

**MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the FRIENDS OF ASTON'S
EYOT held on Thursday 18th November at the Gladiators Club, Iffley Road, Oxford.**

Present: The Committee: Anthony Cheke, (co-chair and meeting chair) Ruth Ashcroft (co-chair), Laurence Burrell (treasurer), Claire Malone-Lee (membership secretary), Adam Gibbon, Charlotte (Charlie) Ellis, Susie Jakobsson Thomas, Rosemary Cameron (minutes) together with 16 others of whom a list has been retained.

Chairman's welcome to the meeting.

1. Apologies, minutes and matters arising

Apologies were received from Thelma Martin and Hugh Wybrew.

The minutes of the previous AGM having been circulated, there were no matters arising from them which did not appear on the agenda.

Acceptance of minutes was proposed by Anthony Cheke, seconded by Laurence Burrell and accepted nem con.

2. Annual Report:

Ruth Ashcroft presented the 11th Annual report, of which a copy is retained. Key points:

- Although the Covid-19 pandemic meant that events and work parties had to be cancelled, most things got done.
- Public access: in spring there were issues with parties, fires and vandalism, but this eased off when venues started to open. It's important to stress that the Eyot is a nature reserve, not a party zone.
- Membership has increased.
- Committee: Ash Stally-Chudasama and Charlie Ellis were introduced; both had been co-opted during the year.
- Media: Ash is updating the website; Charlie has reinstated the newsletters; Charlie and Susie Jakobsson Thomas have kept FaceBook updated with photos and events.
- Volunteering: a very successful year for this, with work parties reinstated after lockdown, together with visits by Oxford Conservation Volunteers, Good Gym, Elsevier workplace and Duke of Edinburgh students.
- Conservation: plantation trees have been mapped and planning for the future is in hand. Ash dieback is present and is being monitored. Some elms which 'died' reappeared as shrubs. Ruth asked everyone present to let us know if a tree becomes dangerous.
- Water pollution: Thames Water are at last taking steps to improve this.
- The Kidneys: a plan of renovations and improvements including re-gravelling some paths was agreed with the City Council but has mostly not been possible yet.
- FoAE is planning to improve the muddier parts of the cinder track on the Eyot with gravel later this month.

Wildlife Report:

Anthony Cheke presented this:

- 11 badgers were vaccinated by the Oxfordshire Badger group under licence.
- There appear to be two white badgers this year
- There are 64 active badger holes, down from last year but this doesn't necessarily reflect the number of badgers
- A maximum of 8 roe deer were seen together; the number of muntjac is unknown as though up to 4 were seen together they are more solitary than Roe.
- An otter was filmed in "houseboat creek" on the Kidneys (and the film later shown); there were various sightings of weasels and an unconfirmed water vole sighting; foxes, squirrels, mice, rats and a rabbit were revealed on camera. Frog numbers and butterflies are down.

- Bird sightings include nuthatches, a marsh tit and nesting coal tits. Anthony thanked Bob Pomfret for his bi-monthly reports of bird sightings.

Plant Report:

Claire Malone-Lee presented this.

- Lockdown increased footfall substantially and this affected plants by the path edges.
- In addition, plant diversity has been lost to deer browsing, although there are several species which they don't eat.
- The deer enclosures have been effective in protecting both trees and flowers.
- Claire thanked the wildflower champions for their help in keeping the nettles at bay.

3. Treasurer's report, subscriptions:

Laurence Burrell presented this.

- Subs have been kept at a minimum payment of £5 (some people add more)
- There has been a big increase in income this year, but it's important to keep money in reserve for potential ash dieback expenditure.
- Two bills were not received in time for this year's accounts: Oxford Conservation Volunteers and the tree surgeon's fee for one day.
- The report was accepted by a show of hands of all present.

4. Election of committee and trustees:

Half the trustees must stand down each year. The remaining trustees were Anthony Cheke, Adam Gibbon and Thelma Martin. The retiring trustees, Ruth Ashcroft, Laurie Burrell and Susie Jakobsson-Thomas, all stood for re-election. The two recently co-opted committee members Ashok Stally-Chudasama and Charlotte Ellis, also stood for election as trustees. Rosemary Cameron stood for re-election as a non-trustee committee member. These candidates were proposed to be elected by Jackie Ingram, seconded by Janet McCrae, and agreed by all.

Claire Malone-Lee has stood down as she will be leaving Oxford in the next year, and Ruth and all present thanked her for all her work.

5. AOB and further discussion:

Laurie and Anthony answered questions about ash trees:

- The wood could be sold, but the value is less than the cost of cutting the tree down;
- Dead wood can be left in place; it only needs removing if it's a hazard, eg close to a path;
- If a lot of trees become affected in the plantation some will have to be removed to leave space for new planting;
- Most ash trees in the plantation are not good specimens; they don't have enough space and are long and spindly. A third have already been taken out over the last 10 years;
- We plan to remove a few spindly ash trees around them smaller oak and alder trees in the plantation to help their growth.

Gift Aid was discussed

- Ruth said we should claim Gift Aid on subscriptions, backdated two years to when FoAE became a charity, and asked if anyone with expertise could get in touch;
- Just Giving was suggested, but as they take a percentage it was agreed it is better to do it direct;
- Ash will put a link on the website;
- Forms were also circulated for people to complete manually.

Finally, negotiations with Christ Church over the lease are continuing.

6. Close of formal meeting:

Following the proposal of a vote of thanks to the committee by Jackie Ingram, the formal part of the meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

7. Video clips from the trail cameras:

Wildlife footage was shown (with thanks to Sarah McFadden) from the camera on the Eyot, together with footage of an otter taken from a local boat.