

FRIENDS OF NAPHILL COMMON
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING FOR 2009

22nd January 2010

Provisional Minutes

1. Attendees

The AGM had been widely advertised to the Village and beyond and about 40 people attended including committee members: Peggy Ewart, Philip Hussey, Peter Davis, Trevor Hussey, Stephanie Morgan, Kevin Bennett, Steve Rodrick, David Greenwood, Ron Collins and Daisy Leek.

2. Apologies

Michael Clarke, Marek Pawlik

3. Chairman's Report

Chairman Trevor Hussey reported that we had had a fantastic first year with over 100 members joining, making FoNC one of the largest groups in the Village. It shows the level of concern for, and interest in the Common.

The Chairman outlined our aims; to conserve and enhance the Common, to promote enjoyment of it and to encourage community involvement.

He listed the following achievements:

- Establishing the website
- Monthly entry in the Naphill & Walters Ash Gazette
- 3 newsletters
- The FoNC leaflet
- Putting path numbers on posts
- Producing a map with paths identified
- Beginning the replacement of the sign boards at entry points to the Common
- We even enlarged the Common by discovering that the land between the clumps and the edge of Bradenham Manor is part of it.

He listed the following scientific work:

- Insect survey with Mike Bloxham (at least 3 quite rare species found)
- Grasses with Angus Idle
- Botany with Dr Alan Showler (a rare plant found)
- Fungus Foray with Derek Schafer and Penny Cullington of the Bucks Fungus Group
- Juniper cuttings with Andy McVeigh

Rarities are good, helping to add to the protection status and prevent misuse of the Common. The Common was once a Juniper forest but now only four bushes remain. The healthy one has been flattened by the recent snow causing splintering of the trunk at the root. It has been re-propped but is in a sorry state. The two smaller ones have been crushed beneath a fallen oak bough, leaving just one semi-healthy Juniper. So the cuttings taken by Andy McVeigh could be vital. They have been sent to a specialist nursery in Scotland and will be returned as saplings in two years for us

to replant (it's important to return the same genetic stock). We need by then, to have opened out a suitable area to replant the Junipers as they dislike being overshadowed.

We have also run a number of social events including:

- Two tours of the Common
- Three walks for Health by Ron Collins
- The mid-summer picnic
- A treasure hunt
- The meeting in the Village Hall

The one disappointment has been the very slow progress with work parties. Because the Common is a SSSI we need Natural England's permission before we can do any significant work. This permission has been granted subject to us getting landowner Sir Edward Dashwood's permission. This too has been granted, subject to us getting tenant Mr Fincken's permission. Here we have failed, despite numerous attempts we cannot illicit a response. We will continue to try this year. Working parties are desired to improve the paths, clean out some ponds, reduce the shading around the Junipers, etc.

But, with this irritation aside, it has been a splendid year with the activities being well supported. The award of a "Highly Commended" certificate in the "Enjoyment and Understanding" category by The Chilterns Conservation Board was nice recognition of all the hard work put in by everyone.

4. Membership Secretary's report

Membership Secretary Stephanie Morgan reported that the first members were signed up in February 2009 and that we now have 112 members. The spread of members takes in Essex and Dorset. 33 members have re-signed for 2010 already. The intention is to rationalise the membership year from Jan-Jan and anyone who joined in the latter part of last year will be offered a reduced subscription this year. Stephanie also distributes the FoNC newsletter by email, post and hand delivery to every member.

5. Treasurer's report

Treasurer Peggy Ewart reported that the accounts to 31st December 2009 showed an income of £632.10, an expenditure of £148.54 and hence a balance of £483.56. A sheet explaining the detail was presented and the income item "Donations" explained as the left-over balance when the old Naphill Common Committee was wound up. The accounts have been checked and approved by John Harris, a copy is appended.

6. Election of New Committee

The 2009 committee consisted of 11 full members and one co-opted member. All but one committee member (Michael Clarke) had said they would be willing to stand for re-election. The Chairman asked the meeting whether anyone else wished to be considered for the committee but there were no additional volunteers. The meeting voted unanimously to vote in the 10 re-standing plus one co-opted as full committee members. The committee for 2010 thus comprises; Peggy Ewart, Philip Hussey, Peter Davis, Trevor Hussey, Stephanie Morgan, Kevin Bennett, Steve Rodrick, David

Greenwood, Ron Collins, Marek Pawlik and Daisy Leek. The committee will elect its officers' positions at the first committee meeting on 9 Feb.

7. Future activities.

An open discussion was held to determine ideas for future events. These included:

- Walks for health
- A stand at the fete
- Helping wildlife, nest boxes for owls, bats, dormice, etc
- Archaeology (eg Romano-British farmstead) and history
- Walk in springtime to plot the singing male birds across the Common
- Walk around the boundary of the Common
- A temporary sculpture trail
- Child's event – pond dipping
- Survey of plant and animal species in the ponds
- Produce a book for young children
- Butterfly survey/foray
- Bat detection
- Working party to clear ponds (SSSI = expert advice and permission needed)
- Working parties to open the glades to let light in
- Planting once-common tree species to improve diversity
- Stone and log piles for insects and small mammals
- Diary notes, observations of wildlife
- Creative art, handicrafts, photos, writing, etc
- Cottage industries, lace making, walking sticks, wood sculpture
- Colour code the paths

8. Possible Futures for Naphill Common

The Chairman presented a leaflet describing three different futures for the common, attached. Mini = minimum intervention allowing the Common to mature into woodland, Midi = moderate intervention to improve diversity and enjoyment, Maxi = significant intervention to roll the clock back 50 years to produce much more open grassland. There is evidence from elsewhere that the Maxi option could encourage species such as Orchids, Linnet and Goldfinch to return. The Common was mostly grassland in the 1920's when grazing stopped. If the Mini plan is followed, the current open areas will become wooded within 20 years.

There was criticism of the work done about 10 years ago, it was rather brutal, left the area looking messy and, because it wasn't followed up, scrub has quickly reclaimed the cleared areas. It is therefore important to have an agreed Management Plan in place to ensure adequate follow-on activities occur. Regarding the Maxi plan, there were 2-3 voices with some concerns but they were generally happy with this choice providing the work was implemented with consultation and sensitivity and not all done at once. There were no objections to the Midi plan. The committee will produce a Management Plan taking these views into account.

A list of Commoners rights was displayed in the hall and it was noted that collectively, Commoners have the right to graze quite a few animals on the Common.

The AGM then closed with two fascinating presentations by guest speakers. The first, by Steve Rodrick described how orchards had affected the history of the area. The second, by Cathy Rose, examined the Red Kite, its decline and reintroduction to the Chilterns.

Distribution:
Committee members
FoNC website

Minutes prepared by: Kevin Bennett, Secretary 30/1/10

Minutes approved by:
Trevor Hussey, Chairman Dated

POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR NAPHILL COMMON

The past

Naphill Common began as an area of open grassland dotted with trees and ponds. It was grazed by animals belonging to the landowner, local farmers and commoners. As grazing declined large areas became covered with heathland plants including juniper, gorse, bracken and heather. Once grazing had ceased in the 1920s the common began to evolve towards mature oak and beech woodland with an understorey of holly, slowly pushing out the heathland plants and what remained of the grass.

The future

The future of Naphill Common is a matter of choice. Friends of Naphill Common would like to find out what local people want to happen to their common. There are many possible futures but to simplify matters we suggest three and would like you to judge which you think is the best.

(1) Mini. The common should be left to complete its evolution towards mature woodland with the minimum of intervention.

- The more important paths and bridleways would be kept open.
- Information boards with maps would be placed at the main entrances.
- Ponds and veteran trees would be left to age naturally.
- The flora and fauna would become uniformly typical of self-generated mature woodland.

(2) Midi. There would be active intervention to achieve a more open and varied common.

- Paths, bridleways and some glades would be opened up to allow in more light, and scrub would be cleared manually.
- Information boards with maps would be placed at the main entrances and some signage would be provided on the paths within the common.
- Several ponds would be cleared and veteran trees would receive attention to try to prolong their lives.
- The flora and fauna would be more varied: mainly woodland but with some heathland and grassland species returning to the open areas.

(3) Maxi. The common would be changed more extensively, with some felling, to achieve a mixture of mature woodland, heathland and grassland.

- Paths and bridleways would be opened up; some areas would be preserved as mature woodland, others as heathland and grassland.
- Information boards with maps would be placed at the main entrances and signage would be provided on the paths within the common.
- Ponds would be cleared and, if necessary re-puddled with clay to hold water. Veteran trees would be cared for and some new pollards made.
- The flora and fauna would become much more varied, with large areas of heathland with juniper and gorse and open areas of grassland.
- A few grazing animals might be introduced to control the scrub.

FRIENDS OF NAPHILL COMMON

Income and expenditure for the financial year from 1/1/09 to 31/12/09

Income:-

Donations	£ 81.10
Sale of books	£ 30.00
Membership fees (103 of £5 & 3 of £2)	£ 521.00
TOTAL INCOME	£632.10

Expenditure :-

Website fee	£ 44.60
Hire of Village Hall -20/3/09	£ 30.00
Refreshments – 20/3/09	£ 12.08
Donation to Village Hall Council	£ 25.00
Stationery	£29.66
Stamps	£ 7.20
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£148.54
Balance	+ £483.56
Cash at bank on 22/12/09	= £483.56