

Marcher Apple Network

26th Annual General Meeting held on Zoom

Saturday 20th November 2021 at 11am

In Attendance on Zoom. Ainsleigh Rice (SAR), Wade Muggleton (WM), Andrew Large (AL), Jim Chapman (JC), Richard Wheeler (RW), Nick Dunn (ND), Andy Ball (AB), Peter Austerfield (PA), Gillian Barter (GB), James Bisset (JB), Ritchie McBride (RMB), David Smith (DS), Andy Pillow (AP), Russell Sutcliffe (RS), Jackie Denman (JD) (in the Chair).

1. Apologies for Absence - Richard and Sally Cheshire, Karen Limbrick, Tim Taylor, Marion Owen & Shirley, Mr B C Daniels, Peter Mitchell, Gareth Pugh, Mr & Mrs C L Hill, Mr S L Keen, Richard Chillingford, Jonathan Lee, Adrian Bagley, Daniella Bergman, Alison Coggon, Brian Edwards, Edmund Hayward, Martin Kunz, Charles Pickles, Bridget Rose.

Before considering item 2, JD reminded those present that no AGM had taken place in 2020 due to COVID-19 uncertainties. This had been explained at the time in Volume 3 No 2 of Apples & Pears (Autumn 2020), alongside the Trustees' Annual Report and Summary of Accounts. Members were invited to make comments and raise questions with Trustees, but none were received. JD took the opportunity to record a vote of thanks to Celia Kirby for her time and effort in compiling Apple & Pears.

Just two members had requested to attend the meeting in person. In the circumstances, it did not seem appropriate to proceed with the face to face element of the meeting, so JD had been in touch with both of them yesterday. Both had been understanding. One was now on the Zoom call, and the other was unable to join online but wished us well. JD felt that MAN should bear in mind that the very rural nature of our area meant that some people remained without access to a reliable broadband service. She thanked Nick Dunn and Frank P Matthews Ltd for hosting the Zoom meeting, and for their kind offer which had enabled us to give members an option to attend in person.

Before proceeding to any vote, JD drew attention to the inclusion of the agenda, annual report and accounts in Apples & Pears Volume 3 No 3 (Autumn 2021). She explained that 20 validated proxy voting forms had been received in advance, and these votes would be cast accordingly. Five members present who had not returned a form would be invited to vote with a show of hands at appropriate moments.

2. To receive and approve the minutes of the 25th AGM held on Saturday 17th November 2019 - 26 votes for and 3 abstentions.
3. No matters arising.
4. To receive and approve the Trustees Annual Report 20 - 21. JD reported that the last annual report now seemed rather a long time ago, and painted a positive picture, especially in the face of the challenges presented by COVID-19. The next one may reflect a less positive picture as may become apparent from the Open Forum discussion to be held later. 25 votes for and 1 abstention.
5. To receive and adopt the Annual Accounts 20-21. AP reported that it has been a quieter year due to Covid but otherwise a fairly orthodox set of accounts. WM confirmed that online sales had been higher than in previous years, presumably due to people being at home more. 25 votes for and 1 abstention.
6. Election of Directors - JD reported that it was her, Mike Porter and Jim Chapman's turn to stand down and that, in the absence of an AGM, Ainsleigh Rice had been co-opted by Trustees for one year last year until the next AGM. Huge thanks were duly recorded to Mike Porter, a founder member, and Jim Chapman who were not standing for re-election. Their experience and enthusiasm had been invaluable to MAN and they would be much missed, although both remained available to provide advice. Ainsleigh was also standing down in order to concentrate on his practical and accreditation work for MAN. Thanks were duly recorded for all his efforts as a Trustee. This leaves only JD to stand for re-election. SAR took the chair at this point, and 23 votes were cast for her re-election, with 3 abstentions. JD resumed the chair.
7. To Determine to Appoint Examiners for Accounts 2021-22. Before considering this item, a record of thanks was duly recorded to Andy Pillow for his 10 years of loyal service as Treasurer, a post from which he is now stepping down although he has agreed to remain a Trustee for the time being. JD reported that seeking a new Treasurer was a high priority for Trustees but also stated that the accounts and finances were in good order. AP pointed out that this was largely due to the generosity of SAR in supporting the organisation financially. JD explained that it would be for Trustees to take a decision on who would be appointed to examine the accounts. 25 votes cast for, no abstentions or against.
8. Open Forum - JD asked WM to share a few views on the future of MAN. At its height MAN had a committee of 14, all with named roles; as of the end of today we are facing a committee of 5 and only 6 Trustees. How tenable is the future with such low numbers and the lack of new people getting involved? Do we need to consider a more shrunk back model of doing less and perhaps pulling in volunteer help on a more one-off basis? It was acknowledged that there are people on the fringes of the committee who do help out with specific things. OR should we look to

merge with another organisation, although this has been discussed before and it was not felt there were many options. OR worst case scenario we have to wind up due to simply not having enough people to be able to carry on. WM expressed the view that we are at a crossroads and a lack of succession, be it in committee members, identifiers, or just volunteers, is now a big problem. He also stated that it was not merely a case of needing 4 or 5 new people but that the future direction of MAN was up for discussion as perhaps after 28 years that original mission of finding and conserving the historic apples of the Marches may have been largely achieved.

JB - stated that there did seem to be a resurgent interest in society in landscape, biodiversity, fruit trees and community gardens etc, and that with the new Environment Bill and biodiversity net gain there could be many opportunities for new and different focuses. Fruit tree sales had soared but was there perhaps a lack of knowledge on how to manage them on an ongoing basis? He offered to assist from the fringes where he could and flagged up the excellent Apples and People digital project with its worldwide reach.

JD - reflected that MAN covers a large area and needs to have an awareness of what is going on where and subsequent opportunities for engagement.

RS - reiterated the fact that there were lots of trees being sold and planted but again lack of knowledge and aftercare was an issue.

WM invited Andy Ball of Colwall Orchard Group to speak of their experiences.

AB - stated that COG have tried to cover a lot of bases including orchards, history, meadows, culture but sometimes lacked expertise and knowledge in specific areas whereas he felt MAN had a wide pool of expertise across the region and that was a strength we should build upon.

JC - stated that whilst in Gloucestershire there had been good support for community orchards and local groups, that had not translated into people helping with GOT in an organisational and administrative way and that this was something that needed addressing.

PA - speculated on whether a merger would be the way to go if some institution or organisation could be found who would take on the collections, Cider Museum, College or University.

JD - questioned if it was the preservation of the collection or the continuation of the organisation that should be our focus. She was aware that Herefordshire had seen a recent influx of new people who could potentially be interested in MAN's work and objectives, and that perhaps this was replicated in other parts of the Marches.

ND - agreed that preservation of the collection was paramount whilst the organisation could be seen as more transitory. He proposed an entire collection in one place was the basis of a firm foundation for MAN going forward, whilst the current collection was fragmented and remote for historical and good reasons. He stated MAN had in some ways been too successful and now need to consolidate and find a launch pad for a new way forward.

AL - suggested that the outcomes from the recent working group be pulled together and circulated as there is clearly a need to do things differently. We have the collections and we have the knowledge - what we need is the people to engage with.

JD - stated that one of the working group issues had highlighted the strengths of the Marches area, but also its challenge in terms of cross-border issues and the influence of regionalism making a uniform approach perhaps more difficult to achieve.

RW - now residing in Kent - related the tale of a symposium, off the back of a 3 year lottery funded community orchard project, which had highlighted the lack of people willing to serve as Trustees for the ongoing stewardship of said orchards.

JD - stated that a BIG conversation was needed surrounding all these issues.

SAR - said he would be willing to continue contributing financially to MAN as long as there was a guaranteed commitment to continue. He also highlighted how in his view, being a charity can seem burdensome in terms of paperwork and process and suggested we should we consider MAN splitting into two elements, that of people focused and conservation focused work?

JD pointed out that the difficulty of an organisation divesting itself of charitable status. (The charity's remaining assets must be used for charitable activities or transferred to another registered charity.)

RS - asked for some clarity as to what the red tape issues might be and suggested the issue needs looking into as an operational matter rather than one of governance.

It was concluded that more conversations were needed over the coming winter as to exploring a way forward. JD reiterated her invitation for members to contribute to this conversation and thanked those present for their contributions to date. The door is open!

9. There was no AOB.

JD thanked everyone for their attendance and it was felt that the Zoom nature of things had been a positive influence on the meeting.

The meeting closed at 12.30.