

# Valley Conservation Society



Annual General Meeting

12<sup>th</sup> April, 2025

at

The King George V Pavilion

Starting at 10am

*doing nothing is not an option*

# AGENDA

1. Welcome

*(This will include a minute's silence to remember our late chairman Bryn Cornwell – please stand if you are able)*

2. Apologies for absence

3. Minutes of the 2024 AGM for approval as a true record

4. Matters arising from those minutes

5. Acting Chairman's address – Jane Holman

6. Grants and funding report – (written report from) Dennis Usmar

7. Development Control – Alan Smith

8. Treasurer's Report – (written report from) Terry Moore

9. Social media – John Robertson

10. Land Management – Dennis Usmar

11. Hayle Park Nature Reserve – Jane Holman

12. Social events – Alan Smith

13. Election of Executive Committee

14. Open Forum

A tea-break will be held at an appropriate moment in the agenda

Close of meeting

# Item 1

## Introduction

Welcome to the AGM.

This has not been a normal year or normal preparation for the AGM.

Members will be aware that, as Vice Chair, I would not usually present this address.

Our Chairman, Bryn Cornwell, is sadly no longer with us and to say we miss him is a massive understatement.

Bryn was Chair almost from the first year and, as we came into our 25th anniversary, the man who rarely took any time away from the work party on Tuesdays, became very poorly.

We were devastated in every area of our endeavours, as he finally lost his battle with asbestosis. He was a driving force for the work in the Valley, in setting up the Hayle Park Nature Reserve and using both to further conservation work and open them up to the public to enjoy.

The Executive meetings were conducted by Bryn; he was the front man for showcasing our aims and achievements with presentations and he did the Society's correspondence, despite being at war with his computer for the duration.

Mainly, he was always in the Valley, not only at the work party, wearing the little beige hat that signalled his presence, but also ready to rush down there at any call about fishing, vandalism or other issues.

Our executive would like to have a minute of reflection to mark his passing before we start the meeting proper.

I hope you will grant this and, those that can stand, please join us in memory of our chairman, champion and friend, Bryn Cornwell.

(Minute's silence)

# Item 3

## Minutes of the 2024 AGM - held on 6th April

### **Present**

*Retiring Committee members: Bryn Cornwell, Jane Holman, Alan Smith, Terry Moore, Fred Cornwell, Jill Lee, Jonathan Leeson, John Robertson, Kevin Shanahan and Bryan Stovell.*

*37 members.*

### **Apologies**

*Rosemary Snelgrove, Chris Wigglesworth, Sean Carter, Tracey Howcroft, Nicholas Peake, Pamela White, Joan Wood, Tom Bartlett, Theresa Webb, Agnes Reynolds, Lloyd Porter, Hazel Martin and Iona Porter, Carol Harwood, Denise and Dale Geeves, Peter and Glenda Morling, Dennis Usmar, Tony and Jaquie Day, Anne and Brian Johnson, Robert and Heather Winter, Tommy and Barbara Small, Mike Hook*

### **Minutes of the 2023 AGM**

*The minutes of the AGM held on 29th April 2023 were agreed as a true record*

**Matters Arising** - *There were none.*

### **Chairman's address**

*Bryn reported on the past year's activities, which had been dominated by the unsuccessful battle to have an allocation of 250 homes excluded from Maidstone's Local Plan Review and by the consequences of the failure of a weir owned by Maidstone Borough Council on the Loose Stream adjacent to the Woodbridge Drive Play Area, which had resulted in the draining of Reeds Pond.*

*With both the Environment Agency and MBC failing to act, the work party had built a "temporary" wall inside Reeds Pond, by the Mount Ararat bridge, to restore the water level in the pond.*

*The Society had constructed a wood-chip path through the woods for the Buttercups Goat Sanctuary at Boughton Monchelsea, held a summer barbecue for which we sold 115 tickets, sold 100 VCS calendars, held an Autumn Walk attended by 21 members and had a book stall at the Tovil Scouts fete.*

*The work party had also assisted with the repair of garage roofs at Hayle Place, where the owner (Jane) allows us to store equipment.*

*Kent Police had been given permission to use our ponds for a diving and search exercise.*

*The Society had ended 2023 with 464 members.*

### **Officers' Reports**

- **Grants and Funding** written report by Dennis Usmar.  
*Tesco had helped with food for social events and Tovil Parish Council had contributed to the cost of a tree survey at Crisbrook Meadow.*
- **Development Control** report delivered by Alan Smith.  
*The Society had given evidence at the public inquiry into the Abbeygate Farm allocation. We had objected to an application for nine luxury homes on the Cricket Field at Hayle Place, which had subsequently been rejected. We heard that the plan for 62 homes on Smith's Field off Postley Road would not be going ahead.*

### *Item3 (Contd)*

- **Treasurer's Report** delivered by Terry Moore  
*The Society made a surplus over the year of £5,185.25 – bringing the total funds to £26,715.18. Of that, £20k is held in an interest-bearing account and reserved for future land purchases.*
- **Social Media** report delivered by John Robertson.  
*The Facebook page had ended the year with 785 followers.*
- **Land Management** report delivered by Bryn Cornwell.  
*During the year, the work party had repaired a leak in the pond wall, dealt with trees blown over in strong winds, repaired the bridge parapet at Crisbrook after a car crash, cleared built-up silt in the ponds, and removed graffiti, as well as general maintenance. Following a tree survey, two large trees had to be felled for safety reasons.*
- **Hayle Park Nature Reserve** verbal report by Jane Holman.  
*Jane gave an update on the year's activities at Hayle Park Nature Reserve and Walnut Tree Meadows.*
- **Election of Executive Committee**  
***The following nominations were taken individually and agreed unanimously:***

**Chairman** Bryn Cornwell

**Vice Chairman** Jane Holman

**Secretary** Alan Smith

**Treasurer** Terry Moore

**Committee members:** Fred Cornwell, Jill Lee, Jonathan Leeson, Eileen Lewis, John Robertson, Kevin Shanahan, Bryan Stovell, Dennis Usmar

#### **Open Forum**

*There was a suggestion from one member that the ponds and Crisbrook Meadow were being over-managed to the detriment of wildlife.*

***The meeting closed at 11.50am.***

# Item 5

## Acting Chairman's address

This year I can honestly say that the valley is looking wonderful and the work party, with Denis Usmar stepping up to plan and direct, have done sterling work.

They are the most visible and impactful force of our Society for the members and general public who have come to love the ponds and Crisbrook Meadow.

I would like to register my thanks for their hard work and going the extra mile. Each one of them has made a difference to the Valley.

Behind the scenes, are the Executive committee – and let me introduce you to them now:

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A large contingent of the Executive is also part of the work party and we must take a lot of credit for giving their partners a day's break as they chop, build, saw, wade, clear, plant, rake, paint and vie for the captaincy of the boat.

That, of course, as an ex-sailor, was Bryn's 'job' and I'm glad that our 25th Anniversary calendar was able to show one of his last sailings, with Sam, on the cover.

The various projects will be covered in other reports, but you may remember that there are two ongoing issues with the water system.

The failure of the weir at the end of Reeds Pond by Mount Ararat left us suddenly the owners of half an acre of mud. The MBC and Environment Agency requested that it was left as a small stream, although there did seem to be a large issue of possible reinstatement costs.

We argued for finding out what the public wanted and valued in the community. The historic pond and heritage use as a flooded winter meadow together with an immediate problem of nesting water fowl now being exposed to dangers increasing during the hiatus, finally forced the issue and several very large stones were strategically placed to slow the flow and restore the pond naturally.

It is still holding well and has now been accepted by the Agency.

Our chalk stream also attracted the attention of South East River Trust (SERT) who became aware of the existence of this rare stretch of water and wanted to explore a two-way movement of trout and eels etc. We had a fascinating presentation from one of their officers, but it was clear that he had not seen the lofty and extremely small outfall into the River Medway.

We offered him a full site visit along the Lower Valley and up to Loose. This has not materialised so far, but it might be a way of improving spawning elsewhere up stream.

This has not been an eel stream and they too would struggle to enter the stream at the outfall as was established by the River Authority some years ago on the same mission.

The other main area for the Society is our third share of ownership of Hayle Park Nature Reserve (HPNR). Bryn was instrumental in setting it up and a signatory to the agreement with the Parish and Borough councils.

We hope to work closer with our partners in the coming years and use their expertise in the more complex regulations that we all grapple with nowadays.

Many members of the work party also work on the Reserve where Dennis is now well versed in the Health and Safety, Manual Handling, policies, reports and checks.

There is an increased level of paperwork, but it is a way into funding and support, possibly further land in the future.

The photo display at this meeting, compiled by John Robertson our Social Media Lead, consists of calendar pictures and others taken by members over the last year.

We have come a long way from the initial aim of calming traffic through the Lower Valley to being the acclaimed custodian over some of the most important and beautiful spaces south of Maidstone.

Thank you, Members, for your support during this difficult year. You are valued in so many ways and please spread the word to see if we can maintain this vital endorsement for our work.

# Item 6

## Grants and Funding Report – year ending 31 Dec 2024

VCS has not applied for many grants over this past year due to our being in a fortunate position of not having any outstanding projects to fund at present.

These days there are not so many grants as there used to be.

Without any planned major projects, we are limited in what we can apply for.

We did apply to Redrow house developers and we were awarded a grant for £750. This has helped VCS work party to purchase new tools to replace worn-out and broken ones.

Several other applications were unsuccessful.

We have had a steady flow of donations throughout the year through Localgiving.com.

Thank you to all the people that have made donations to Localgiving.com - it helps to balance the VCS overheads.

If you are registered as a taxpayer and you tick the box, we can receive an additional donation with gift aid.

We are hopeful that donations will continue over this next year and possibly increase the number of standing orders we have.

I would like to thank all the people that have made additional donations on top of their VCS membership, it all helps with funding the society.

We have had a batch of calendars printed which were all sold, making a small profit.

Tesco supplied us with a voucher, which we used to buy items for the BBQ

Thanks to all the people who have supported us with fundraising throughout the year.

**Dennis Usmar, Funding Secretary**



# Item 7

## Development Control Report

Members will have noticed that development has finally got underway in earnest on the land off Farleigh Hill.

We previously referred to this as the Burke's site, although it is no longer being developed by Pat Burke, but rather by Vistry, in conjunction with Legal and General Affordable Housing.

The plans have altered many times since they were first granted outline permission in 2005 (**10/0256**) and even since detailed permission was granted in 2019 (**15/509041**).

Currently, there are two accesses proposed, one either side of Invicta Cottages. The idea for a roundabout on Farleigh Hill has been dropped.

The scheme is for 272 homes.

*Members will remember from last year, that the Society opposed an application for nine luxury homes on the old cricket field at Hayle Place. The application was rejected by planning officers, but the applicant appealed. VCS gave written evidence to the appeal inspector back in October. We are still waiting to hear the outcome. (23/505511)*

During the year, there was a change regarding the proposed development on the Smiths Field off Postley Road (behind Richmond Way) previously submitted by Chailey Homes. The land has changed ownership and the new developer is Aile Homes.

Aile at first attempted to persuade MBC to agree that the previous application (**19/503702**) had been "materially started" by Chailey and that therefore the earlier grant of planning permission was still valid. Their justification was that around 30 yards of kerbing had been laid.

VCS objected saying that so little work could not be considered a material start, and the planning officers agreed. So Aile have had to work up a new application – which now must comply with recent new regulations on providing biodiversity net gain.

The application has yet to be submitted, but VCS has seen a copy of the proposed layout. The scheme is now for 36 homes (instead of 62) and there are significantly expanded areas of landscaping around the site's borders.

*There has been no application submitted yet for the Abbeygate Farm site off Stockett Lane, but we know that DHA, the agents for the developer, have been holding discussions with MBC and with local councillors. An application for 250 homes is expected imminently. The plan still includes the proposal to drive an access road through the Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve.*

**Alan Smith, Secretary**

# Item 8

## Treasurer's report - year to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024

From a financial point of view, 2024 was another good year for the Society.

At the end of the year, we were showing a surplus of £2,337.68 – this being the usual combination of members subscriptions and donations, LocalGiving, and one grant of £750 during the year from Redrow Homes.

There was also £515 interest earned from the linked savings account, although the interest rate did drop slightly to 2.3 percent.

Our annual insurance was, surprisingly, £450 less than the previous year's premium of £1,390.

Spending was minimal on printing and stationery, a little over £350 spent on new and replacement tools, and just over £2,000 spent on the land and ponds.

So, as at 31<sup>st</sup> December we had £8,447.36 in the current account, and £20,605.50 in the savings account.

Total accumulated funds, or end-of-year balance, was £29,052.86.

After much consideration - and 10 years as treasurer - I've decided that 2024 would be my last year.

Jane stepped up and took over the role from the 1<sup>st</sup> January, which made sense as that is the start of our financial year.

So, thanks to Jane and also to Brian Hunt for auditing the accounts.

**Terry Moore, Treasurer**

# Item 9

## Social media

### Facebook

The VCS social network continues to grow. Twenty-seven new friends started following us in the past year. We now have 812 followers. If you're not already a follower, look up Valley Conservation Society on Facebook and click the follow button on our page. It's a great way to keep up to date with the latest news about the conservation area.

The Tuesday work party volunteers have been busy during the year. Their conservation work makes for popular posts as Crisbrook Meadow, the ponds and woodland grow and flourish throughout the year. Photos of the team trimming back summer growth were among our most popular posts. But it was a picture of a very relieved looking Canadian gosling being scooped up and returned to its parents that was the most popular.

In late summer, we produced the latest VCS calendar to raise funds for our conservation work, promoting sales on Facebook. We plan to another this year. Please email any photos (landscape orientation only) to Alan at [a128smith@btinternet.com](mailto:a128smith@btinternet.com). Keep an eye on our Facebook page for updates about when the calendars will be available to buy.

We like VCS members and Facebook followers to keep in touch and 'talk to us' through our Facebook page. Please do encourage your friends and families to look us up!

### Popular posts from 2024



Rescued Canadian gosling  
27 May 2024 – 990 people reached.



Trimming undergrowth  
29 August 2024 – 674 people reached

### Website

Our website is another good source of information about VCS. Visitors to the website can learn more about the society and the conservation area. See the latest news, photos of different parts of the conservation area and look at the newsletter library. There is also access to membership forms for new and renewing members.

You can visit the VCS website at: <http://www.valleyconservation.org.uk/>

**John Robertson**

# Item 10

## Land Management Report

*Bryn's passing was a sad loss to the VCS Volunteer Tuesday Work Party. He managed the work party for at least 20 years. The Committee asked if I would be prepared to take over the leadership of the work party from now on. I will have a hard job to match Bryn's dedicated way of organising, but I will give it a go.*

### **VCS Cabin**

While we were having an autumn clear out, we noticed that several wooden-handled tools and shelving had been attacked by woodworm and had to be treated. The top layer of stone in the car park at the cabin was removed and a fresh surface laid. The hedge surrounding the cabin was cut back twice during the year.

### **Reeds Pond**

We kept the waterways cleared of debris. The ongoing problem with the weir in Woodbridge Drive and the Environment Agency is still to be resolved.

We repaired the dry-stone wall by pond. The Conservation Area "gateway" sign in Cave Hill, had fallen into disrepair. The sign was removed, the wood treated with a fresh coat of paint and mounted on new concrete posts. Siltex was spread across the pond. A large ash infected with ash die-back was felled by the weir.

Tree Surgeons of Kent, working on the fire brigade land off Cave Hill, allowed two large boughs to fall across the road buckling our metal railings. The firm admitted responsibility, but in the end we had to sort the railings out ourselves.

### **Crisbrook Meadow**

The meadow was mowed five times this year using the Hayle Park tractor. We had an autumn clear-up round the meadow, trimming the hedgerows and cutting back some overhanging branches. An excavator was hired to dig some trenches for a series of porous drainage pipes to be laid. This has relieved an area that was previously always waterlogged.

### **Crisbrook Pond**

We had a spring and autumn clean in the pond and around the surrounding banks. Siltex was spread across the pond. We carried out repairs to the wall beside the footpath. This year we had two breeding pairs of Canadian geese on the pond.

### **Treacle Wood**

We brush-cut the regrowth around the young trees

### **Hayle Road**

Twice we cut back the overhanging regrowth along the top of the wall. We also cleared the regrowth around the pond opposite Hayle Cottages.

I would like to thank the work party for all their hard work and dedication.

**Dennis Usmar, Work Party Leader**

# Item 11

## Hayle Park Nature Reserve

The Government plans to replace Borough and County councils, or at least change their operations in the near future, which will affect the ownership of the land held by the Charity.

Mitigating the problems in these differences and still trying to sustain the aims and necessary work and planning may well start to take most of the committee's time.

The weekly work parties, however, still manage to maintain and improve this long-neglected landscape. It is a bit like breaking eggs to make an omelette at present. There has been a large loss of the bigger trees to various pests and diseases and also age and wind this past year.

The regular external tree survey findings are binding, but thousands of new whips and some strategic standard trees have continued to be planted.

Unfortunately, these will take many years to come to fruition although the Elm Avenue, that was planted up at the Postley Road entrance to replace the historic avenue running to Hayle Place, is now poking its head above the protective shields and showing the promise of a spectacular landmark again.

The layering of the hedge around the inner top field was begun and a big clearance or cutting back the massive clumps of bramble that had come to dominate the reserve. All this is to increase the biodiversity of the area.

To this end, it is noticeable that the top field is in need of more heritage grazing and of various types. It is to be divided in two and the southern part, which is the most depleted, will be kept for grazing.

Work with local groups continues. Giving people an opportunity to have work experience and an insight into conservation. Bat, birdsong and fungi organised walks continue and the annual BBQ was a resounding success with cart rides, children's theatre, activities and burgers.

Walnut Tree Meadows, on long-term lease to the charity, is now overlooking the construction at the old tip, but still affords a lovely walk between the Loose Valley and the River Medway. It is heritage-grazed, but has wonderful views over Maidstone and out to the North Downs. There are plans to tackle the stone walling and enhance biodiversity here.

While the Trust does not have membership, its social media platform allows for 'friends' to become involved and is well followed.

**Jane Holman, trustee**

# Item 12

## Social events

### **Spring Walk and VE Day celebration – Saturday, May 3**

The Society will be holding our usual Spring Walk in May, but as the event falls close to the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day (May 8), we will make a point of visiting the two War Memorials in Tovil along the way.

Afterwards, there will be celebratory tea and cakes provided in the garden of The Manor at Hayle Place. Tovil Parish Council has kindly sponsored the refreshments and any money raised through donations on the day will go to a Service charity.

Meet at the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill at 10am and wear stout shoes. Members unable to manage the walk are welcome to go straight to Hayle Place for 12noon.

### **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration – Sunday, June 29**

Join us for a night of Opera and show tunes by the talented Italian tenor **Yuri Sabatini** to celebrate the Society's Silver Jubilee.

The event will be held in the King George V Pavilion. Tickets will be £12.50 to include free Prosecco. Dress up to join us for our anniversary treat!

### **Summer Picnic – Saturday, July 12**

Instead of our usual summer barbecue, this year we will be inviting members to join us for a picnic in the garden of The Manor in Hayle Place.

A welcome glass of Pimms will be offered, but otherwise members should bring their own food and drink. Music will be provided by DJ Palvo who proved so popular at our barbecue last summer.

Tickets will be £5 to cover the cost of the DJ and Portaloo hire.

### **Quiz Night – Saturday, October 11**

There will be a quiz night in the King George V Pavilion, with John Robertson as quiz master. We will be looking for teams of six, with members invited to bring their own snacks and drinks.

Make a note of the date and we will advise of the start time and ticket price nearer the day.

**Alan Smith**

# Item 13

## Election of Executive Committee

Under the terms of the Society's constitution, all existing members of the executive committee must step down at the AGM, although they may seek re-election.

During the previous year, we sadly lost our chairman Bryn, and Kevin Shanahan also felt that committee membership was not for him, though he continues on the work party.

We were fortunate that we were able to co-opt two former committee members to help us through a difficult time: with Brian Shingleton and David Hill both rejoining.

In addition, Fred Cornwell understandably does not seek re-election this year, and Terry Moore has also decided to take a well-earned rest.

Bryn's outstanding service to the Society has already been mentioned, and we would also like to thank Kevin, Fred and Terry for their service.

We are lucky to have two new volunteers interested in joining the committee – Nathan and Claire Faulkner. If elected, they will bring a welcome element of youth to our aging committee!

The Secretary had received the following proposals by the deadline for nominations:

**Chairman and Treasurer:** [Jane Holman](#)

**Vice Chairman and Secretary:** [Alan Smith](#)

**Executive committee (ten vacancies)**

[Nathan Faulkner](#)

[Eileen Lewis](#)

[Claire Faulkner](#)

[John Robertson](#)

[David Hill](#)

[Brian Shingleton](#)

[Jill Lee](#)

[Bryan Stovell](#)

[Jonathan Leeson](#)

[Dennis Usmar](#)