Alnwick Area Friends of the Earth

Annual General Meeting Wednesday 3rd March 2021 – on Zoom

Present; Brycchan Carey (Chair) Mike Powell, Lisa Bellamy (Mins) Cathy Crowder, Sue Patience, Jan Maddison, Peter Edge, Eve Reverchon, Cath Coultas, Gillian Maude, Terry Smith, Sheila Pearson, Elizabeth Bland, Clare Stanicliffe, Pamela Dewener, David Archer

Apologies; Jean Lovie

Brycchan welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave some background to this, our first Annual General Meeting.

The group had drawn up and adopted a Constitution in 2020, partly as most grant-awarding bodies now require a group to have a Constitution and partly to try and make us a more open and accountable organisation. Presently the group is made up of an active core of people who regularly attend meetings and an 'outer' group of supporters. An AGM gives this 'outer' group an opportunity to both hear what we have been doing over the previous year and to ask questions and should also offer encouragement for more people to become involved in our activities.

This AGM had to be held on Zoom due to current lockdown restrictions, but it is hoped that in future years it will become more of a social event, possibly with a guest speaker.

Reports

Save Druridge Bay Campaign

Martin gave a short background to the campaign which had been set up to fight proposals from Banks Mining for an open cast coal mine at Druridge Bay. A local group had been set up in the area to oppose these plans and we, along with other environmental groups in the county, had been approached for support. Our involvement intensified over a five-year period – including involvement in protests, fundraising (we raised around £1200 in one event) – and we were successful in getting National FoE involved, possibly our most important achievement in the campaign. After the application being 'called in' by the Secretary of State and a series of appeals, the planning application was finally rejected in 2020 – a huge win for all involved and a key event in the wider fight against coal extraction.

Since then, a similar proposal at Dewley Hill outside Newcastle has also been overturned but Terry pointed out that here are still plans to open a deep coal mine in Cumbria – so the fight against coal goes on!

Plant for the Planet event February 29th, 2020 at Duchess High School

Mike gave the background to this event which was part of our longer term aim to better develop our links with the school and build on the educational aspects of our campaigning.

The event included: 2 keynote speakers: Selma Guerreiro, researcher in Hydrology and Climate Change at Newcastle University, and Guy Shrubsole, trees campaigner from National Friends of the Earth, plus a Q&A session with a panel of experts, stalls run by 13 environmental and other related organisations, and hands on activities for children. Students from the school presented their own environmental poetry and a photography display and there was a mass tree planting activity outside on school grounds – some 150 trees were planted on the day.

Around 200 people turned up for the event and we felt it was an extraordinarily successful, educational, and networking event – we had very positive feedback from the organisations attending the day and links with the school were very much strengthened.

A follow up event was unfortunately cancelled due to the first Covid 19 lockdown.

Hope Tree Project

Peter gave a presentation on the Hope Tree Project which we set up in response to the National FoE campaign to double tree cover in the UK.

This ongoing campaign promotes the planting of more trees as part of a strategy to help mitigate the effects of climate change. It aims to engage members of the community in positive action towards tackling the climate emergency and to enhance the local environment in terms of reduction in air pollution, increased biodiversity, flood mitigation, and to promote general well-being.

Peter explained that we had secured a thousand oak tree saplings for planting and 400 more mixed saplings due in April, from the Woodland Trust. We have also bought canes and biodegradable tree guards.

The project is currently searching for suitable sites for larger scale tree planting. The sites where we have started planting are Alnwick Junior Football Pitches and the Duchess High School. Other options we are looking at include the old Alnwick Cricket Ground off Alwynside (400 trees), an area behind the Post Office sorting office (50 oaks), an area behind Aldi (50 oaks), the Lionheart Industrial Estate, Alnwick Moor – Freeman's Land, The Woodland Burial Site near Felton are happy for us to plant trees on their land.

We are also encouraging and facilitating individuals, community organisations and local churches and schools to plant trees on their land.

Peter reported that we had just been successful in attracting funding from Northumberland County Council and are waiting to hear about a grant application that had gone into Alnwick Town Council

Live for the Planet Leaflets

Jan pointed out that we have revised and reprinted our highly successful Live for the Planet leaflets which we plan to distribute wider, once lockdown is over.

Website

Brycchan reported on the formation of our new Communications Subgroup which we have set up to try to improve our communication flows with our supporters and a wider audience. Brycchan shared the new website on screen and talked us through it – he explained that we aim to add to it as we go along, and we welcome any ideas or articles for additional material.

We also have a new Twitter page which we mainly use as a noticeboard for the group and a new contact email account. Terry pointed out that our Facebook page still attracts a lot of views.

Clare said that email reminders for meetings would be a useful addition – Lisa said that we are trying to make better use of the website and Twitter for this kind of interaction with our supporters, in an effort to lessen some of the administrative workload.

Northumberland County Council (NCC) and Alnwick Town Council (ATC) Climate Emergency Plans

Martin outlined some of the main developments over the past year relating to NCC and ATC plans to reduce their carbon output.

NCC have drawn up a Climate Action Plan and aim to get to Net Zero emissions by 2030. The key elements of this plan involve promoting a wider awareness of the issue to the public – through the use of Climate Champions – researching and establishing lower carbon output heating schemes, encouraging sustainable, low carbon transport, promoting renewable energy schemes across the county, land use, and the reduction of waste.

Alnwick Friends of the Earth along with other local organisations have been involved in the Steering group which has promoted the Climate Action Plan and so have been directly involved in encouraging and pushing NCC to this position. We continue to network with other environmental groups to keep on the pressure.

ATC has a Climate Emergency and Environmental Subgroup which is going through a similar process and we now have representation on this group.

Clare asked if anything is being done around the wider issue of ‘nature’ at NCC, and not just climate change. Martin reported that there is a group working on peat sequestration but agreed that it was something we could be pushing more and that we are considering a campaign about NCC’s use of glyphosate. Lisa reported that National FoE has just launched a Nature campaign which we hope to respond to as their ideas develop.

What a Wonderful World Event (WaWW)

Sue reported on our involvement in a forthcoming event on October 23rd 2021 as part of the run up to COP26. The event has been conceived by Liz and Alistair Anderson who are part of a group called Green Light and will focus on using arts and performance to get across the climate emergency message to a wider audience.

Sue was originally invited through her involvement at the Playhouse, but Alnwick FoE is now a 'pillar' organization for the event. The original idea was for a 3-day festival focused around the Alnwick Garden and the Playhouse but Covid 19 has frustrated these plans. The group is presently working up a programme for the day event which will be open to the public and will take place at the Northumberland Hall. It will involve Duchess School, Alnwick Town Council, NCC, and other environmental organisations across the county. The main focus of the day will be an interview and a Q&A session with Anne Marie Trevelyan MP who has been given a key role in the COP26 event, information stalls, performance by Duchess students, music, and a panel of environmental 'experts'.

It is hoped to follow up this event with a weekend long festival, along similar lines, in 2022.

COP26 - the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties

Terry explained that COP26 will take place in Glasgow in November and we plan to be there. We have been invited to join the Climate Coalition – of which National FoE is part. This coalition is drawing up plans for activities within and around the conference and we hope to attend some of these events.

Financial Report

Sue presented a financial report for the last year (on screen)

The main expenditure and income for the year has been -

- Live for the Planet leaflet reprint - £85 but with a donation from Barter Books of £50 towards the reprint
- Hope Tree Project - £790 for trees, canes and guards – but this will be set against a forthcoming grant of £535 from NCC and awaiting a grant from ATC
- Payment for the website domain (£55.98)
- Payment for the extended Zoom account (£143.88)– this has been balanced by not having to pay for room hire for meetings since last March.

Sue felt that we were financially stable at the moment, but we need to be generating more income before too long.

Coordinator

Lisa has been coordinator for the group for the last five years and has now decided to stand down, though she will still be involved in the group. The meeting thanked her for all her hard work throughout this time.

General Contributions from the floor

Cath told the meeting that she had got involved with the group in September 2019 and had been heavily involved in the Plant for the Planet event. She said that she has really enjoyed her time and found the group to be very welcoming and supportive and she encouraged others who were thinking about getting more involved to do so.

Terry reported that he had been asked if we planned to do any litter picks this Spring?

Cathy thanked Martin for all his work with the NCC climate steering group.

The Committee

Brycchan explained that the Committee was the main core of the group who do the day-to-day admin and management of the group but that being a part of the 'conversation' was equally important. Meetings are open to all and that supporters (people who have signed up to our mailing list) are very welcome to feed into the agendas - the committee does have the final say on any decision.

Mike explained that we do have a series of 'subgroups' – so people who don't want to commit to a full business meeting can still be involved in specific FoE activities.

Election

The following people wished to continue to be part of the committee; Lisa, Brycchan, Mike, Cathy, Gillian, Martin, Sue, Terry, Jan, Cath, Peter, Eve – all agreed by the meeting.

As Lisa has now stood down, Sue will take up the role of link person to National FoE and Gillian will manage our email account.

There were no proposed changes to the Constitution.

The next Annual General Meeting will be on 2nd March 2022, when, hopefully, we will be able to meet in person!

Brycchan thanked everyone for attending and closed the AGM.