



**Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds AGM
Tuesday 7 April 2025
MINUTES**

Present:

Committee: David Solomon (Chair), Andrea Powell (Treasurer), Yvonne Solomon (Minute Secretary), Pat Stevenson.

Members: Sue Cooper, David Cooper, Vernon Miners, Tom Stevenson, Mark Powell, Kate Hart, Michael Jay, Sylvia Jay, Keith Tibbs, Margaret Connolly.

Apologies for absence:

Andrew Walker, Trisha Scott, Kirstie Scott, Peter Harden, Alison Barraclough, Fliss Hoad

Minutes of the last AGM held on 30 April 2024 and matters arising from them.

David Cooper pointed out that there was a minor inconsistency between the Management report and the financial report describing the contributions paid to the Green Gym. This will be addressed by Andrea.

Chairs report

From David Solomon

The main item to report was on the social events. The Social evening held in January was deemed very successful for those that attended. However, the number of attendees was disappointingly low. This was in part caused by some people attending Burns night events. The ageing population of the Friends members is possibly also causing a decline in attendance, and it may be that people are more reluctant to come out on a winter's evening. Once again the need to attract younger people was reiterated. Interest in the watercress beds has is being maintained by the participation of green gym organisations, it is the Ewelme contingent that is missing. It was pointed out from the floor, however, that several new volunteers for the mowing rota had been found from the local community. The green gym members were thanked for their unstinting hard work. Some of the green gym members had also bought and installed a new 5 bar gate. David agreed to write and thank them.

Another successful social event was the Dr Anne Day. David extended the thanks of the Friends to Kate Hart who was instrumental in organising this event. A further event was the haymaking day where the Friends provided refreshments.

Treasurer's Report and Accounts and Membership report.

From Andrea Powell

Financial Report to AGM, 07 April 2025

	£	£
Balance at AGM 2024 (30 April 2024)	6,585.29	
Income 01/05/24-07/04/25	1,729.85	
Subscriptions & donations		1,271.00
Event fees and sales		160.10
Raffle and bar at social event		298.75
Expenditure 01/05/24-07/04/25	1,410.13	
Social event costs		97.60
Green Gym expenses		270.00
Maintenance (via Management Team)		924.54
Activity/AGM/work day expenditure		108.99
Bank charges		9.00
Balance at AGM 2025 (07 April 2025)	6,905.01	
Surplus on January 25th social event	966.15	
Funds added to balance since AGM 2024	319.72	
Number of members as at 07/04/2025	103	
Total members as at 31/12/2024	126	

Some notes with respect to the above:

The maintenance item includes hedge cutting, hire of a skip and paint for the picnic table – thanks were extended to Fliss for taking on this task. It also included £100 for tools.

The Friends have agreed to make a contribution (up to £2,500) to the Management team for the purchase of a new mower and a shed to house it. The shed has arrived and the mower has been purchased but not yet delivered. The management team have received a grant from SODC which will cover some of the cost (about half).

Vernon asked about the costs/benefits of operating the solar panels. David Cooper has the figures and explained some of the savings but said he would see if he could produce up to

date figures. The possibility of using the panels in conjunction with a battery was discussed. This is really a management team item and The Friends are not involved. It will be discussed at the Management Team meeting.

Report from the Management Team

From Tom Stevenson and Mark Powell

Tom reported that the beds are looking splendid. The nearly total loss of watercress in some places which occurred 2 winters ago, and the struggle to regenerate are now in the past. This happened in part by using the tested method of cutting the tops in July and replanting them. There are plans to rotate the plantings in the beds so as to allow the flushing of silt build up. There then followed a discussion on the possible causes of siltation from run-off, high water table and wash-out following the burst water main. It was reported that high phosphate levels are found throughout – both temporal and geographical. Both these problems, silt and phosphate are associated as they form an attachment to each other. It was reported that Ceri (Chiltern Chalkstream Project) has offered a phosphate meter to monitor the situation. The discussion also featured the possibility of monitoring and investigating levels in order to alert the Highways Agency and the EA to any changes.

Tom reported the installation of a number of bird boxes and that the management hoped to create a pleasing meander of the flow in the lower watercress beds.

Tom registered his thanks for the support of the Friends for the management of the Watercress beds, and the thanks of the Friends was reciprocated.

The meeting showed their appreciation of Tom receiving an award from the Chiltern Society on behalf of the management team for ‘outstanding volunteer group’ for 2024.

Election of Committee

The committee was re-appointed following a proposal and second from the members. The committee made a plea for more members to join the committee.

Future Events

David reported that the format and content for next Social Event hosted by the Friends had not yet been determined. The members were reminded of previous events. Discussion took place as to the timing of such an event and it was felt that an event held later in the spring when the evenings were lighter would attract more participants. Possible themes included a presentation with animals such as that staged by the Owl Trust which might prove popular.

Vernon Miners suggested the possibility of selling T-shirts and badges as a possible money maker.

The possibility of taking a stall at the Ewelme Horticultural show at the summer bank holiday weekend was suggested and seemed a popular idea. Some of the wild-life photographs could be featured. This could advertise the Watercress Beds to a broader audience and increase the profile. However, Tom and Pat warned that previous attempts some years before had not proved successful.

The Friends agreed to further advertise for volunteers for the autumnal Hay Making event.

Kate was willing to take the Dr Anne Day forward, which has been set for the 21st August. However, she reported that despite very positive noises from a number of parents with young children that had attended last year, nothing concrete had emerged with respect to helping organise this year's event. There was also the problem that parents attending with children had to be responsible for them rather than act as activity leaders. More interaction with parents of local children was need and David said he would ask Fliss to see if she could approach Ewelme school on this account. It was hoped that Joe Ottaway the headmaster would be invited to the annual Parish meeting on 14th May.

The Friends had agreed that the working party scheduled for the 5th of July could be enlarged to include a Friends get-together and include a picnic event.

A Moth Breakfast organised by BANG would be held at the Watercress Centre and the Friends agreed to provide the 'bacon butties'. This could also be on the 5th July although Tom needs to sort out dates with the BaNG committee.

Any other business

The meeting thanked Vernon Miners for the funds gained from his table-top sale which had raised £66.

Date of next meeting

The provisional date of the next AGM was decided to be Monday 13th April 2026 (subsequently changed to Monday 27th April) at 7.30pm.