

MINUTES OF SURREY HILLS SOCIETY

Fourth Annual General Meeting

7 pm on Saturday 20 October 2012 at Bocketts Farm, Young Street, Leatherhead, KT22

DRAFT MINUTES – for confirmation at the 2013 AGM

1. **Welcome.** The President, Neil Maltby, welcomed members and thanked them for their continuing support. It was very rewarding to see the Society expanding and he thanked the Trustees and Management Committee for all their commitment and hard work.
2. **Apologies for Absence** – apologies had been received from 38 members.
3. **Minutes of the AGM held on 29 October 2011** – The Minutes were agreed by all at the meeting as a true record, signed by the Chairman and filed.
4. **Chairman's Report** – a copy of the full text of the Chairman's Report is attached. The Society goes from strength to strength and is a growing influence in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The increase in membership numbers is particularly rewarding in these challenging financial times. The Chairman closed by thanking the President, all her fellow Trustees and the volunteers, without whom the Society could not flourish.
5. **Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012** – Copies of the accounts had been published on the website and Jo Tollow (Finance Director) highlighted key information in the Report. There had been an increase in membership income to £6,608, represented by 509 memberships. The Trustees recognise that the key to the Society's success is in raising the profile and increasing membership and this will continue to be a key focus in 2013. The figures reflected the reduced availability of grant funding but, despite this, the Society had finished the year with a secure financial position and a year-end cash balance of £14,530. There were no questions.
6. **To confirm the appointment of Margaret Brett, a Partner of Bullimores Accountants as the independent financial examiner for 2012/13 and to authorise Trustees to fix remuneration.** The Chairman expressed thanks and appreciation to Margaret Brett of Bullimores for examining the accounts for the year to March 2012. The meeting unanimously agreed that Margaret Brett should be appointed independent financial examiner for the year to March 2013; she had again waived remuneration.
7. **To appoint and reappoint Trustees of the Society** (there should be no fewer than 5 nor more than 12). Graham Butler and Richard Pitts had served as Trustees since the inauguration of the Society and decided not to offer themselves for appointment for a further year; Graham Butler was not able to attend the AGM but will continue as Chair of the Events subcommittee. The Chairman thanked them for their outstanding contribution and a presentation was made to Richard Pitts. Richard said he had very much enjoyed his time as Membership Secretary and looked forward to supporting the Society in the future in a different capacity. The Chairman welcomed Stella Cantor, who had agreed to take over as Membership Secretary.

Those who had expressed a willingness to be appointed, reappointed or continue as Trustees were introduced to the meeting or their apologies for absence noted. By agreement, there was a single vote covering all Trustees and the following appointments were agreed nem con.

Paul Bettinson and Rob Tong were appointed.

Ken Bare and Nigel Davenport were reappointed.

Diane Cooper, Terry Driscoll, Christine Howard and Jo Tollow were willing to continue as Trustees.

8. **Any other business** – Doug Sudbury asked what proportion of SHS members lived in Surrey. The retiring Membership Secretary, Richard Pitts, advised that 95% of the membership live in Surrey. Martin Cantor asked if the website was monitored for "hits" and if there was any activity on Facebook or Twitter. The Chairman was able to confirm that machinery was in place to review the use of the website; there was an awareness of the need to engage with social media to reach the younger generation but involvement was limited by time available from volunteers. The position had ongoing consideration and it was hoped to be able to introduce an online payment facility such as PayPal within the foreseeable future.

The meeting closed with thanks to Becky Gowing and the Bocketts Farm staff for hosting the meeting and the Harvest Supper and to Mervyn Mewis and Kathryn for entertaining the membership with their "Out of Our Woods" musical presentation.

Surrey Hills Society Chairman's report for AGM- October 2012.

Firstly, thank you all so much for being here today to support the Surrey Hills Society and celebrate another successful year of this charity. We are now in our fourth year and still growing despite the deepest recession since the war. Not many charities can currently say that.

Strictly speaking my report should cover from the 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012, but I have included in my report the period between our AGM's, that is from last October to now.

The first thing I must do is thank my Management Team - all unpaid volunteers who spend hours and hours working on behalf of our Society. I have the most brilliant Finance Team consisting of Jo Tollow, (Chairman of Finance Committee), Paul Bettinson who has been working really hard this year on reviewing all our corporate governance issues and keeping us legal and last but probably most importantly, Terry Driscoll, our Treasurer, who works week in week out to make our books balance and make sure all our invoices are paid. Thank you all so much.

Now to my PR Committee, ably Chaired by Diane Cooper, who is incredibly useful because not only does she produce a beautiful newsletter with the team but her day job is working with Surrey County Council in the Countryside team and provides a really useful link for us to the County Council. The team also consists of Ken Bare, myself, and I am delighted to say several new members who have just joined us.

Ken Bare, I think deserves a slot all on his own because I know I only survive in this job because of all the fantastic support I get from Ken. He is the best project manager I have ever had and no matter what problem I throw at him he manages to solve it. He is one of the big drivers behind the successful Wood Fuel Fair held in Bramley this month (now in its third year). He also organises the promotional events for each year including organising where the trailer will be throughout the summer nearly every weekend and these days we sometimes do two or three events on the same day, using the trailer, the tent and our display boards. Then during the winter months he spends his time giving talks on the Society to various other groups across the County bringing in valuable funds and attracting new members throughout the year. Ken, I cannot thank you enough for all you do for the Society.

I want to thank his team of volunteers who assist him throughout the year but there are too many to mention here but I will just say a big thank you to Peter Hattersley who has been a constant and generous volunteer since the formation of the Society.

I also want to thank Nigel Davenport, who was one of the founder Board members with me and as CE of Surrey Wildlife Trust has given invaluable advice and support to our Board. I rely on him heavily for his experience and for his support this year with the development of our members' pack which I will talk about later.

We also have a really strong events programme now thanks to the efforts of our Events Committee. Ably led by Graham Butler, who could not be here tonight, the programme has grown and grown and is so varied and interesting I can't actually manage to get to everything I want to these days, often because they are fully booked before I get my act together!

Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped to develop this programme and to the Parish Councils who have all done a wonderful job developing our "Day in the Country" events. It is so interesting to get behind the scenes of each little village and parish and hear, in often minute details, the interesting historical events that have happen there or the interesting solutions villagers have come up with to solve various issues. I always come away having learnt something new or with a new inspiration for my own village. I wanted also to thank Mark and Virginia Turner who have joined the Events Committee this year. I hope you are enjoying yourselves.

I also want to thank my partner Jeff Holliday. He is a fantastic supporter of the Society and accompanies me to all the events, volunteers for lots of different jobs as well as drives me around the county to all the various meetings I have to attend. I am truly grateful for your support.

June Robinson, our co-ordinator is one of the driving forces behind the success of the programme and the Society as a whole and we are all extremely grateful to her. Thank you June for another fantastic year. We are truly grateful. She is also a pleasure to work with. That goes too for Stella Cantor, who has become one of the stalwarts of the Society and another “rock” I rely on, on a regular basis. She has recently agreed to take on the onerous task of running our membership team at the office at Warren Farm Barns for which I am incredibly grateful. Thank you Stella (and behind the scenes, husband Martin)

The reason, Stella is taking on this role is because we are very sadly losing Richard Pitts who has run the membership database since the Society was first set up. I know the Society would not be the success it is today without the massive input and support of this man and we are all enormously grateful to you for all you have done. Can I take this opportunity to give you this engraved glass as a small token of our appreciation. Richard is standing down from the Board and taking a break for a while but I hope we will see him back with us soon. I would also like to mention his volunteer team in the office Rosie Challis and Lucy Whitrow. Thank you both for all your support.

Now, Graham Butler has also decided to step down from the Board but I am pleased to say will still be Chairman of our Events Committee. His links to the Ramblers Association and as Chairman of the Countryside Access Forum here in Surrey give us invaluable knowledge.

One other valuable member of the team I have not yet mentioned is Rob Tong, who along with juggling his own IT business and a new baby has found time to support the Society through his expertise on our website. As some of you will have noticed The AONB, as a whole has a new website. I want to thank Rob as well as all the other volunteers who helped develop the new site, which as we know is never easy!

One of the reasons for changing the site, apart from keeping up with technology, was that the AONB as a whole is changing. Partly due to the pressure on finances, as central government reduces funding to AONBs across the country, the Surrey Hills AONB must look to more creative ways to fund the protection and management of this protected landscape in the future. It was with this in mind that the voluntary Society was formed three years ago and why this year we have been working with Rob Fairbanks and the local authority Board to create a “not for profit” company called “Surrey Hills Enterprises”. The idea is to commercialise the now very recognisable Surrey Hills logo. Neither the charitable arm nor the local authority arm could legally trade as a commercial body, hence the creation of this new company. It is registered with Companies House and operates as a normal company but the Directors are not paid and all profits are used for charitable purposes, in our case the protection and enhancement of the Surrey Hills AONB. I know this can seem all very confusing and one of our members Peter Hattersley, helpfully suggested I bring a diagram of the current Surrey Hills AONB “Family”, which is on the table for you to look at. Do come and see me afterwards if you would like further clarification. The new website also clearly explains what each branch is focusing on.

The Surrey Hills Enterprises will be working with commercial companies who wish to be associated with the Surrey Hills and in particular our food producers like Tillingbourne Brewery, Norbury Blue Cheese, Mayfield Lavender and so on. There are also going to be more opportunities for corporate sponsorship of the Society as companies look for local rewarding ways they can support their local community and our charitable arm of the AONB is a perfect vehicle for them for the CSR obligations. Our biggest sponsor to date has been May Gurney, the SCC roads contractor. They have very generously agreed to pay for the production of our newsletter, they pay for the designing of the news letter and they have loaned their PR manager to our PR team for which we are very grateful.

I am also very proud to launch our new membership packs here today. Jo Tallow led the team who applied for EU LEADER funding to create these wonderful packs to help promote and grow our Society. We have encouraged members in the past to buy membership as a gift for friends and family but a sheet of paper is not a very inspiring gift. The membership packs are not only attractive but also offer fantastic value for money as not only do you receive your membership, but also all the goodies contained within, including a lavender bag from Mayfield Lavender, a set of notelets, a postcard of the AONB and other special offers. We have also negotiated it to be available for sale at the Tourist Office in Guildford and we have plans to expand to other places as well. They are also available for you to buy tonight for all those friends and relatives who are difficult to buy for. Our individual membership now stands at over 716 and growing.

Between the beginning of the show season this year (7th May) and the end of October (final event is day after AGM) we will have had the trailer/gazebo display boards at 16 events covering 21 days. We have held at least one event every month throughout the year and produced our regular newsletter to all our members.

We have also run a successful photographic competition, built a shelter for our trailer at Norbury Park with the help of RHW solicitors and Surrey Wildlife Trust and passed on information to Clive Smith, the Planning officer at the AONB office who puts together the Planning objections on behalf of the Surrey Hills AONB. This year that has included the controversial Cherkley Court application for a golf course and the potential gas extraction on Leith Hill. I have heard some people saying we do not “do enough to protect the Surrey Hills” well I think we do an invaluable job working with all the organisations working within the Surrey Hills and the area would be the poorer without us. I am also proud to announce our first practical volunteering day next Saturday, working with the National Trust rangers at Headley Down. If you fancy getting your hands dirty next Saturday please come and see me afterwards.

Thank you also to Becky and the team here at Bocketts Farm for hosting us here tonight. And, thank you to Mervyn Mewis and Kathryn Young for providing the musical entertainment for the evening. We will be seeing Mervyn and Kathryn again next March when they will be giving a talk on the conservation of Surrey’s trees and what craftsmen can do with the wood plus a musical performance. This brings me to the Trustees Report and Financial Statement. For the period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012 which I present to you tonight.

Can I thank again Bullimores of Dorking for their support and particularly Margaret Brett, for acting as our external examiner.

Can I also thank the National Trust for their support including the use of their building at Warren Farm Barns.

Finally, can I give a big thank you to our President, Neil Maltby, who is with us today. It is reassuring to have an experienced pair of hands in the wings for me to use as a confidential sounding board and also another enthusiastic supporter. I am particularly grateful to Neil for organising the most amazing “President’s Day” at Epsom Race Course in September. It was a fascinating ‘behind the scenes’ look at racing at this interesting site on the famous Surrey Chalk Downs. Thank you Neil.

Thank you all again for being such fantastic supporters of the Surrey Hills Society and I look forward to seeing you at one of the events over the coming year and also encourage you to come and join one of our committees and get more involved in the running of this organisation.

Chris Howard
Chairman SHS- 20 October 2012.