

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Ilketchall St Andrew and St John Land Management Company Ltd. held via Zoom on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 7 p.m.**

Present: Tim Bacey-Fisher (TB-F) (Chairman)  
John Bedwell (JB) (Secretary)  
Rod Apps (RA)  
Gerald Godfrey (GG)  
Roo Lee (RL)  
Chris Roberts (CR)

There were 5 members of the public

**1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

1.1 The Chairman welcomed the public to the meeting and outlined the evening's format.

**2. Minutes of AGM 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

2.1 The minutes of the AGM of 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

**3. Chairman's Report**

3.1 When reviewing the past year, one inevitably has to recognise the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. When I gave the Chair's Report this time last year, the possibility of a global pandemic, lasting as long as it has, seemed a remote possibility.

The impact of the pandemic on many aspects of life, and on many organisations, has of course been very considerable. The impact on the Commons, and on the work of the Land Management Company, has been much more limited and most aspects have continued as normal. The vast majority of the objectives that were set out in the Management Plan for 2020-2021 have been achieved without disruption.

3.2 Over the past 12 months, the Land Management Company has created the Commons website, which has provided an information base about the Commons which is widely accessed. The LMC has ensured that the website is regularly updated with information regarding planned work, completed work, Reports from (for example) the Pond Survey, as well as a Progress Report on the implementation of the Management Plan.

3.3 A major aspect of the Commons – the annual hay cut – went ahead as usual in 2020, although slightly later than normal. In light of the very dry spring and early summer, the yield was somewhat lower than the average of previous years.

3.4 A trial attempt at improving the quality of the grass on Great Common by harrowing and rolling a test area was undertaken, but this was not a success due to the depth of the thatch being too great. Too much grass was being removed along with the thatch for the treatment to be appropriate.

3.5 Work was undertaken to control the thistle problem in May 2020. The results of this will become more apparent in 2021, but initial indications are that this work has achieved some worthwhile reduction in the thistle infestation.

3.6 The hedge and scrub cutting plan proceeded as outlined in the Management Plan. Fortunately, this work was largely completed before the wet weather arrived in Autumn 2020.

3.7 A survey of the ponds on the Commons was commissioned and undertaken in June 2020. The report is available on the website. In overall terms, the majority of the ponds were found to be in a very good condition, and therefore facilitating a wide range of wildlife. The Report broadly endorsed the various actions that the LMC had been undertaking in relation to the ponds in recent years, which was very encouraging.

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3.8 Some additional benches have been installed at various locations on the Commons, and feedback received has been very supportive of these.

3.9 Other works completed have included the reestablishment of drainage ditches and bunds, clearing of fallen trees, and the cutting of willows and brambles.

3.10 There are two particular areas outlined in the Management Plan that did *not* proceed as was hoped during the past year.

*First*; the intention was to undertake widespread consultation amongst stakeholders regarding the long-term objectives for the Commons. Due to the pandemic and the associated restrictions, face-to-face meetings could not be held, but a questionnaire was circulated to all households in the two villages in order to make a start on this consultation. An analysis of the results from the completed questionnaires is available on the website. Overall, this was a very useful exercise in terms of identifying what residents would like to see as the long-term objectives of the Commons, and will be useful as a base for further consultations in the future.

*Second*; the Management Plan included the intention to clarify the boundaries of all of the Commons in relation to the properties adjoining the Commons. This has been difficult to progress as a consequence of the pandemic restrictions, but it is hoped to move ahead with this programme soon.

3.11 On the funding front, the LMC was invited to apply for continued membership of the HLS/ELS schemes, and after consultation with the Commoners' Association, duly applied. This scheme is scheduled to end in January 2022, and at the current time the provision of future funding schemes that will be accessible by the Commons remains very unclear. What *does* appear very clear, though, is that funding for all agricultural enterprises, including the Commons, will be significantly less in future years. The Commons are in the fortunate position of having accumulated substantial reserves in recent years, which may well prove to be a valuable resource in the future when funding is much more constrained.

3.12 The LMC has made available its intentions in the draft Management Plan for March 2021-February 2022. Some comments and suggestions relating to that draft have been received, and along with contributions from the later part of this meeting, will be reflected in amendments to the draft. We intend to publish the final version of the Management Plan for next year before the end of the month.

3.13 In summary terms, the LMC believes that it has had a successful year. Subject to any amendments to the Management Plan for next year, it intends to continue with its activities next year in much the same way as last year. The LMC *will* have to devote time and effort to the examination and appraisal of whatever funding schemes become available to it, and will endeavour to secure funding that is appropriate to the Commons without undue constraints.

#### 4. Financial Report


4.1. In previous years our financial year went from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March but because the AGM is now held in February, the decision was made to extend the financial year for this year only by 6 months so that the end date is 30<sup>th</sup> September which makes the financial report more up-to-date for the AGM. So, for this year only, the report covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. In subsequent years the period covered will be 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> September.

4.2. The Company started the year beginning 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 with £13,900 in the current a/c and £34,875 on deposit giving total funds of £48,775. During the 18-month period, the Company's income totalled £27,336 whilst expenditure totalled £9,046. The high-income figure was due to our receiving 2 years of the Basic Payment System and Higher Level Stewardship schemes within the 18 month period. Expenditure included cutting walks, haymaking, flailing ditches, hedges and pond frontages, erecting a number of benches around the commons, setting up a website and financing a pond survey. This resulted at the end of the financial year of £21,613 in the current a/c, unpresented cheques £502 and £45,953 on deposit giving total funds of £67,064, an increase in funds over the 18 months of £18,289. The details of income and expenditure are provided in the Accounts which with the agreement of the Board will be made available on the LMC website.

4.3. The Board formally received and approved the accounts.

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## 5. Progress Report March 2020 – February 2021

- 5.1 Bird recordings have been carried out for the last 10 years, but due to a declining number of recorders, it has been decided to end the project. Much valuable data has been obtained and an attempt will be made to make it available in digital form.
- 5.2 The LMC website was launched in April 2020. It provides lots of information about the commons and the LMC together with details of work proposed and completed and has proved its worth.
- 5.3 Permissive paths have been cut five times during the year, gateways have been kept strimmed and ponds fronts have been kept open as recommended in the Pond Survey.
- 5.4 The annual hay cut was undertaken by three contractors and took place between 4<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> July.
- 5.5 Other works carried out included:
  - a) further benches installed around the commons
  - b) salallows removed from ditches
  - c) some security ditches dug out

This concluded the formal business of the AGM.

## 6. Open Discussion of Draft Management Plan (DMP)

- 6.1 There was an open discussion of the DMP.
- 6.2 Adrian Sampson's offer to continue to cut the paths at Beck's Green and flail The Mardie was gratefully accepted.
- 6.3 Sam Brown raised the possibility of a late cut of the common near the Village Hall in order to protect Sneezewort and Devil's-bit scabious growing there. It was agreed to hold a site meeting with stakeholders to discuss the possible options.

There being no other business, the Chairman concluded by thanking all residents who had contributed to the questionnaire saying that the opinions expressed would help when considering future funding choices and he closed the meeting at 19.58 p.m.

J Bedwell  
Secretary  
17<sup>th</sup> February 2021

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Signed

*J. Bedwell*

Date

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