



THE ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the 37th Annual General Meeting, held via Microsoft Teams on Monday 18th October 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Tom Chevalier (Chair), Lesley Blundell, Chris James, Clive Beckett, Phil Prigg, Sue Prigg, Alex Goldie, Chris Stott.

1. **Welcome.** The Chairman formally welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that as there had been no AGM in 2020 because of the Coronavirus pandemic there were no AGM minutes requiring approval this evening. Minutes of the 2019 AGM annotated to update members on actions taken since that meeting had been circulated to all members in October 2020 and questions/comments invited but none had been forthcoming.

2. **Apologies for absence.** Apologies had been received from Doug Landman, Helen Smith and David Allard.

3. **Officers' reports.**

a) **Chairman.** The chairman began by expressing his hope that no-one in the IWA had been seriously affected by the Covid pandemic. He expressed his disappointment that, given government advice, it had not been possible to hold an AGM in 2020 as normal and explained that one of the challenges is that the Icknield Way Path is over 100 miles long, meaning some people always have to travel a long distance to attend a physical meeting. Given the uncertainty at the time arrangements were being made for the 2021 AGM it was decided to try this virtual meeting instead.

The Chairman next thanked all the committee members for the time and effort they had put into the IWA during the past year. In the absence of an AGM in 2020 all had agreed to continue in their roles during 2020/21, despite having many other calls on their time. As ever, if there was anyone else willing to take on a role, however small, it would be much appreciated. He had informed the committee that he would now like to stand down from the Chairmanship as it was difficult to commit the time necessary for the Icknield Way leadership whilst running a growing business. If anyone would like to get involved, would they please contact either him or the secretary, Lesley. As explained in the Finance report, we would also welcome anyone coming forward to take on the role of Treasurer.

The Chairman also thanked all the dedicated wardens who keep an eye on the route and are essential in identifying problems and investigating/responding to questions from walkers. In particular, he thanked those wardens who had retired during the year all of whom, he was sure, would have liked to continue had circumstances not dictated otherwise. As a result there were now a number of warden vacancies needing filling, as detailed in the latest *Newsletter*.

During 2021 the Chairman had refreshed the www.IcknieldWayTrail.org.uk website which is aimed at horse riders and cyclists. It now included a link to a Google Map highlighting the different Icknield Way routes, including that for walkers. The map has a number of layers which identify parking, railway stations, places of interest,



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refreshments and camping/caravanning. At the time of last year's AGM it had received around 35,000 views and this had now increased to over 580,000 views, hopefully helping promote the Icknield Way and encourage its use. There are links to the map from both the IWA websites and Covid-19 had clearly prompted people to look for information about the Icknield Way. Unfortunately the Ordnance Survey had withdrawn a tool the Association had used to map some circular routes from the Icknield Way, although we have no measure of whether visitors to the map had actually used these circular routes.

The directional flag signs along the Icknield Way path have faded over the years. In the autumn of 2019, Central Bedfordshire Council procured 72 new Icknield Way cast finger signs in the same style as those used for the riders' route. As these had not been installed by the end of 2019 the Chairman had offered to fit them, fitting 48 arms at 31 locations during June 2020. Inevitably some of the posts had rusted so in 2021 CBC got a contractor to replace the finger posts and fit the remaining new arms. Now the Association needed to improve the signage in the remaining counties along the route! Once again, Sue Prigg, ably assisted by Phil, had organized the printing and sales of the *Walkers Guide* contributing to increased sales during the year. As always, our thanks are due to them both.

Sadly, membership of the IWA has declined over many years as the Association has failed to recruit new members and existing members have ceased to renew. Whilst a pity, this situation is reflected across many similar organisations although thankfully and unlike many other organisations, the IWA is not dependent on membership fees for its existence. Nevertheless, it would be good if we could develop ways of encouraging greater membership.

Clive Beckett and Doug Landman had been progressing the Association's objective of achieving National Trail status for the Icknield Way Path, on which Clive would report later. Along with Clive and Doug, the Chairman had attended various meetings of the Steering Group promoting the Great Chalk Way project, which aims to promote the Great Chalk Way (GCW) as a family of paths linking the Dorset and Norfolk coasts by a long cross country route. Over the year the Chairman had updated the previous basic GCW website and created another Google Map, both accessible at www.GreatChalkWay.org.uk. One of the benefits of Covid-19 had been that it had forced the Steering Group to meet virtually, saving considerable travelling time, effort and cost when attendees are spread from Wiltshire to Norfolk.

Four years ago, the Chairman had first discussed attending the Local Access Forums along the route of the Icknield Way. Yet again, this intention had been a casualty of his work commitments and the desire to ensure the Association has the correct 'message' to impart, particularly in respect of the Great Chalk Way. This remained his intention, although it was not clear when he would have the time. CB commented that he had, in the past, raised the GCW project with all the Local Authority Forum regional authorities along the route so all should be aware of it but may well need reminding.

Finally, the Chairman wished everyone well as the country slowly reopened after the pandemic and encouraged them to get out and walk some or all of the Icknield Way. When he walked locally he often found that people are actually walking the route, which justifies the effort involved in maintaining and developing it.



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b) Acting Treasurer The Association has been without a treasurer since Sep 2016 and in the interim the Chairman has been Acting Treasurer. He explained that the Association's accounts are presented on a 'cash basis' – i.e they record the account balances and stock at the beginning and end of the year and the transactions during the year. At each year-end there are a small number of transactions committed in the prior year but not completed in that financial year. Such transactions are generally small in value and not material to the reported financial position, except for outstanding invoices not paid by the year end. For obvious reasons there are no AGM expenses recorded for 2020/21.

The IWA has two bank accounts with Barclays, a current account used for regular transactions and a Premium account for keeping significant sums. The IWA benefits from free banking services so does not pay any bank charges. The Association also uses a PayPal account to receive the income from the website guidebook sales and some purchases. When the PayPal balance reaches a significant level the money is transferred to the Barclays current account. The accounts state the bank balances at the last day of the financial year.

The Association uses on-line banking so that payments can be made directly into the Recipients' accounts. To ensure appropriate authorisation three committee members are signatories to the account. They are Clive Beckett, Lesley Blundell and Tom Chevalier and two out of the three are required to authorise any payments (cheque or on-line).

Guidebook Sales.

Guidebook sales are the main source of income for the Association, although the net profit has reduced in recent years due to the increasing cost of postage and the Association's reluctance to increase the sale price. Guidebook opening and closing stock is accounted for at cost price in the accounts. This cost had increased during the year. Guidebook sales figures are shown net of the PayPal commission (where purchased through PayPal). The commission does not, therefore, appear as an expense, which slightly depresses the income figures. With regard to wholesale sales, all invoices were paid within the relevant financial year, except for one order of £110 supplied in March which was still outstanding in September (now paid) and another couple of invoices near the year end. The Association is fortunate that all its wholesalers do pay eventually, even if it occasionally takes a little time.

Membership

Membership income has continued to decline. Membership has not increased for many years as we have not managed to recruit new members and existing members are not renewing. During 2020/21 we only circulated one *Newsletter*, close to the August financial year end, meaning the membership reminders were not sent until very late in the financial year. As a result, membership payments have started to be received in September, in the new financial year.

Financial Position

The Association currently has a significant bank balance which is kept under regular review by the committee, considering how any expenditure might be used to support the



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Association's aims. It must be borne in mind that funds will also be required to support the Icknield Way's participation in securing national trail status as part of the Great Chalk Way.

Independent Examiner

The Independent Examiner had reviewed the accounts and signed them off.

There being no questions on the accounts their adoption was proposed by Chris James, seconded by Alex Goldie and carried unanimously.

c) Membership secretary. Sue Prigg reported that there were currently 71 members of the Association, 7 of whom had not yet renewed their subscription, although renewals were gradually filtering through.

d) Publicity Officer's report. In his absence, Doug Landman's written report on his activities was circulated to the meeting. Since the last AGM in 2019 he had produced a publicity plan which had been approved by the Executive Committee. He had undertaken to :-

- Finalise draft job descriptions for the committee posts, agree these with the Executive Committee and circulate them round local volunteer organisations to seek recruits.
- Investigate producing an article to be circulated to local free magazines and newspapers as well as relevant local organisations and other media – e.g. 3 Counties Radio.
- Provide details of such local publications to the Secretary, for inclusion on the Association's mailing list.
- Contact the Ramblers' Association nationally to promote the Icknield Way Association and try to increase membership and recruit new wardens for the Icknield Way Path.
- Investigate the possibility of securing a celebrity President for the Association to help raise its profile.

During the year he had attended some of the GCW meetings on behalf of the IWA and had agreed to contact Contour Holidays to ascertain what interest they might have in the GCW once the project is realised. He had also made a preliminary approach to Bill Bailey about the possibility of his becoming President of the GCW in due course.

e) Development Officer. As the Development Officer's report was concerned entirely with progress with the Great Chalk Way Project it was dealt with under item 5 on the agenda (Update on the Great Chalk Way Project).

4. Icknield Way Association Draft Action Plan. The Chairman introduced his draft action plan for the Association, which had been circulated to attendees in advance of the meeting. He explained that he did not intend to go through it in detail at the AGM but that it was a work in progress, an attempt to take the Association forward and keep it



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growing. The Executive Committee would try to break it down into a series of achievable tasks but volunteers would be needed to help. He would welcome any further ideas that might be sparked by his draft and any volunteers who might be willing to join in future discussion meetings to take it forward. Alex Goldie offered to join in the discussion meetings, which was welcomed by the Chairman. It was agreed that the next special committee meeting to discuss the Plan would take place on 15th November at 7.30 pm via Microsoft Teams.

- 5. Update on the Great Chalk Way Project (GCW).** The Chairman, Clive Beckett and Doug Landman had continued to attend meetings of the GCW Project Steering Group, which included representatives of walkers, horse-riders and cyclists in addition to the project's founder members/officers of the Friends of the Ridgeway, Peddars Way and the Icknield Way Association. However, the Group still lacked a representative from the western end of the route. At the last AGM Clive Beckett had reported that Natural England were supportive of the concept of a GCW and had initially proposed a project that would have included a Project Officer and fund-raising scheme. Unfortunately, due to pressures within Natural England and the reassignment of the appropriate lead officer this had not materialised.

Clive Beckett reported that there is a difference of opinion within the Steering Group about two possible alternatives for the western end of the route, one the existing Wessex Ridgeway and the other a new Cranbourne Drovers Way which is favoured by the Friends of the Ridgeway. The IWA representatives (TC, CB and DL) feel strongly that both routes should remain part of the GCW but the matter had still to be resolved.

TC reported that at the most recent Steering Group meeting on 12th October, which CB had been unable to attend, it had been agreed that there should be one GCW noticeboard at the start of the route in Dorset and one at Knettishall Heath. The IWA would need to organise a GCW notice board at Ivinghoe Beacon, marking the start of the Icknield Way. CB commented that it would be preferable to have a series of information boards along the length of the route, drawing people's attention to specific visitor attractions along the way, such as Dunstable Downs. At the Steering Group meeting there had also been discussion about a possible launch date for the GCW and a proposal that it should take place in 2023, to coincide with the anniversary of the Ridgeway. However, the IWA representatives feel strongly that the GCW warrants a separate launch event in its own right and that this could take place in 2022.

- 6. Election of officers and committee members.** As every year, the Chairman invited nominees from the floor to join the committee. None were forthcoming but Alex Goldie offered to participate in the Executive Committee's discussions on the draft Action Plan. The Chairman having confirmed that all the serving officers and committee members were willing to stand for re-election, Alex Goldie proposed that they be re-elected en-bloc. This was seconded by Christ Stott and carried unanimously.

- 7. Appointment of independent examiner.** In David Allard's absence it was proposed that, subject to his agreement, he be invited to remain as independent examiner for



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2021/22. It was agreed that the Secretary would approach him to secure his agreement.

8. Any other business. There was none.