

# HODGEMOOR RIDING ASSOCIATION

## Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 12 November 2020 at 19h15

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this AGM was held via Zoom. Many thanks to Shona Fraser who not only provided the Zoom facility for participants, but also ably took on the role of the Chairman at the last minute as Marcus Bicknell was ill in bed, hopefully not with the virus.

**Apologies** from Dawn Fleming and Adam Collier. 16 participants, including Phil Bartlett, a cyclist member **and** from Forestry England Rob Bell, Beat Manager for the Chilterns and Simon Bound, Works Supervisor, Hodgemoor.

**Welcome by Shona Fraser.** Shona endorsed the Chairman's prepared comments that the Association was in good financial, administrative and social health, with thanks to Susie Bicknell (secretary) and Geoff Gudgion (Treasurer) who did the bulk of the work. The Association was privileged to be able to use such a great amenity and to participate in the maintenance and development of trails and the co-existence of different users. It was encouraging to have increased membership of and better communication with cyclists.

1. **Approval of the 2019 Minutes.** Last year's minutes, downloadable on <http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/agsm2019.pdf> were approved.

2. **Election of Officers and Committee**

The current Committee is:

Marcus Bicknell (Chairman)  
Susie Bicknell (Secretary)  
Dawn Fleming

Shona Fraser  
Geoff Gudgion (Treasurer)  
Claire James

Francesca Jones

The committee and officers were elected as in the past by a single group, including new committee member Charlotte Perry, who had agreed to stand for membership.

3. **Approval of Accounts.** Since 2016 the financial year now runs from October to October. Funds currently stood at £10,126.91. The Treasurer said income was obviously less as there had been no fund-raising events: income from subscriptions was around £4,200 to £4,300 with most coming in around April. This was a factor to bear in mind if planning more repairs. It would be possible to spend around £12,500 in 2021 for example. The accounts, available at [http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/treasurer\\_report\\_2020.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/treasurer_report_2020.pdf). were approved by the meeting.

4. **Membership subscriptions.** The secretary reported that membership stood at round 200. There were 17 cyclist members of which 8 joined this year, and 8 walkers.

5. **Collaboration with cyclists.** The meeting welcomed Phil Bartlett, a cyclist member who had kindly distributed the BHS/Cycling UK leaflet [http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/cyclists\\_and\\_horseriders\\_leaflet\\_2018.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/cyclists_and_horseriders_leaflet_2018.pdf) to cycling groups, including the Chiltern Society group. He said he had himself learnt from this leaflet and was sure other cyclists would too. Lisa Mayhew and Susie said that they had always found cyclists to be very polite and cooperative in the woods. Lucinda Starling said younger riders could be educated more to respect horse-riders. Claire James said she found that off-road cyclists were fine, it was the road cyclists who were less considerate. Phil suggested submitting an article on cyclists and horse riders to the Cycling UK regular magazine. **Susie will act on this point.**

Francesca Jones asked if Kate Baptista's idea of organising some event with cyclists would work: Phil Bartlett thought not: cyclists were usually intent on getting on with doing their mileage. But if anybody out there was willing to try and organise such an event, the meeting and our Association would welcome it!

Lucinda asked if the Cycling Code of Conduct notices that had either fallen or been ripped off from the notice boards in the wood be replaced. **Susie and Simon Bound would look into this.**

Not discussed at the AGM, but please note that the revised riding code (requested at 2019 AGM) mentions cyclists and is at

[http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/members\\_riding\\_code.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/members_riding_code.pdf).

**Dog-walkers.** Geoff Gudgion said he wished some dog walkers were as cooperative as the cyclists, particularly the commercial dog walkers. Rob Bell said Forestry England was trying to get them to engage more and work towards a permit system. Phil Bartlett said signs forbidding commercial dog-walkers were in some National Trust land. Rob pointed out that unlike Councils, for example, and the National Trust, Forestry England has no legal right to forbid commercial dog-walkers.

6. **Report on Events and funds raised last financial year.** There were no events in last financial year (Le Trec 26<sup>th</sup> April cancelled because of COVID-19).

**Future events.**

- The Christmas Dressage at Waylands Equestrian Centre on Sunday 20 December 2020; Dawn Fleming would help Susie organise this. Schedules would be ready soon
- Le Trec in spring 2021. The plan to have a first affiliated Trec in 2021 was postpone till 2022. The normal Trec would take place hopefully in April. Social event for 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Association, date tba;
- BHS Ride 9 May 2021 organised by Jenien Cunningham, Grove Farm.
- Dressage at Highclere, probably in July next year. Many thanks to Kevin Malyon for offering to do this. Shona said she could probably be the writer on the day.

7. **Trail Repairs and Relationship with Forestry England:** 370 metres of trail repairs were done in October 2019 at a total cost was for £29,800 to which the Association contributed £15,300, about half. FE agreed to pay half this time because of new regs imposing on us a contractor which was more expensive than our regular one. You can see a map at [http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/hodgemoor\\_trail\\_works\\_2019\\_map.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/hodgemoor_trail_works_2019_map.pdf)

There was some discussion on the timing of future works. With income of about £5,000 p.a., (assuming fund-raising events will resume) the Association would, in 2021 have around £12,500, enough on Forestry England contractor rates of £80 a linear metre, enough to repair about 155 metres. In a couple of years, funds should reach £20,000 (£10,000 present funds plus two years income) with which we could rebuild 250 metres if the rate is still £80/metre. Rob Bell said that from Forestry England's point of view waiting for longer metrage was preferable: access for the works was particularly disruptive last time, leaving one popular route from the car park for walkers closed for several months. Lisa Mayhew and others supported the idea of making a softer-surfaced sandy canter trail in the woods where there was a good sightline: for example along the Old Bridleway, or the straight uphill section of Susie's Loop. Rob Bell pointed out that the surface would have to approved by Natural England as the wood was a SSSI. Susie would also investigate with Rob and Simon the possibility of moving the Highfield trail (impossible to surface because of tree roots) a few metres south to the wider cart track route, currently a footpath.

Geoff Gudgion proposed that problem sections be assessed accurately (reports from members welcome, in addition to sections in audit below, during this winter, and that a sandy surface be researched before deciding on timing. Priority for attributing funds would also depend on Point 8, controlling the badgers. Susie said maybe a sandy trail would become less of a priority with the proposed canter trail in the mini-cross-country field of the Bicknells (point 10 below). The meeting agreed.

8. **Badger and Rabbit holes on Wickham Way at the Spring Link.** Deep holes into badger or rabbit holes under the north end of the Wickham Way have started to cause a distinct

danger to horses. Even at walk, a horse could break a leg if it fell into such a hole. At our request, Phill Fox, Rights of Way Structures Inspector in the Highways & Technical Services of Bucks County Council visited the site with Susie and Marcus in September. Here is his email of 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (which was not read out at the AGM)...

" I have had a word with our Ecology team who are glad to help out with advice and liaison with Natural England re any licencing. Initial thoughts are that any works would most likely start in the "safe" for Badgers season starting in July next year. We have just missed the current "safe" window (July to September) for works, though it would have been impossible to sort out licences and procure works in such a short timeframe this year. However it does give us a few months to come up with a plan and method statement for Natural England to approve and get the works arranged.

"I expect I will return with my colleagues for a site visit in the next month or so and will let you know if you would like to join in. The environmental team is largely part time so I will advise you of their availability. I would like to visit the wood in Autumn/Winter to see how the current bridleway surfaces perform. We should be able to come up with some idea of costs before year end and our most likely working method. We have an early consensus on using vertical piling or weldmesh as a subterranean barrier. Just need to figure out if we install this for the full 90 metres or get selective."

The meeting agreed that the Association should contribute to the cost of doing this if Bucks CC can't meet full cost, as it was a top priority to make this much used bridleway and access to the woods safe.

9. **Horse Signage.** Signage will soon be erected a) on Chalfont Rd and Narcot Lane by Bucks CC with agreement of the parish councils. These will inform horse-riders of the law, i.e. to go on the grass verges and not on the footways. Claire James said that these signs were a reassurance to horse-riders that they were legally permitted on verges. b) on Stratton Chase, a private permissive trail in the centre of Chalfont St Giles, after consultation with the owners, to confirm permission for horse-riders to ride there as long as they don't canter and slow for pedestrians.
10. **Renovation of the mini-cross-country course and creation of a canter trail.** Dawn Fleming had proposed that the perimeter of the Bicknells' field be made into a canter trail that members could use, paying £5 as was the current charge for using the XC course. The trail would be kept mown by Marcus and usable, even when the main area was closed for the few weeks of the hay season. The meeting agreed that this was a very good idea.

There were still about 20 usable jumps on the XC course, but the meeting agreed that it was not worth renovating old ones or making new ones. Francesca Jones proposed that the Widmer XC course be offered formally as an alternative "Hodgemoor" XC course:£5 from each booking made via [info@hodgemoor.org.uk](mailto:info@hodgemoor.org.uk) and passed on to Francesca and Charlotte Perry would go to Hodgemoor out of Widmer's £15 fee. The meeting supported this proposal.

11. **Historic Bridleways rights ending 2026.** Claire James made an excellent short slide presentation explaining simply what is a complicated issue. Her slides have been uploaded to the Hodgemoor web site and can be seen there or by clicking on

[http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/bhs\\_historic\\_bridleways\\_claire\\_james\\_nov\\_2020.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/bhs_historic_bridleways_claire_james_nov_2020.pdf)

attached to these minutes). Lucinda Starling said the cart track that had always been used down to the former Chalfont Equestrian was one route that could be formalised as a bridleway. Claire said the HS2 works made this even more complicated as the route might still be closed until after 2026. Francesca Jones said the Swerlings had never objected to horse-riders using that track but was certain they would if it was to become an official right of way. Shona agreed with Francesca that we had to be certain to gain rather than lose from the process. Susie it was tricky as to whether to maintain the status quo where horse-riding was allowed but not formalised, or go through the lengthy process for a right

of way: with Stratton Chase, the owners immediately put up fierce opposition to it becoming a formal bridleway, but are quite happy to let horse-riders continue to use it as it is. If any members know of routes that could be formalised, please let Claire James know.

12. **Organised rides outside Hodgemoor.** Marcus had tried to organize an autumn colour ride to Wendover Woods, but Forestry England now require 6 weeks notice and a lengthy Health and Assessment process. Hopefully next autumn! A ride to Kensham Farm had to be cancelled because of the new Covid-19 lockdown. Members praised Marcus's new WhatsApp group for ride outs.
13. **Motorised vehicles in Hodgemoor.** There were aggressive incidents in the woods during the year but we had quite good support from the Police, mostly local community officers. Click on [http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/off\\_road\\_motorcycling\\_the\\_law.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/off_road_motorcycling_the_law.pdf) for the guidance we have published. We urge riders to do everything possible to photograph or otherwise identify vehicles and report them to us and to the Police on 101 (even if you have to do it online). The cumulative effect of your reports increases the Police attention to the problem.
14. **Any Other Business.** Members discussed several other issues in a constructive way, No action points were arising.

Susie Bicknell, Secretary  
Marcus Bicknell, Chairman  
14<sup>th</sup> November 2020

#### Trail audit, Marcus and Susie, 17th October 2020:

(Map at [http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/map-of-hodgemoor-wood\\_orig.pdf](http://hodgemoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/map-of-hodgemoor-wood_orig.pdf))

The Glade: Under the oak at the top (junction with The Mount) there is some soft earth but no deep mud. The roots of two oaks are getting difficult to pass safely except at walk. The work to rectify that would be very difficult and we might have to take advice. On the steep part of the Glade curving downhill away from the Mount and towards Widmer Corner, there are no problems to report. Nor are there any on the straight section at the bottom. There is one loose earth patch over the culvert at the bottom of the steep bit but not really muddy.

At the junction of the Glade with the Dell there are 3 metres of mud but it is at the bottom of the hill so collect water naturally. There are raised sides which enable horses to pass without issues. Consider this for work in a couple of years.

On the Yellow Brick Road there are some new muddy patches forming half way up, further up than the work done in 2019.

Please report other problem areas to Susie at [susie@hodgemoor.org.uk](mailto:susie@hodgemoor.org.uk)