

THE BEACON HILL SOCIETY
Minutes of meeting held Wednesday 9th October 2019
Somerset Earth Sciences Centre Moon's Hill Quarry Stoke St Michael

1. Chairman :- Matt Brookbank opened the meeting at 19.00hrs, welcoming all members present.

Present : Matt Brookbank (Chairman, Publicity/Website); Peter Banks (Treasurer/Membership); Lesley Stewart (Secretary); Mary Newman (Events co-ordinator); Fran Britten; Richard Raynsford; Janet Raynsford; Margaret Hares; Paul Newman; Christine Mayle.

Apologies : Alan Stone; Marion Black; Paula Jordan; Jennie O'Kane; Jo Baverstock; Nicola Stoate, Lucy Chard, Bo Walsh

2. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. Matt told the meeting that Paul Allen had expressed his concern over the tone of the previous minutes being somewhat negative towards the Woodland Trust. Matt has agreed with Paul that his emails will be included in future minutes to provide members with as much up to date information from the Woodland Trust as possible.

3. Matters arising from the minutes and not on the Agenda : None

4. Officers Reports :

Chairman:

Matt reminded members that it has been a very busy three months since the previous meeting with the Society's involvement at the Mid Somerset Show, a Bat Walk which took place in early September and the receipt of the new Eco-Survey of the Woods undertaken by the Woodland Trust. He also had an archaeology update. *See further*

Secretary:

Lesley read out an email from Jennie about the Bat Walk and it was confirmed that a donation was made by the Society to Liz and Peter of Frome Bats in Care. Lesley also informed members present, Committee members already being aware, that she will be standing down as Secretary as from the April 2020 AGM

Treasurer/Membership:

(a) Peter informed those present that there were now 24 members.

(b) As of the Bank statement up to the 21st September 2019 closing credit balance for the Society account was £843.94. This balance did not include the outgoing expenditure of payment to Matt for the cost of the new website setup and the donation to Frome Bats in Care. The petty cash balance brought forward £5.00 and an additional £35 has been received. A payment out of £29 for the new pamphlet printing has been made, leaving a petty cash balance of £11.

(c) Peter confirmed that there are now only a few of the pamphlets printed for the Mid Somerset Show remaining. The booklet is still to be updated but this was not essential at this time.

(d) Peter told the members that he had attended a meeting of FUTURE SHEPTON at the former HSBC bank building in Shepton Mallet. Other groups involved include Shepton Mallet Carnival Club, Radio Shepton Mallet, "B" Wing Arts (a project in part of Shepton Mallet Prison) and each group were given the opportunity of a 5 minute presentation. Peter felt that this had been a successful opportunity although there have not been any new members from this. He was also approached by a representative from SPARK, which the Society has encountered before. They are able to offer funding for proposals from local groups although it was agreed by members that this offer may not be appropriate for the Society at this time.

Events: Mary expressed her apologies for not being able to attend the upcoming Fungus Foray. Several other members are also unable to attend. It was decided that Mary will contact Les Cloutman and cancel the walk for this year.

Publicity/Web site manager: Matt confirmed that the website and Society's Facebook page are up to date and running successfully.

5. Beacon Hill Society – events/projects

Updates

(a) Mid Somerset Show – The Society boards were put up in the Heritage Tent, in the same location as last year. The display was not permanently manned this year although Matt, Peter and Lesley were in the area throughout the day. Pamphlets were taken but no new members signed up.

Bat Walk - this was scheduled for Wednesday 11th September in Great Elm, courtesy of Peter and Liz of Frome Bats in Care. It was led by Adel, Peter and Liz with the aid of bat detectors provided by Adel. This allowed those on the walk to identify Pipistrelle, Serotine and Horseshoe bats in and around the meadows at dusk. Those attending also became involved in 2 bat rescues – one coming in from Bradford on Avon, the other from Westbury. The “rescue” volunteers remained with the walkers once their charges had been dealt with. A very enjoyable evening was had by all and the Society will express thanks to Adel, Peter and Liz. A donation to Frome Bats in Care is being made.

Woodland Trust Volunteers – Both Matt and Peter joined a Woodland Trust Volunteer day in early September and met with the Woodland Trust Area Manager for Devon and the South West Regional Director. Despite a very busy day, both Matt and Peter agreed it had given a positive outcome. Part of the meeting involved the discussion of Ash Die Back in woods and the Trust's approach to dealing with it. Opinions were also sought from those present about deer culling in order to reduce the damage caused by deer to newly planted saplings. This matter is still subject to ongoing discussions. Matt asked whether any other members would be interested in becoming “basic” WT volunteers – several applications have been handed to members present. Anyone else who may be interested, please contact Matt direct.

Mendip Rocks - The walk in the Woods in conjunction with Mendip Rocks 2019 (SESC) on Saturday 12th October is full. There are a few places for the afternoon lectures still available.

(b) Fungus Foray – This is cancelled.

(c) Sapling and bramble clearance – a date for this TBA

(d) Other suggestions – the possibility of a Butterfly survey was suggested for next year.

A bat survey was suggested, although the Woods are not a habitat particularly conducive to bats. Adel has agreed that a survey could be undertaken, in any event.

Next August marks the 200th anniversary of the first recorded discovery of a Bronze Age burial urn in the Woods. It was suggested that a party could be arranged to celebrate the event.

6. Woodland Trust

Matt quoted from a management update he had recently received from Paul Allen;-

"I hope all is good with you. I see Amanda has sent through a role description for the woodland working group. As part of this process we noticed we aren't aware of anybody in the group with first aid (ideally emergency first aid + F (F is the forestry - one which deals with sun burn, deer ticks etc)). Can you ask those who want to become WT volunteers if they have 1st Aid please and if not would anyone like to do a course? We normally recommend that a number of people do it, so it takes the responsibility can be shared. Amanda can pay for courses or even organise one if needs be.

In terms of the wood itself:

You have a copy of the ecological report – as we expected it didn't come up with anything new – and indeed interpreting it, suggests we should have done further thinning some time ago.

We have employed a contractor to do the thinning work this winter. They will NOT be doing any work on the scheduled ancient monuments. While they will be covering the rest of the wood, they will be 'releasing' some of the veteran and mature trees and taking out some trees around the wet flush / pond areas.

The wood is on acidic soils, bilberry and heather have been recorded, it is possible that we could get a nice flora developing as well as some acidic woodland. (I cleared 6ha of 100 yr old rhododendron off a site on the Blackdown Hills a couple of years ago and we now have acidic woodland / heathland developing). One of the issues with thinning beech woods is the first thing that comes back is beech, which then shades out everything else. Would the group be interesting in doing work parties in the future to control the beech regen as it comes up? This would heighten the chances of a more diverse understorey and ground flora developing and remaining.

The roadside ash is still on track to be dealt with as well.

Timings are still fluid as the contractors are balancing working on a number of sites for us, which include relevant permissions and time constraints and weather constraints but I will let you know timings as soon as I know."

Following a request for more information Matt received a second email from Paul as follows;-

"Thanks for being willing to put yourself forward for 1st aid training if other can do it as well then even better.

In terms of the thinning work there won't be a detailed plan. We will go in and mark off the monuments, badger setts, veteran trees and other key bits of archaeology with hazard tape . I will up mark some individual trees that we want coming out and after that it is up to the contractors, based on a 1 in 4 thin and the timber volumes. It's all standard forestry practice.

'Releasing' veterans...sorry falling into technical jargon, sometimes referred to as 'halo thinning' as well. Many veteran trees grew in a more open landscape (you can tell by the broader shape of them compared with the more upright growth and narrow crown of woodland trees). Releasing is taking out those trees that are either growing up over them, or into them, or simply blocking light from them"

Matt noted to members that the works to be undertaken are still awaiting dates for contractors and that the thinning will be of 1 in 4 trees, rather than 1 in 5. It is proposed that Matt contacts Paul to ask whether members can attend the Woods with the contractors/Paul to assist in marking out the scheduled monuments together with some archaeology which is not apparent on the map.

Fran expressed a wish that some of the beech will be retained to maintain the beauty of the Woods.

All members expressed some concern over the use of machinery to extract the timber, not least in view of the recent very, very wet weather which will impact on the conditions in the Wood. Matt will raise this with Paul when they next speak.

Peter questioned whether a charcoal burner could be brought onto site during the thinning.

Eco-Survey – Matt is to ask Paul whether the survey can be published on the Society website but anyone who wishes for a copy should contact Matt direct. The survey appears to show the loss of several species within the Woods but it was felt that this may be incorrect. Fran is going to go to the Woods to try and identify the species which members think are still present.

7. AOB

- Archaeology Update - Matt reminded members about his ongoing research into the possibility of one of the Bronze Age razors discovered by John Skinner (one at Beacon Woods and one at Priddy) being mis-identified at the British Museum. Unfortunately, this is not the case but it appears that there may now be THREE razors – the difficulty is that the Beacon Woods razor cannot be formally identified between the other two and remains “lost”. Also, items from a dig undertaken by Skinner at Cranmore were reputedly handed to the Vicar of Doultong but for the time being, it has not been possible to identify what was given nor where it may be now. This is another avenue of investigation for Matt, together with chasing up Taunton Museum about Bronze Age pottery discovered locally and further research into the 1960’s Shepton Mallet Museum draft catalogue and the 2001 Shepton Mallet Museum catalogue which Mary provided for research. Christine proposed a big THANK YOU to Matt for his ongoing work.
- Matt raised the opinion that the Society needs more committee members but that this may be achievable with a less formal structure of the Constitution.

Next Meeting – 8th January 2020 at 7.00pm at SESC, Moons Hill Quarry Stoke St Michael
Meeting ended 20.36pm

For information

CANCELLED – Fungus Foray of 20th October