



THE ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the 38th Annual General Meeting, held via Microsoft Teams on Monday 17th October 2022 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Tom Chevalier (Chair), Lesley Blundell, Chris James, Clive Beckett, Doug Landman, Alex Goldie, Tim Johnson, Mark Westley, Andy Mountain.

1. **Welcome by the Chairman.** The Chairman formally opened the meeting by welcoming those present, especially those members present for the first time. At his suggestion each person introduced him/her self and, where appropriate, explained their role on the committee. The Chairman then expressed the Association's deep sadness at the death during the year of our long-standing committee stalwart and friend Sue Prigg and our regret at the subsequent resignation from the Committee of her husband Phil. They were both sadly missed and it was **agreed** that this should be noted in the minutes.
2. **Apologies for absence.** Apologies had been received from David Allard, Alec Gardiner and Phil Prigg.
3. **Minutes of AGM 2021.** Proposed by CJ and seconded by TC, these were **agreed** to be a true record of the meeting.
4. **Officers' reports.** Written reports from the following officers had already been made available on the Association's website via a link circulated to members:
 - a) **Chairman – Tom Chevalier.** The Chairman began by expressing his regret that this was the 3rd year in which it had not been possible to hold the AGM face-to-face because of the pandemic. However, when the Committee had considered the arrangements for the 2022 AGM earlier in the year the Covid situation had still been uncertain. One of the challenges faced by the Association is that the Path is more than 100 miles long, meaning that a physical meeting at any point along the route inevitably involved some people having a long journey. One possibility for the future would be to continue with a virtual AGM and to replace the usual AGM walk with one or more 'meet ups' for a walk and tea at different places along the route. However, this would require members volunteering to organise these.

The Chairman then went on to thank the committee members, Lesley, Chris, Clive, Doug, Sue and Phil, for all the time and effort they had put in to the IWA over the past year and appealed again for volunteers to take on a role, however small. In particular, he recorded his thanks to Sue and Phil for their dedication to the Association over many years and thanked Phil for agreeing to continue as warden for the Willingham Green to Icklingham stretch of the Path despite his sad loss. For himself, he had informed the Committee earlier in the year of his wish to step down from the Chair because the pressures of running his growing business made it difficult to commit the time the IWA required. He asked that anyone willing to get involved should contact either himself or the Secretary, Lesley Blundell. He was however, delighted to report that, subject to the formal approval of the meeting later on the agenda, Tim Johnson had volunteered to



take over the role of Treasurer, which the Chairman had been performing in an acting capacity for several years.

The Chairman also thanked all the dedicated wardens who monitor the condition of the route and are essential in identifying problems and investigating/responding to questions from users. In particular he thanked those wardens who had retired during the year and welcomed the new wardens who had recently taken on the role. There were still a few stretches without a warden at the eastern end of the Path (details in the Newsletter and on the website) so more volunteers would be most welcome.

Noting that separate reports dealing with Guidebook sales, the website, membership and national trail status and the Great Chalk Way appeared later on the evening's agenda, the Chairman closed by repeating his best wishes to all members and urging them to get out and walk or ride some or all of the Icknield Way. Meeting people actually walking the route was what justified the effort put in by the Committee members and wardens.

b) Acting Treasurer, including approval of the accounts - Tom Chevalier. The Association had been without a treasurer since 2016, with the Chairman carrying out the duties in the interim. Subject to the approval of the AGM, he would now be handing over those responsibilities to Tim Johnson.

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

The bank balances reported are as stated at the last day of the financial year. On-line banking enables the Association to make payments directly into a recipient's account and, to ensure appropriate authorisation, three committee members are signatories to the accounts. Currently they are Clive Beckett, Lesley Blundell and Tom Chevalier, two out of three of whom are required to authorise any payments (cheque or on-line).

Guidebook sales provide the main source of income for the Association. Guidebook opening and closing stock shown in the report is accounted for at cost price, which increased during the year. Guidebook sales through the website incur a PayPal transaction fee which is included in the purchases/fees entry in the accounts. It is pleasing to report that all invoices for wholesale sales were paid within the relevant financial year. The postage costs shown for the last year (2020/21) were higher than normal due to reimbursement of two years of expenditure in the single financial year. Postage costs for 2021/22 have returned to normal levels.

Net profit from Guidebook sales has reduced in recent years due to the increasing cost of postage and the Committee's reluctance to increase the sale price. This is something that will need to be reconsidered in the near future.

Membership income increased during 2021/22. Although the Association gained only a few new members, the chasing of outstanding membership subscriptions successfully



generated several renewals. Membership has not increased materially for many years as the Association has failed to recruit significant numbers of new members.

The bank balances show a significant credit balance which is reviewed regularly by the committee when considering possible expenditure to support our aims. However, significant funds will be required to support any future national trail status.

The accounts have been examined and approved by the Association's Independent Examiner and a copy of the authorised accounts had been made available to all members on the Association's website. Their approval was proposed by LB, seconded by CJ and **agreed unanimously**.

c) Website - TC: TC had created and was maintaining three websites on behalf of the Icknield Way Association – one focused on the walkers' route and governance (www.IcknieldWayPath.co.uk), one for the riders' routes (www.IcknieldWayTrail.org.uk) and one promoting the Great Chalk Way coast-to-coast route (www.GreatChalkWay.org.uk). Sue Prigg had established and done an excellent job of maintaining the www.IcknieldWayPath.co.uk website over many years but the original software had become obsolete and could not support modern accessible features such as an interactive map, or devices such as a mobile phone. Sue had passed over responsibility for the website to TC shortly before her death and despite the many difficulties of changing the website host and getting the right passwords, much of the material on the old website had been successfully transferred to the new website, which has a similar look and feel to the www.IcknieldWayTrail.org.uk recreated by TC in 2021. There are many cross-links between the two sites, with some common and some specific material on each. New features added to both include:

- A new 'Join Us' feature allowing visitors to pay online to join or renew their membership of the Association, which it is hoped will encourage an increase in membership. Although each transaction incurs PayPal fees this is a modern and convenient method of payment and reduces the administration involved in cheque payments. Already, some new members have joined via this route;
- News items can now be posted on each website, allowing information to be more current than the six-monthly Newsletter;
- People can now become subscribers to the news posted on the websites, without becoming members of the Association. Once subscribed, they receive a weekly email of any news items through the cleverness of MailChimp, which also allows them to unsubscribe at any time. Subscribers can express an interest in walking, off road cycling and/or equestrian items and of the 100 subscribers to date about one third have expressed an interest in riding. This demonstrates clearly that the IWA is promoting a multi-user route;
- Copies of the Walkers' Guide can still be purchased via the website and sales continued virtually uninterrupted during the website migration. A download of changes to the route is also available for those who bought their copy some time ago.



Suggestions for other improvements to the websites would be welcomed at (Info@IcknieldWayTrail.co.uk).

The Association still has no presence on social media such as Twitter or Facebook as none of the current Committee members has the ability to provide this. Would any members who might be interested in taking the lead in improving the IWA's social media presence please contact the Secretary lesley.blundell@uclmail.net.

LB proposed a vote of thanks to TC for all the work he had put into developing the websites, which has generated significant interest and raised the profile of the Icknield Way. This was seconded by CJ and **agreed unanimously**.

d) Guidebook sales – TC. As Guidebook sales are the main source of income for the Icknield Way Association it is important to maintain sales to encourage walkers and earn the income necessary to fund the maintenance and promotion of the Icknield Way. The Guide is sold through the Association's website and through the following wholesale customers – Linton Kitchen, Walking Pages (www.walkingbooks.co.uk) Stanfords Bookshop and Saffron Walden TIC. Sales for 2021/22 totalled 210, of which 103 were via the website and 107 via wholesale (compared with 212 total sales in 2020/21 and 117 in 2019/20).

For many years, sales of the Guide were handles by Sue Prigg, with the help of her husband Phil. Following Sue's sad death in April, TC and his wife had taken over the role on an interim basis, pending a long-term solution. This meant that fulfilment of orders was able to continue after only a short gap and the Association's thanks are due to Bridget Chevalier for stepping into the breach. Sales through the website had to be suspended temporarily while the Paypal account was adjusted so that the PayPal notification of sales was redirected from Sue's email address, which proved to be a complex and frustrating process. As part of the change of management TC created a Sales@IcknieldWayPath.co.uk email address, to avoid the same problem arising again with any future change of personnel in sales handling.

The Guide was largely rewritten in 2012, to create the current 6th edition. The text and maps were revised and all details checked by wardens. Since then, minor changes (typos, route changes, feedback from walkers etc.) have been included in subsequent reprints. The software used to create and maintain the maps is now defunct. These are held as image files which it is not really possible to update, while the cover picture is a pdf. Future route changes will require some redrafting of the maps making this a problem that must be addressed sooner rather than later.

Other aspects of the Guide requiring review are the printing arrangements and the selling price. Previously, the Guide was printed in Newmarket and delivered to Sue and Phil Prigg's nearby home, thus avoiding any delivery costs. The existing printers have been extremely supportive during the transition from the Priggs to the Chevaliers but going forward future delivery costs will need to be explored, together with the possibility of finding a local printer.



As stated in the Acting Treasurer's report, the sale price of the Guide has remained unchanged for 10 years, while the net profit from sales has reduced due to the increase in underlying costs (PayPal fees, printing, postage and packaging). In particular, overseas postage currently results in selling at a loss. TC would be compiling some costs for the Committee, to enable them to consider whether a price increase is now necessary.

At the conclusion of TC's report, CJ proposed that the IWA should sell copies of the Guide via the National Trust's Dunstable Downs visitor centre and it was agreed that an approach should be made. CJ also suggested David's Bookshop in Letchworth as another possible outlet. The Publicity Officer (DL) replied that he was in ongoing discussions with a number of possible outlets, although some had expressed a preference for leaflets.

Andy Mountain (AM) enquired whether the Association had ever considered the possibility of producing a version of the Guide travelling from east to west, as well as going from west to east? CJ replied that although this had been considered it was difficult to see how it could be done. LB observed that she received only one or two enquiries a year about this so it was unclear how high public demand would be. TC stated that it was a good question, which should be considered as part of the Icknield Way Action Plan currently in development.

Action:

- **TC to produce costs for the Committee to consider a possible increase in the sale price of the Guide.**
- **Executive Committee – to consider the possibility of producing a Guide to walking the Path from East to West as part of work on the Icknield Way Development Plan.**

e) Acting Membership Secretary – LB LB had taken over as Acting Membership Secretary from Sue Prigg in January 2022 following Sue's resignation due to ill-health. The Association owed Sue, who has sadly since died, a tremendous debt for all her hard work on its behalf and she is much missed.

Since taking over from Sue LB had been getting to grips with the various membership records and contacting members to make sure their contact details are all up to date. She had also written to members whose subscriptions have lapsed, to establish whether they wished to continue in membership of the Association. As a result, 5 names had been removed from the membership records, for a variety of reasons and there had been several renewals.

The Association currently has 60 subscribing members, equating to 69 individuals as some are joint memberships. Of these the Association is able to contact 50 subscribers by email. The remainder are contacted by letter. In total there are currently 14 individual Life members; 35 individuals who have joined for 5 years and 20 who pay annually.



Increasing the membership of the Association continues to be one of the primary objectives of the Executive Committee. It is, therefore, gratifying to be able to report that as a result of the Chairman's revamp of the Association's website and promotional work by the Publicity Officer, 3 new members had recently joined the Association. Two of those have volunteered to act as wardens for stretches of the route while the third has agreed to stand for election as Treasurer at this AGM. All were very welcome indeed.

f) Publicity Officer – DL. Several months ago the IWA committee had agreed new job descriptions for the voluntary roles necessary for the Association to carry out its functions and achieve its objectives. DL had since established links with voluntary organisations in every county along the route and sought their help in gaining new members, officers and wardens. He had made good contacts in the Brecks and Norfolk although Cambridgeshire remained a work in progress, as there is no central Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) in the county. To date he had succeeded in advertising the IWA website and volunteer vacancies in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk as well as having an article published in The Comet newspaper in North Hertfordshire. These had generated a number of enquiries and new members and some volunteer vacancies had already been filled, although a number were still left. Contact had also been established with a number of local town and village newsletters and articles based on the one published in The Comet and publicising the IWA's website, membership, Guide book and volunteer vacancies had been submitted to the Arlesey and Stotfold News free community magazines. DL hoped to continue this process all along the Icknield Way. He had also contacted an organisation producing souvenir postcards illustrating the routes of various long distance path routes, which might provide another publicity opportunity and was awaiting a response. He was currently in contact with an English Heritage employee at Grimes Grave, who was enthusiastic about the Icknield Way and whom he was hopeful would take on the social media role the Association currently lacked.

At DL's suggestion, a sympathetic landowner in Ickleford had installed a bench alongside the River Hiz a few hundred yards off the Path, with plans for more benches and an Icknield Way information board on his land in future. DL would continue working with other landowners to seek similar arrangements along the route and appealed to wardens to let him know of any good possibilities in their area that he could pursue. He was hopeful that his connections with the voluntary sector would help in this respect. CB and CJ both commented on the need to be aware of the maintenance requirements of any benches and CJ suggested the use of recycled plastic benches, which are very resilient. CB pointed out the need to beware of the issue of injury to users in the absence of any public liability insurance.

The IWA committee had agreed separate Publicity Strategies for the IWA and the Great Chalk Way project, which would direct the focus of many aspects of the Committee's future work. Much ground had already been covered although there was still much to do. The Committee had also agreed to change its banking arrangements from Barclays to a more ethical bank, which would be easier to achieve with a new treasurer in post.



Twenty twentythree would be the 40th anniversary of the Icknield Way Association and the Committee would be considering how to celebrate this significant milestone. The Committee had already agreed that the appointment of a president would benefit the Association and that Cambridge lecturer and author Robert MacFarlane should be approached with the offer of the position. The approach has been made but no reply yet received as he is currently on sabbatical.

After an approach from DL, the Long Distance Walkers Association was now correctly advertising the IW Guide as available via our website, rather than via Amazon as previously. He had also contacted other organisations that might be suitable sales outlets for the Guide, although there were more organisations willing to take leaflets promoting the Icknield Way. It would be very helpful for DL to have with him leaflets promoting the Icknield Way when he was making contact with other organisations and he would be asking the Executive Committee to consider this. It was possible these could be funded with help from the CVS. TC observed that such joint funding would be really helpful as the Association would be getting twice the value from its funds.

TJ requested that LB send him a copy of the Committee minute agreeing to investigate alternative banking arrangements for the Association, together with details of the existing Barclays bank accounts to help him find a suitable alternative bank.

Action:

- **LB to supply TJ with the information requested about the Association's current bank accounts, plus a copy of the Committee minute agreeing to investigate alternative banking arrangements.**

g) Great Chalk Way Update – DL. TC, CB and DL have continued to represent the IWA on the GCW project group, and successfully presented a case for supporting the project to the Bedfordshire Local Access Forum (LAF) earlier this year. They plan to do the same for each LAF along the IW.

The design of the information boards is close to agreement, some locations have been agreed and others are being investigated. The IWA has submitted images from Royston Cave (Cambridgeshire/Hertfordshire border) and West Stow Anglo Saxon Village (Suffolk/ Norfolk border) for inclusion on the board, as these are highly relevant historic places along the route. It has also been suggested by the Chair of the GCW group that an image of Grime's Graves be included on the board, as this is the single most important place in connection to the GCW, although it is not directly on the routes of the current IW or Peddars Way paths. This has yet to be discussed by the IWA. Bill Bailey (actor, comedian, celebrity dancer, musician and writer) has agreed to be the President of the GCW, being a regular walker of the IW and Ridgeway.

The official launch of the GCW will hopefully take place at the Dunstable Downs Visitor Centre in either 2023 or 2024. There is, however, currently no collective insurance for the GCW, which would be a prerequisite of the National Trust for the use of Dunstable Downs for the celebrations. The reason for the likely delay until 2024 is to avoid a clash with the celebrations of the Friends of the Ridgeway and the IWA, both of which will be celebrating their 40th anniversaries next year, as well as the 50th Anniversary of the



Ridgeway National Trail. It is also necessary to be mindful of any launch of the new Wainwright Coast to Coast national trail.

The GCW project steering group has agreed that no guidebook of the GCW route will be produced until the entire set of paths constituting the GCW (the Wessex Ridgeway, Ridgeway, Icknield Way, and Peddars Way) are all National Trails. The launch of the GCW may thus help in achieving this status for the Icknield Way Path, the main objective of the IWA.

5. **Icknield Way Association Updated draft Action Plan – TC.** Two special committee meetings to progress the Action Plan had been held since last year's AGM, one in September 2021 and the second in January 2022. However, the amendments agreed at the January meeting had not yet been incorporated into the draft Plan due to the Chairman's period of serious ill-health. TC would be incorporating the January amendments into the draft Plan over the next few weeks, then another special committee meeting would be called to continue the work. For this reason, consideration of the Plan was deferred until the 2023 AGM.

Action:

- **TC to produce a revised draft of the Action Plan for further discussion by the Executive Committee.**
6. **Election of officers and committee members.** All the existing officers have agreed to stand for re-election. There are no additional committee members and with no further nominations forthcoming from the meeting Mark Westley proposed that the officers be re-elected en bloc. This was seconded by Alex Goldie and **agreed unanimously**. In addition, Tim Johnson had been proposed for the post of Treasurer by TC, seconded by LB; and LB had been proposed as Membership Secretary by DL, seconded by CJ. Both nominations were **agreed unanimously**.
 7. **Appointment of Independent Accounts Examiner.** In David Allard's absence it was proposed that, subject to his agreement, he be invited to remain as Independent Accounts Examiner for 2022/23. The Secretary would approach him to secure his agreement.

Action:

- **LB to approach David Allard and secure his agreement to act as the Association's Independent Accounts Examiner for 2022/23.**
8. **Proposed amendments to clauses 6 and 8 of the Association's constitution – Executive Committee.** A copy of the full constitution had been made available to members on the Association's website. To facilitate the operation of the Association the Executive Committee were proposing the following changes to clauses 6 and 8 of the Constitution.

Clause 6 of the constitution currently states:



The Executive Committee shall consist of the officers and not more than seven other members. Up to three additional members may be co-opted. A quorum shall consist of five members.

During 2022 a quorum of 5 has proved to be unworkable with the current number of committee members. Following Sue Prigg's death, the consequent resignation of her husband Phil and the Chairman's period of serious health, for several weeks it was impossible for the 4 remaining committee members to hold a quorate meeting and take effective decisions on behalf of the IWA. The Committee therefore proposed that the quorum requirement be reduced to 3 officers, with the following wording being proposed:

The Executive Committee shall consist of the officers and not more than seven other members. Up to three additional members may be co-opted. A quorum shall consist of 3 officers.

This amendment was proposed by LB, seconded by AG and **carried unanimously**.

Clause 8 of the constitution relates to the calling of an Extraordinary General Meeting. It currently states:

At the written request of fifty paid up members, or a third of the membership, whichever is the less, the Executive Committee shall arrange forthwith an Extra-ordinary General Meeting for which twenty-eight days written notice shall be given.

Given that the Association currently has only 60 subscribing members, a figure that has rarely reached 70, the Committee proposed simplifying Clause 8 to read:

At the written request of a third of the membership the Executive Committee shall arrange forthwith an Extra-ordinary General Meeting for which twenty-eight days written notice shall be given.

This amendment was proposed by CJ, seconded by LB and **carried unanimously**.

- 9. Any Other Business.** There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting.