gardening group of learning-disabled adults. They are always so jolly and cheerful, that they seem to bring the spring nearer, they are great, and they do really useful work.

We had another Christmas party. And these affairs were such a good idea when Vyvyan and Gay first suggested them, that I now cannot think of a Christmas season without one. This year it will be on Sunday 13 December, and if you haven't been to one yet, do come, because there is something wonderful about sitting around a crackling campfire and cooking lovely things to eat.

An excellent addition to our activities list was the series of three woodmanship courses, which began in January. These were organised and run by Vyvyan, who, with his huge experience and knowledge made them a very popular success. More such courses would be very welcome – if anyone would like to take this up.

I would also like to mention that several activities this year were greatly enhanced by David Wrigley's wonderful wood-burning steam machine, which, looking like something out of Thomas the Tank Engine, provided boiling water for endless cups of tea and coffee. I love that thing!

In discussion, a summer event was suggested, as a way of creating an activity day during the school holidays. Ideas tabled included orienteering, a nature ramble, an evening moth hunt. It was noted that DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks would be needed for childrens' events if parents were not present.

Regarding the tree survey, EC reported:

Certain unpleasant events at Kew Gardens prompted us to check what our liability would be should a tree or branch fall on someone. Apparently we would not be covered under our public liability insurance unless we could prove we had established a duty of care. This meant we had to have a tree survey done, which luckily led Emma to enquire from one of our members, Paul Frainer, who happens to be the senior arboriculture consultant for Essex County Council. He kindly came to look at all the trees and we are currently awaiting his written report, but he did mention that we will have to get tree surgeons in to chop off some dead branches that overhang footpaths and the highway. This is probably going to be expensive.

6 Grants Catch-Up

EC reported:

Emma has been working tirelessly to chase an enticing grant from Essex County Council called the Community Initiative Fund to pay for some signboards. To this end she arranged for the two of us to go to the Swards End Parish Council meeting last week because we needed some nice words from the local council to support our claim. To our delight and surprise, they were so excited to learn that they had a nature reserve on their doorstep, that they chatted about it for ages and ended up saying they would persuade their District Councillor to donate his community fund towards our claim. If all goes well, we should get most of the money for signboards from that one grant alone. I have been seeking further donations from Ridgeons for a moveable sheep shelter, from NFU Mutual and Mike Hibbs has agreed to sponsor us as well.

7 Farm Report

EC delivered the following report:

The ewes all produced twins this year, although two were stillborn, so we have ended up with 12 lambs. Fears about the capability of the little yearling ram we borrowed have disappeared, as the lambs are the best we have ever had: big, strong and lovely to look at. The weather has been generous to us this year as well and we have had plenty of grass. We are planning to move some of the lambs onto the dock/nettle/thistle field this week as there is grass there and it might help to control the weeds.

SB reported that the bees had now been handed over to beekeeper Andy Webb. They had been given a pre-winter check. There was hope for honey in 2016!

8 Concerning the Soil Association and possible change of Company name

EC reported:

I have had another run-in with the Soil Association, which left me fairly devastated. The local butchers have not renewed their organic certification, so unless I paid £160 for a certificate for me and a certificate for the butcher, allowed another inspection of Noakes Grove, enabled an official inspection of the butcher including all his paperwork (just at his busiest time) and then agreed to watch the whole slaughter process, I could not use that

butcher and then sell the lamb as organic. So the directors and shareholders all agreed to forget about the Soil Association and sell the meat as it is.

However, it leaves us with a question of whether we continue with certification at all. After many years of paying in hundreds, even thousands, of pounds, we have not actually had any benefit at all from them other than their name, which we now cannot use. There is a stewardship grant, but it is less than the Soil Association fees, and the Soil Association themselves admit that they are not geared for small operations like ours. So the certification question is open to debate. The current certification period expires in June 2016.

Whichever way we go, though, we cannot use our company name on the products that we sell because unless you are registered with one of the certification bodies, you cannot use the word 'organic', even if it is your name. So we may need to change our company name. Any ideas? Noakes Grove CIC?

9 Any Other Business

JW suggested that it would be prudent to conduct a risk assessment for the whole site if as is hoped more visitors come to the reserve as it becomes better known locally. The meeting agreed.

All present were encouraged to spread the word about volunteering for the work parties, and LG said she would put working party information and dates on her market stall.

PH-S suggested that an Open Day be considered for the summer to generate interest.

It was noted that if more visitors were to come to the site especially all at once for an event, consideration may have to be given to the provision of toilet facilities, whether temporary or a more permanent composting type facility.

In closing, the meeting proposed a vote of thanks to EC for her energy in keeping the whole thing going.

The meeting closed at 21.55