

**MINUTES OF THE FRESHWATER PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL PARISH
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 19th MARCH 2024 AT 7.00 PM IN THE SMALL
HALL, MEMORIAL HALL, FRESHWATER**

PRESENT: Councillors: G Kennett (Chair), C Bray, E Cox, D, Hicklin, B Hobbs, C Jarman, D James, N Thomas, F Turan and W Whyte

Members of Public 6

APOLOGIES: Councillors: A Bamford, B Hinton, J Medland,

NOTICE AND WELCOME: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and signed the Convening Notice.

1. **TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE 21st MARCH 2023 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING:** It was resolved the Minutes of the meeting held on the 21st March 2023, having been circulated and agreed, be approved and signed.
2. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL:**
The Chairman gave the 2024 Annual Report for the year.
3. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL HALL ARTS AND LEISURE COMPANY:**
The report from Cllr Gareth Wyre (Totland Parish Council) Chairman for the Memorial Hall Arts and Leisure Company was received. Attached to the Minutes.
4. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WEST WIGHT HERITAGE CENTRE:**
Cllr Harris gave this report as Chairman of the West Wight Heritage Centre and Freshwater and Totland Archives Group (FATAG). Attached to minutes.
5. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FYT BUS:**
Michael Craig gave this report for the year. Attached to minutes.
6. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WEST WIGHT SPORTS AND COMMUNITY CENTRE:**
Clare Griffin, West Wight Sports and Community Centre Manager gave the report for the year.
7. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY CONNECTOR:**
Adam Tucker West Wight Community Connector gave the report for the year.
8. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GIFT TO NATURE:**
Graham Biss Gift to Nature gave the report for the year. Attached to the Minutes.

9. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm

Memorial Hall Arts & Leisure Annual Report

October 2023 – Updated January 2024

Hall Use

The Hall has remained fully booked and we can only accommodate one off bookings. We have several private functions, including Wedding Receptions, booked over the coming months. Cllr Hilary Benns is looking at the feasibility of the Hall becoming a Licensed Wedding Venue, the Hall would be an attractive and affordable venue for those wishing to have a non-religious ceremony.

On the 3rd of October 2023 we again hosted the BBC who recorded their Gardeners Question Time Programme in the Main Hall. This was another successful collaboration with the BBC, and I would like to thank Hilary & Alan Benns for their hard work in arranging it.

In December 2023 we held our Pensioners Annual Xmas Dinner for the residents of Freshwater & Totland. This was attended by about 105 people. Thank you to Cllr Jan Cave for organising it and to all the Trustees, Staff & Volunteers who turned up on the day and helped make it a success. A special thank you to Adrian Bolton and his team at the Waterfront Bar & Restaurant for providing the catering.

Thank you to Peter Alexander of Shide Trees for once again providing our Xmas Tree.

Thank you to Cllr Hilary Benns for her sterling work on updating The Memorial Halls Policy & Procedure, and The Health & Safety Documentation.

Building & Maintenance

The final phase of building maintenance was the repointing of the east main hall wall. This work was completed in March 2023. This was the last major building maintenance project needed to complete the recommendations made in the Condition Survey carried out 2017 by ermc Architecture.

There is still an issue with Damp in Dressing Room 1. This is being monitored and possible solutions are being investigated.

Staffing & Volunteers

Last year we welcomed two new members of staff who share half of the caretaking role, Nick and Simon Palmer.

In December we said goodbye to Jim Phillips, the other half of our caretaking team, we wish him well in his retirement and thank him for his 26 years of service. That caretaking position has now been filled by Jim Richardson. We welcome him and are sure he will prove to be a positive addition to the team.

I would like to thank the Staff, my fellow Councillors and our Volunteers for their continued support and hard work for the Memorial Hall. A special thank you to Alan Benns for his continued work on the sound and lighting equipment.

Cllr Gareth Wyre
Chairman Memorial Hall Arts & Leisure Company

WCAL – FYTbus REPORT to FRESHWATER PC 12 03 22

1. Scheduled services

2021/22 has been a torrid time for our Scheduled services. At the onset of Covid 19, we were almost at a standstill, running just one service, a combination of our A and B morning routes and suspending the afternoon route C. As restrictions eased, we re-introduced our A and B services but C route has remained suspended.

Passenger numbers fell to a third of pre-Covid levels but gradually increased over the year, roughly following the level of restrictions imposed. This gradually increasing trend continued until the Co-op store closed its doors. So the last month has seen numbers drop off again. We do expect, though, that once the new Tesco store opens we will see a significant rise in passenger numbers. Will we ever get back to pre-Covid levels? The jury is out – increased incidence of on-line shopping will reduce demand, but higher fuel and car ownership costs will increase it.

Throughout the pandemic, we have been supported by the IW Council who have continued to pay the concessionary fare rebate at the rate equivalent to that in the 2019 month. This has been a lifeline which we hope will continue for some months yet. At the time of writing, this is not certain.

We are also very grateful to Freshwater PC for their annual grant supporting the services we provide.

2. Non-scheduled services

a) Excursions

Our excursions have also been drastically hit by the pandemic – both for lockdown reasons and just because people were socialising less. The shopping trip to Newport now only goes once a fortnight. There are signs of this coming back as life gets back to near normal and as fuel prices make car journeys less attractive.

b) The School run

While All Saints' primary school in Freshwater is undergoing major expansion and refurbishment, we have provided a service, funded by IWC, to take children from Freshwater to the school in Yarmouth. This started with one minibus but now requires two. This service will continue until the new Freshwater School is back in service. We are very pleased to be able to serve the younger elements of our communities in this way.

c) Medical services

Initiated in mid 2019, this grew steadily but really took off through the pandemic – trips to St Mary's, Brookside and other medical services this side of the Island. We are now averaging one patient per day and last December we had to hire in an additional vehicle to meet demand. This service has also put huge strain on our office – finding drivers for all these trips, and we have recruited additional volunteers to help with this.

3. Future fleet

a) Electrification

Our trustees have agreed to go ahead with the leasing of an electric minibus. We will place our order this month. Initially, we had hoped to access the IWC leasing scheme this month, however, we are now advised that this will not be operational till September. Bus 2?

The concept of generating our own electricity to fuel this fleet is on-going. There are still several hurdles in the path to this but the increasing cost of diesel relative to electricity and the greater emphasis on energy security does mean that we still have a tail wind behind this project. We will persevere!

b) Demand responsive

We have agreed to become a pilot for the Hampshire Transport Zone Demand responsive initiative. This will involve running a service to a few specified main stops but between these, only picking up people who had booked to travel. We will trial this on a re-instated Route C in the autumn. The advantage of this system is a much reduced 'running empty' time, so reducing emissions and vehicle wear and tear. Work on this model starts this month and there are many uncertainties to be addressed.

c) Bus back better

We have offered the IWC our thoughts on how bus services on the Island and, in particular, in west Wight could be improved. No comment back yet from IWC or, indeed, funding from National government.

d) Tackling loneliness through transport

This is another DfT initiative which, for the Island, is led by Age UK, with FYTbus as a partner. We, in turn, have involved Adam Tucker in this project. Again, no indication as yet as to whether the Age UK bid has been successful.

4. The FYTbus Shop

The FYTbus shop has done really well during these turbulent times. Clearly, during lockdown, it was shut, but this year it has more than made up for the closures last year and turnover is now almost 50% up in pre-Covid levels. A tremendous effort from all concerned. We introduced contactless payments last year and now more than a third of all purchases are by this means. Again, with the prospect of financial hard times, the Shop is a really important resource for our communities.

5. The volunteers

Of course, in all our efforts, we rely totally on local residents volunteering their time and effort to serve their communities. We always need more people to volunteer to keep our established services running and to help with the expanding range of services we provide.

We would like to hear from anyone who has some time and expertise to offer, particularly those with skills related to our core activities – drivers, office staff and shop assistants. We plan to hold recruitment events around west Wight in the near future.

Freshwater Reserves

Annual Report

2023 – 2024



Produced for Freshwater Parish Council



Introduction

We are pleased to provide our Gift to Nature Freshwater Reserves Annual Report 2023/24.

It has been another busy but successful year for the Gift to Nature team. We have continued our programme of site improvements and visitor numbers have continued to increase.

Our priorities remain to keep the Gift to Nature sites open and safe to use, allowing everyone to have free access to the Island's fantastic countryside.

This is only possible because of the support we receive from our funders, partners and volunteers for which we are grateful. We also value the feedback we receive about the sites so please continue to share with us your views and observations.

Ranger Activity

Afton Marsh and Golden Hill are some of Gift to Nature's most used and loved sites and when onsite the Ranger team enjoy lots of engagement with lots of different members of the public.

The sites have a fortnightly check when the Rangers do a litter pick, the litter has generally been good on these sites, however, it would seem that some neighbouring properties are throwing their garden waste onto the sites, which is both unsightly and introduces invasive plants. The Bamboo at one of the areas on Afton North, with the help of volunteers, was cut back and removed from site - the area has also been recently cut back by the Rangers to stop the regrowth, in the hope this will help eradicate it from the area.

The Rangers also do a visual tree inspection and general site check and during the growing season mow and strim the sites, balancing public access with protection of wildlife and fauna both of which these sites have a fantastic variety.

The area around the concrete heritage sites has been cleared by volunteers, who have also supported the team in maintaining the Golden Hill site. The maze had major works in 2023 but will require further maintenance into 2024 by the artist and his team. Lastly, at the end of the year a contractor cuts the hedges and mows $\frac{3}{4}$ of Golden Hill.

The Rangers have installed a memorial bench and picnic table on Golden Hill this year. The Rangers have dealt with several dangerous trees, mostly Willows, but we have also needed to bring in contractors to deal with some of the more complex and dangerous tree situations.

The Ranger team cleared the route of any overhanging trees for the Afton Marsh North path upgrade and introduced 'dragon's teeth' (which prevent unauthorised vehicle access) at each end of the path, as well as a new information pillar and cycle racks.

Plans for Afton Marsh, which is an important SSSI site, over the coming year are extensive. With direction from Natural England and Forestry Commission we hope to undertake the following work:

- removal of invasive Willow
- clear large areas of scrub
- fence Afton South, which will allow the introduction of livestock to the site.
- Building of a cattle corral

It is hoped the removal of Willow will start in Autumn 2024 and will involve some major works on the site. The benefit of this works will not be seen immediately but we are trying to reset the clock before this wonderful area is lost to invasive species.

Engagement Activities

The Gift to Nature engagement programme has been designed to encourage more people, from a wider background, to visit our sites and connect with nature. It is delivered through a mix of events, activities and presentations.



To broaden the reach of Gift to Nature, we have worked in partnership with other organisations working in the areas of mental health, cultural diversity, young people, care homes, people with disabilities and those from harder to engage communities.



Over the past year, we have worked with 48 groups or organisations, held 38 public engagement activities, with 1187 people taking part in a workshop or walk led by the Engagement Officer.

All the pupils, plus their accompanying adults, from both Shalfleet Primary School and Freshwater & Yarmouth Primary School joined the Engagement Officer for a day of outdoor learning at **Golden Hill Country Park**. The children were



enthralled by the number of butterflies and other insects they discovered during a bug hunt. On a sensory walk they explored the park using all their senses with the taste of wild mint being a highlight.





ANNUAL REPORT FOR FRESHWATER AND TOTLAND ARCHIVE GROUP (WEST WIGHT HERITAGE CENTRE) 2023-2024.

Our first full year after the madness of Covid, although the consequences still live with us all. Without the valued support from the Freshwater Parish Council we have not been able to get through the difficult times.

It has been an interesting year where we have seen an increase in visitors to the centre, with very positive comments. The joint project with Yarmouth Town Trust enabled us to present a superb window display about the history of the Yar Bridge and crossing. This was positively reviewed with some amazing archive pictures of the pre bridge days

We also managed, in co-ordination with the Paddle steamer society, to create a display of paddle steamers visiting Totland and Yarmouth, This coincided with arrival of the Waverley in the area for its summer season and was well appreciated.

We have continued to receive material through accessions including a generous, substantial archive from the family of Eric Toogood a well known local author, business man and photographer. This included documents, films and lots of photographs.

Requests for information about local families, houses and the general area continue to fill the in tray.

We ran a number of Car boot sales in Totland which not only promoted what we do but also gave us some good income.

The relative calm of this year enabled us to finish and publish a new book "Totland reflections". A book launch in November was very well attended and the new book literally flew off the shelves on that day and since then we have sold over 350 books and are now looking to do a second print. A number of other outlets have taken books to sell. It also stimulated interest in the "Freshwater Reflections" book which increased its sales.

We have also had a number of new volunteers join us able to help both in the archiving and the public facing centre, we could still use more especially to help support our IT systems and internet presence.

Looking forward we will be taking over the lease for the Heritage centre from the FPC in July for the next 5 years and will then be self funding. We are in the process of applying for various grants as well as looking to increase our subscription income, charges and donations.

Roll on 2024/25.

Adrian Harris

Chairman

Freshwater and Totland Archive Group Ltd (West Wight Heritage Centre)

18th March 2024.