

PONDHEAD CONSERVATION TRUST



AGM

Tuesday 30th March 2021 – 6pm

The Charcoal Kiln, Pondhead Inclosure

Attendees:	Derek Tippetts (DT)	<i>Volunteers Representative (Chair)</i>
	Gary Melton (GM)	<i>Treasurer</i>
	Jenny Pitt (JP)	<i>Secretary</i>
	Dave Dibden (DD)	<i>Woodland Manager</i>
	Ian Barker (IB)	<i>Trustee – NPA Ecologist</i>
	Robin Mair (RM)	<i>Trustee – Forestry England</i>
	John Stride (JS)	<i>Trustee – Forestry England</i>

1. Apologies

Perry Bond (PB) - *Chairman*

Barry Dowset (BD) – *New Forest Verderer*

2. Matters Arising from previous AGM of 23rd January 2020

The previous AGM's minutes were read through and agreed as accurate: proposed by RM, seconded by IB.

Matters arising from previous AGM:

Action 1	Bentley Wood visit: As an alternative to this, a visit to Garston Wood Nature Reserve in Dorset was proposed. IB will send around some possible dates.
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3. Chairman's Report – Perry Bond

This past year has been so long I have had to read my previous reports to remember the beginning of it! At the beginning of the year we were still in the first lockdown, this didn't impact Pondhead that much as we had finished the winter season, the impact was felt more keenly by the volunteers and their inability to get their Pondhead fix. As the year progressed, due to restrictions we were late starting the charcoal season, but due to good weather and stay-at-home advice charcoal sales were good, more details I am sure will follow.

Chair courses were shuffled and moved a few times and finally some cancelled due to promised bad weather and a few were run, so profit was made but less than our usual. The usual buffet style lunch was replaced by individually boxed goods and chair construction was achieved using masks and visors. I believe the courses were run both to the letter of the rules and the moral imperative of them.

Charcoal burns were not advertised and run by just pairs of people as were the cutting rotas again exceeding the government guidelines.

Heading into the autumn we were not able to run our usual large number of volunteering sessions, but as we had already decided to reduce our coup cutting due to a surplus of timber this wasn't a complete disaster, Derek set up a maintenance bubble of 6 and essential work was achieved in the periods they were allowed to operate. In the lock-downs this was reduced to pairs of people.

The chainsaw team is a resource that costs the trust money in the form of renewing certificates and thus it is a waste to have them standing idle! With the pause on coups, we agreed with Forestry England to thin Williams copse. We have discussed this in previous meetings and whilst not coppicing it does fit in with our main aim to increase biodiversity. Dave worked with Mike Danks (FE) in marking the trees to be removed and early autumn Paul and I started thinning, aware that the work needed to be done early in the winter season due to the proximity of badger setts. However, towards the end of the first day Dave took a call from Mike Danks to stop work as some paperwork within Forestry England (that we were not aware of) was not in place. So we stopped work there.

Dave identified some ash trees he was sure were suffering with ash dieback. As they had little to no canopy cover we cut a few and found although the trunks were not structurally compromised there was evidence of early dieback in them, so we continued and found the same in every single tree in the glade. Clearing the area had the added benefit of allowing sunlight to dry a very wet clay ride and to give space to a field maple.

The ash trunks were not large, but they were straight. Mechanical extraction would have caused a mess but we were loath to consign such good timber to charcoal; so we came up with the audacious plan to prepare, strip and manually transport the ash logs to the retort area to create a wet shelter for the wood colliers.

We built the wet shelter as a temporary structure checking structural loading and stability. Although this was carefully planned, it was by necessity an iterative design; basically only by building it could we prove the concept. We had failed to ask Forestry England for permission to erect a structure and our licence states explicitly that we may erect structures but only after getting the forestry's consent.

Due to some inopportune comments on social media by myself, which I apologize for, we received a request for a meeting with Mike Graham. He was concerned by us cutting timber which is not in our licence and the construction of the shelter. The meeting seemed constructive and I feel both parties gained a better understanding of the frustrations of the other. To summarize:

1. We both agreed that the current licence was not really fit for purpose and should be re-drafted
2. It was conceded by Forestry England that tree cutting should be added to our licence as it is not possible to effectively coppice without cutting the occasional larger tree, also we have been asked by Forestry England to thin Williams Copse which indicates their implicit agreement for our cutting of small trees.
3. It was conceded by us that we should not have erected the wet shelter without asking permission but explained it would be taken down for application of a VOC free preservative and it is currently dismantled awaiting a decision.
4. He agreed, although not within his jurisdiction, that it seemed sensible that the new keeper in the adjacent cottage take an interest in Pondhead. He reiterated that he would make the suggestion but it was not within his remit to make decisions on this aspect.

Since that meeting, we have had correspondence that has agreed it was constructive. I have sent him documentation on the structural integrity, the chemical compounds of the preservative, the data that it took 33 minutes to dismantle the shelter entirely. I have explained that we have a duty of care to supply shelter from the elements for our wood collier and asked politely but unequivocally if he will give us a yes or no to us erecting this shelter.

Moving on, Derek has instigated repairs/improvements upon the retort and early indications are that it's working more reliably than before and we expect it now to last out our current licence.

In summary, I feel the PCT proved itself resourceful and flexible in unprecedented times. My main concern is for the morale and cohesiveness of the volunteers and suggest when restrictions are sufficiently lifted we have more summer based work parties and a few more social events than in a typical summer.

Following PB's report, IB declared his thanks and admiration, on behalf of the other trustees as well, for the way in which the PCT has continued its operations over the past year in the face of the challenges presented by the pandemic.

4. Treasurer's Report – Gary Melton

Accounts for Year Ending 31st March 2020

The accounts have been reviewed by Paul Wilcox, a Pondhead volunteer and have been filed with the Charities Commission. My thanks to Paul for verifying the accounts.

Year End showed a surplus of £3,516.56 with a closing bank balance of £10,880.16. The budget was for a surplus of £3,500.00 so very good budgeting by the previous treasurer.

Charcoal sales produced £6,184.75 of income which was £606.00 down from the record sales the previous year. Chair courses produced £3,578.40 of which £40.00 related to the spoon course trial and £230.00 related to a prepayment for next year's chair course. The total for last year was £3,218.40. Guided walks generated £553.50 of income and this included a number of talks given by Derek Tippetts. We won another award this year from the Royal Forestry Society for Community Woodland and this generated £500.00. Donations totalled £403.31 and this included £285.00 from Dave Dibden for the painting auction. Rustic product sales were £365.00 which may be another income stream for the future. Total income for the year was £12,023.39.

Expenditure for the year was £8,506.83. Consumables totalled £1,383.66 which in the main relates to expenditure on the retort. This was up by £329.08 and the majority was for additional retort sealant, adhesive etc. Equipment expenditure was £1,134.75 an increase of £342.10 on the previous year. The main reason for this was the purchase of a new chainsaw and new samurai saws. We also purchased a new BBQ for Chair Course use only. Insurance costs were £1,047.74, a reduction of £172.08 on the previous year. This was due to changing our insurance provider. We also spent £1,462.70 on charcoal bags but these will last us for 2 years. There was no expenditure in last year's accounts. Expenditure on the New Forest Show stand totalled £427.03 but this was offset by £240.00 of income. Most of the equipment will be used in future years.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE

Year Ending 31st March 2020

	2019-20	2018-19
Opening Bank balance	7375.72	3167.26
Petty Cash	4.23	
Income		
Charcoal	6184.75	6790.75
Chair Courses	3578.40	3218.40
Donations	403.31	277.09
Give as you Live	198.43	133.68
Walks	553.50	405.00
Rustic Poles	365.00	192.50
Awards	500.00	
New Forest Show	240.00	
Total	12023.39	11017.42
Expenditure		
Safety	217.99	136.96
Tools		504.01
Equipment	1134.75	792.65
Storage		0.00
Consumables	1383.66	1054.58
Fencing		0.00
Insurance	1047.74	1219.82
Packaging	1462.7	0.00
Promotion	159.4	491.22
Outside Courses - volunteers	250	650.00
Trees	278.7	75.00
Pondhead Clothing subsidy	390	545.26
Website	203.47	194.02
Retort Repairs	768	606.00
Food – Chair Courses	367.65	299.94
Volunteer Chocs/food	343.29	370.33
Mileage	72.45	130.05
QAVS		580.78
New Forest Show	427.03	
Total	8506.83	7650.62
Bank 31.3.20	10880.16	7375.72
Cash	16.35	4.23

The accounts were formally approved: proposed by DT and seconded by JP.

5. Secretary's Report – Jenny Pitt

This AGM marks my first full year since becoming a Pondhead trustee, and I think it's fair to say this hasn't been a typical year for any of us. While the physical operations of the Trust were obviously impacted by the lockdown restrictions, my duties as secretary (as opposed to the time I give as a hands-on volunteer) have been relatively light and not, I believe, greatly affected by the restrictions. For example, we have been fortunate to be able to hold our meetings outdoors, giving the proceedings a semblance of normality. It's apparent that many of the administration duties are being carried out by others, and so with succession planning in mind, I would say that I'm happy to take on more of those responsibilities as the Trust feels would be fitting for the role of secretary.

I would just finally add that I'm grateful to be here and to be a part of the team, and am looking forward to the year to come as we gradually (hopefully) find our way back to normality.

6. Election of Officers

- a. **Chairman:** Proposed by DT, seconded by RM
 - **Perry Bond**
- b. **Secretary:** Proposed by DT, seconded by GM
 - **Jenny Pitt**
- c. **Treasurer:** Proposed by DT, seconded by JS
 - **Gary Melton**
- d. **Trustees:** All proposed by GM, seconded by JP
 - **Dave Dibden** Woodland Manager
 - **Derek Tippetts** Volunteers Coordinator
 - **John Stride** Forestry England
 - **Ian Barker** NPA Ecologist
 - **Robin Mair** Forestry England

It was proposed by JP that, in addition to our current cohort, we invite Peter Frost to join the PCT as a trustee. Local to Ashurst, Peter has served as an officer of the New Forest Association for 17 years including being Chairman from 1991 to 2000. He is a former amenity verderer of the New Forest, and when the New Forest National Park Authority was formed he was appointed by the Secretary of State to be one of the first Members of that authority. It was felt that Peter's wealth of experience and strong connections to the Forest people, traditions, and practices would make him an ideal candidate to join the

PCT. The other trustees were in agreement, and it was decided that JP would approach him with the proposal.

7. A.O.B.

a. Communications with Forestry England (FE)

A general desire was expressed among trustees to improve communications between FE and the PCT. Some names to contact at FE were suggested, including Keith Mansbridge and Sean Marsh. There is also a new keeper who has been appointed, Jordan Thomas, who has taken residence of the keeper's cottage in neighbouring Clayhill, and who has expressed interest in engaging with the Pondhead Inclosure.

b. A discussion of the use of social media

DT explained that the current Facebook group is around 400 members strong and represents a place of positive engagement with Pondhead. He agreed with PB's comments that Twitter is not a natural platform for the PCT, but that Instagram was. IB commented that we need to retain a mindfulness of the purpose of our social media feeds. It was acknowledged among the trustees that the FB group includes members from the wider local community, and not just volunteers of Pondhead.

In regards to exposure of our social media feeds to members of FE, JS reminded that we should try to retain a positivity that will support the improvement of PCT's dialogue with that body.

There was debate over the way in which the "official" communications of Pondhead are expressed in the Facebook group, with currently the only mechanism being via the private accounts of officers of the PCT, i.e. people without an obvious affiliation to the PCT in their profiles. To this end, it was suggested that the "group" be dedicated as a volunteers & locals forum, while a Pondhead "page" be created to represent a more formal platform for the PCT. It will then be possible for the Pondhead page to post within the group, with the members of that group then having a clearer sense of what the PCT stands for. The admission of the members to the Pondhead group was also discussed, with JS querying the ethics of discrimination against profiles deemed inappropriate to join.

Actions:

1	Garston Wood visit: IB to send around dates.
2	Peter Frost as Trustee: JP to approach Peter with the proposal.
3	Social media: DT to organise a Pondhead page, and rename the group to reflect its function as a volunteers and locals forum.

Closure of Meeting: 7pm.