

34th Annual General Meeting Minutes from Saturday 7th November 2020 Zoom (Covid-19 government restrictions)

Attendance: 42 members
21 proxy votes received

The Chair, Mike Mintram, welcomed members to the first online AGM, then introduced Mike Coe (CEO), Martyn Smith (Finance Trustee); also, Andrew Smith (Arboretum Director) and Roger Busby (Vice President)

1. Minutes of the 33rd Annual General Meeting (2019)

Christine Burt proposed that the minutes be adopted, seconded by Martyn Smith. The meeting voted via a virtual pole with 33 for, zero against and the minutes were approved by the Chair.

2. Matters Arising from the above Minutes

None

3. 2019 Review of the Charity and Future Plans (Mike Mintram)

It seems strange to be talking about achievements of 2019 so late in 2020. Clearly, the impact of COVID-19 has been significant. We remain confident that FOWA and Westonbirt will survive these challenging times and continue to provide a wonderful space to enjoy, learn or recuperate.

2019 achievements include:

- Supporting Forestry England with the once-in-a generation purchase of neighbouring Silkwood House, growing Westonbirt for the first time in 200 years.
- The opening of Westonbirt Woodworks, which uses felled timber from the site, further improving the way we engage and educate visitors in the full lifecycle of trees.
- Development of a new 10 year vision, launched in December 2019 "Our place in a changing world - for the arboretum to become a world leader in trees, inspiring people through conservation, education and participation". The detailed master-planning process is underway.

The Charity's work would not be possible without the significant support it receives from several different sources. Members continue to be our biggest source of income through subscriptions, donations, appeals and fundraising events. Members have played a vital role in the Charity since it was established in 1985 and continue to be pivotal in enabling the Charity to support the arboretum and secure its sustainable future for generations to come. We are incredibly grateful for your continual loyalty and support.

Thanks to the FOWA staff team who, despite several challenges, have continued to provide a great service and grow revenues.

Dear friends lost this year include Mike Westgate, former trustee and significant figure in our development; Peter Gregory, former arboretum Superintendent and leading expert in maples; and Peregrine Pollen, a leading light in the development of the Friends. They will long be remembered for their outstanding contributions to FOWA and to Westonbirt.

Welcome to new trustees, Veronica Morris (experienced in conservation, environment and heritage) and John Parker (arboriculture expert).

5. 2019 Reports and Accounts

Finance Report – Headline Summary (Martyn Smith)

- FOWA's position is sound
- Bishop Fleming (our auditors) gave the accounts a clean audit report
- 2019 income = £1,433k; expenditure = £2,024k (includes £750k grant for Silkwood House);
Net expenditure = £591k
2019 unrestricted funds = £831k; restricted funds = £44k; total Charity funds = £875k
£1,344k total cash (upfront subscription income)

We intend to use our grants for future projects – it will not stay in the bank.

Almost 90% of income is from membership subscriptions, which was 3% up from 2018. Donation and legacy income was up 60% from 2018, although amounts to only 12% of income overall.

About three-quarters of our expenditure went to the arboretum for grants and access payments and the purchase of Silkwood House. Other grants increased by 50%. Support costs were higher due mainly to a full year of CEO costs and the purchase of Raisers Edge Customer Management System (the previous one became unsupported) and we expect members to reap the benefits of this.

4. Election of auditors of Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum accounts -

Martyn Smith proposed that Bishop Fleming continue as our auditors, seconded by Mike Howarth. The meeting voted via a virtual pole with 35 for and zero against, approved by the Chair.

5. Election to the Board

New trustees elected to the FOWA September Board in accordance with the Articles of Association

7. Invite Continuation in Office

President – Christopher Brickell CBE

Vice President – Roger Busby CBE

8. 2019 Review of the Arboretum (Mike Coe)

Thanks to everyone for attending on a Saturday despite an overlap with the National Trust AGM.

At the end of 2019, we had 33,752 members (20,876 memberships) – a further growth of 5%. This is a wonderful achievement. 68% (c307,000) of all visits to the arboretum were by members. The 82.8% retention rate is a result of great value for money and visitor experience that we offer.

Your support and donations contributed to many projects in 2019:

- Silkwood House and future master-planning development
- Mobility Scooters, allowing access for all
- Timber trailer
- Westonbirt Woodworks
- Interpretation signage and maps

and funding commitments to:

- Quarantine House (biosecure space for propagation)
- Community Shelter
- Coppice Shelter
- Westonbirt Arboretum Shop

People - Hannah Litherland joined us for a year as Fundraiser, succeeded temporarily by Sarah Malina. Chloe Vincent joined the Membership Team. Alistair Williams was brought in as Retail Manager for the gift shop, with all staff moving over from Tidings. We appointed Emma Frost as Finance Manager. Jane Shute was recognised for forming one Supporter Team and her management of it.

The Vision - An information video was shown to highlight the key themes to protect our trees for the future, share knowledge to create change and to connect people with nature. You are encouraged to keep in touch, read the newsletters and support us financially through fundraising activities (Support A Square, Leaves of Life).

COVID-19 - Our membership numbers have recovered incredibly well following the closure. We started the year with just under 34k members. There was a significant decline during spring lockdown, but July to October saw the fastest growth ever and by the end of October, we were pushing towards 35k members. Thank you to our partners in Forestry England for making the site secure and to all of you for your support and retention of your membership donations; this really is important to sustain us over the next ten years. The arboretum will remain open during the next lockdown and again, thank you to Andrew Smith for managing social-distancing on site.

Q&A (Mike Coe)

"Why could I not get a refund or extension on my membership?"

Under charity law, we are unable to refund a donation as that was made for our objectives of conservation, education and participation and entry to the arboretum is one of the benefits of it. An extension would involve reissuing 33k cards, the cost of which would be almost £100k. Secondly, it would mean that Gift Aid could not be claimed because your membership would change from being a donation to being arboretum entry and we would lose around £150k. Thirdly, conceptually as shareholders, it would be unusual in a time of crisis to take rather than give support to the charity. It was a tough decision to make, but what we did do is cancel the planned price increase. The "lost" money on your membership during closure equates to around £7 and this supported ongoing site work.

"Why did we take on the shop and how is the shop doing?"

The trustees signed off for the charity to take over running the shop in December [2019] when the previous tenants decided to retire after turning it into a profitable enterprise. With due diligence, we looked at the stock (c£50) and the books suggested £50-60k pure profit in a standard year. We could then control the product in the shop, bringing in more branded items with the messaging of conservation, participation and education. Obviously, retail took a big hit during the COVID-19 lockdown, but there were government grants and wages support to tide us over. In the given climate, we are still forecasting a breakeven position. The business runs as a Limited Company, the profits of which are donated to the Charity just before the end of the year. We are looking to grow these revenues in line with predictions next year.

A Centenary Year (Andrew Smith)

The wider Forestry Commission's "100 years of Forestry" celebrations took place all over Great Britain and we were honoured to have Acer Glade feature on one of the two First Class Royal Mail stamps issued.

The boundaries of the Silkwood House estate were presented on an aerial photograph. This was a once-in-a-century opportunity within a narrow purchase window, being one of only five neighbouring landowners (one being the Beaufort Polo Club). Subsequent events [COVID-19] may have impacted the confidence to make the £750k investment from either party, so we were very fortunate. The funds allocated to establish the works had to be suspended. However, we were successful in a £195k Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage Grant (DCMS). We are in the fortunate position to be able to use it to take forward positive work rather than lost income. Decisions made now (especially in light of revised thoughts due to COVID-19) will affect the arboretum for the next 100 years (it took Robert Holford 20 years after his purchase of Silk Wood in 1840 to do anything arboretum-related!). We need to formulate a thorough, staged 10-year action plan - background research for our needs and desires will involve members, staff and volunteers. The vision will include a funding review, visitor analysis, sustainability and a heritage management plan. Unsafe ash trees were removed in August from the highway boundary and bridal path; operations were

made more efficient with the new trailer. The Cyprus hedge around the coach park will be removed and the use of space will be part of the master-planning.

In review, highlights of 2019 include Big Forest Find (using iNaturalist), Westonbirt 10k, "The Arborists" poem by a writer in residence, Westonbirt Woodworks and sawmill, Enchanted Christmas and Chalara ash dieback interpretation on the seasonal trail in Silk Wood. The Woodland Management Plan on how to deal with felling of 10-15 acres has been approved.

Volunteers

Recognition includes: Investing in Volunteers award retained; 99.5% of participants enjoyed guided walks; 3,610 butterflies and bees recorded; 3,142 photos taken; 787 trees labelled; 1,662 scooters issued; 2,843 shuttle users; 12,433 participants on family events; 1,037 surveys; 1,000 community participants; 23 talks to 954 people.

Working in partnership FE & FOWA

Thank you for your support with the timber trailer, Silkwood House, a Trampa electric wheelchair, student arborist recruitment and the 10-year vision. Also for supporting us with the Community Shelter, Quarantine House, Westonbirt Restaurant procurement consultant, interpretation signage, an electric car charging point and Coppice Shelter.

Mike Mintram paid tribute to the two retiring trustees: Mike Howarth for his major role in supporting FOWA and the arboretum and wise counsel and Christine Burt for her energy, enthusiasm and professional contribution.

Q&A (Andrew Smith)

"Can we please have a position statement of progress with plans to expand the arboretum in a westerly direction?"

The role of Silkwood House is part of the 10 and 100 year strategies. "The Great Gloucestershire Forest" driven by The Woodland Trust and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust aims to link us up with Lower Woods (north of Yate). We are limited with further expansion plans, although we have connections with our neighbours to ensure coordination in our respective operations.

"What are the costs in maintaining the treetop walkway?"

There have been some design issues with the rope bridge causing its closure, which are being resolved. We pay a few thousand pounds for a structural engineer's report each year and we respond to any recommendations. Costs are manageable within the arboretum operational budget. Inevitably, there will be major works in the future (eg deck boards). The walkway has been designed in a way that any individual element can be replaced without dismantling the whole structure. The Duchess of Cornwall paid a recent visit and was told about the success of its three objectives - ease of access, a year-round attraction and education about the tree canopy.

Mike Coe reminded the Meeting that FOWA marks its 35th anniversary this year, along with the 20 years since the build of the Great Oak Hall. Celebrations had to be cancelled when the Great Oak Hall was forced to shut, and the exhibition will be moved to next year.

9. Closing statement (Mike Mintram)

Hopefully, in today's meeting, we have given you all a very good overview of the achievements of the charity and Westonbirt over 2019. I'd like to think we have painted a very broad picture of some of the challenges that we have faced in 2020 and the fantastic opportunities that the arboretum has now to move forward. Clearly, we have established a fantastic vision, a joint vision for the arboretum; and we are now working on how to we can turn that vision into a practical reality. I'd like to close the meeting by thanking you for your ongoing support for the charity. Thank you very much - stay safe.

Meeting closed

Signed by Chair (as a correct record)	Date Signed 09/12/20.
Issued by L Smith Issued on	

