

Inaugural Meeting of 'The Maybush Copse Friends'
on 27th July 2009 at St Wilfrid's Church Hall, Nutbourne

The Minutes

Stephen Johnson opened the meeting, noting apologies from County Councillor Mark Dunn who also extended his thanks to the Maybush Copse supporters, and welcoming James Davis from Chichester Harbour Trust and Nicky Horter from Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

The process of purchasing the site had taken over a year, and had been fraught with uncertainty, but success had finally been achieved with substantial contributions from the Chichester Harbour Trust and the Chichester Harbour Conservancy. There had also been good support from Southbourne and Chidham & Hambrook Parish Councils, and an important bridging loan from West Sussex County Council.

James Davis paid tribute to local residents whose enthusiasm and willingness to pledge money to the project had been the foundation of the success, which would protect the site 'in perpetuity', be an important step in protecting the general harbour environment and provide the community with a wonderful natural space to enjoy.

Nicky Horter said that the Conservancy would lease the land from the Trust, and while the Conservancy had limited resources it would advise the residents management group on the landscaping and planting of the site and the development of the site management plan. Exactly what action would be required to improve the site, for example dealing with the contamination and tree surgery issues to make access open to the general community was not yet clear, so the site would remain closed for the time being. A reptile survey would be carried out at an early opportunity.

Stephen Johnson said that the formation of a residents' group to manage the site was essential, and provisionally a committee of 'Maybush Copse Friends' had been established. The Friends needed to be seen as an 'enduring' group which would work with the support of the Parish Councils, the Trust and the Conservancy. It would produce and maintain a five year management plan for the site, implement the plan, manage the site on a day to day basis, and raise the funds necessary to do all this in accordance with the tabled constitution.

Formation of 'The Maybush Copse Friends'. Stephen Johnson asked the meeting to endorse the formation of the 'The Maybush Copse Friends'. On a show of hands the meeting unanimously agreed with the proposal.

Approval of the Constitution. The meeting was asked to approve the Constitution (appended to these minutes). On a show of hands the meeting unanimously agreed with the proposal.

Approval of the Membership Fee The meeting was asked to approve a voluntary £5 membership fee. It was suggested that this could be treated as a minimum figure. On a show of hands the meeting unanimously agreed with the proposal.

Committee: A provisional committee of Stephen Johnson (Chairman), Diana Beale, Peter Hilton (Treasurer), Philip MacDougall (representing Southbourne Parish Council), Steve Clark (representing Chidham and Hambrook Parish Council) James Davis representing the Trust, and Nicky Horter representing the Conservancy had been set up. The meeting was asked to elect the committee 'en bloc'. On a show of hands the meeting elected the committee unanimously. It was agreed that the committee could co-opt additional members as necessary.

Setting up a bank account : It was proposed that the committee should set up a bank account to handle the 'Friends' money. On a show of hands the meeting unanimously agreed with the proposal.

Annual General Meeting The first Annual General Meeting of the 'Friends' would be in March 2010.

This concluded the main business of the meeting. After an Open Forum session, the meeting was closed.

Attendance at the meeting was estimated at more than sixty.

Comments from the Open Forum

Contamination, site hazards and planning permission It was asked if it was safe to walk on the site or whether planning permission would be required for public access. James Davis said that the site survey had shown relatively high levels of Arsenic and Lead are present in places, and that there was a certain amount of glass close to the surface. Putting this in perspective, it was thought that the Arsenic and Lead originated from ash dumped on the site and that this was largely below the surface level. We would need to take advice from the local authority on the question of planning permission and the steps necessary to effect remediation. Stephen Johnson, commenting on the question of site safety, said that while broken glass represented a hazard, in his personal opinion the risk of stepping in one of the numerous rabbit holes and turning an ankle was probably a more significant hazard than the site contamination.

Cost of clearance and landscaping. It was asked if there was an estimate for the cost of developing the site. We do not yet know what we will need to do to transform and improve the site so that the cost could not yet be estimated. This was a major task for the committee, but the cost was very likely to be more than £10,000, and perhaps considerably so. Having said that, the committee were optimistic that grants would be available to cover some of this cost, and some of the work could be done by volunteers. Since the work done at this stage would be the long term foundation for the future of the site, it was important to get it right.

How soon would work start? Although major works would depend on the overall management plan for the site, it was hoped that work such as rubbish clearance, vegetation cutting and making the trees safe could start almost straight away.

Allotments: It was asked if there could be allotments on the site. It was explained that the soil was not suitable, and that the intention was to maintain the land as an open natural space, which would be at odds with setting up allotments. However this was a hot topic with Parish Councils who would no doubt be looking to find alternative sites.

Dogs' mess It was asked what would be done to prevent the nuisance of dogs' mess. The site would (in due course) be open for people to walk their dogs. It was agreed that while the majority of Dog owners were responsible, there was a problem with a minority, particularly those who placed the mess in plastic bags and then hid the bags in hedges. However this was an issue that needed to be tackled by the community as a whole and was something that the Parish Councils were addressing.

Ball Games It was asked if ball games would be allowed on the site. It was intended that this would be an area where informal ball games could be played but there were no plans at this stage for a formal sports pitch on the site.

Wild Life It was agreed that it was important to maintain the balance between the recreational needs of the community, and the wild life of the area. It was said that Deer used the site, and Buzzards had had a nest on the site. Nicky Horter planned a reptile survey in the near future.

Charitable Status It was asked if the Friends would seek charitable status. James Davis said that seeking and maintaining charitable status was time consuming and demanded a high level of administrative effort. The benefit was beneficial tax treatment and in particular the ability to claim gift aid. Currently organisations with income of less than £10,000 pa were precluded from seeking charitable status.

Parking and Security It was asked what parking arrangements would be planned for the site. It was agreed that several issues had to be considered. Cot Lane was not wide, and roadside parking might well prove a nuisance to residents and a hazard particularly to agricultural traffic. However it was not desirable to have a large car park on the site. It was also important to maintain reasonable security on the site so that it was not open to illegal occupation. The committee would look into the options.

Keeping the community informed and feedback It was agreed that it would be very important to keep the community informed about the actions of the committee, but also to receive feedback and ideas from the residents. The website, email, and newsletters would be used, and there could be further public meetings.

Helping the Friends Stephen Johnson said that improving the site and carrying out all the work that would be necessary would cost money, and that at present the 'Friends' did not have any funds. However he hoped that by signing up the membership this would start the fundraising, and that we would all be able to enjoy fundraising / social events. Many people had offered help to the Friends for work parties, with some significant offers of help from people with equipment and special skills. Administrative and organisational help would also be needed on the committee, for example in signing up members, organising social and fundraising activities, and making grant applications. In particular, the committee would need a secretary to take the formal minutes of the executive committee's meetings, and Stephen Johnson asked people to let him know if they would like to help.