

# NORTHERN FELLS GROUP

## AGM MINUTES OCTOBER 7th 2020 via ZOOM

**THOSE PRESENT:** Geoff Batey, Diane Barraclough, Geoff Hine, Jenny Bland, Libby Graham, Barbara Stoddart, Philippa Groves, Keith Bridges, Andrew Rose, Tim Cartmell, Dianne Bowes, Mike Richardson, David and Antoinette Ward, Simon & Sue Braithwaite, Helen Sturges, Gill Skillicorn, Janet Cox, Richard de Robeck,

**APOLOGIES:** - - Amelia Nicholson Big Lottery Fund, Ellen Clements – Cumbria Community Foundation, Andrew Liddle – Saint & Co, Ian and Pat Shaw, Jim Cox, Diane Woodham, Malcolm & Mary Threlkeld, Steve Brockbank, Peter Pearson, Anne Burgess, Lionel & Susan Bidwell, Colin Addy, Peter Huntington

Last year's minutes were approved with no matters arising. Proposed by Jenny Bland and seconded by Tim Cartmell.

### **CHAIRMANS REPORT: -**

It is again my privilege and pleasure to report to the community on the work of the Northern Fells Group and to pay tribute to so many people. Strictly speaking this report should cover a period ending 31<sup>st</sup> March but if I confined myself to that then it would hardly reflect the new reality we are living with. At that date the pandemic cloud was over us but lockdown was only a week old.

We have had a very successful year but the statistics of activity pale against the forced suspension of so much of what we do, and the major modification of other activity. I want to pay tribute to and say a very warm thank you to all our staff and express my admiration and appreciation for the way in which they have all transitioned to a whole new way of operation.

My thanks go first to Diane Barraclough, our Company Secretary and Administrator, without whose skills and stamina we would not be operating so well. Our thanks to Libby Graham for her tireless and tremendously successful work in fund raising. To Simon Braithwaite not only for the smooth running of 'Lend a Hand' but for managing the huge expansion of our volunteer force to 191. He has also had huge input to our improving data management and recording. I want to thank Barbara, Gill, Helen and Philippa; our four Village Agents. Ken, our Shedmaster; Diane our Benefits Advisor and Amanda for the work she has done for the Northern Fells Dementia Action Alliance. I also want to thank Antoinette and Carol for their management of the minibus and for a host of other volunteers who made over thirty group activities thrive and grow during the year.

In July 2019 we were visited by the Regional Manager and our own case officer from the Big Lottery fund. I reported on this last year but its success was foundational for our subsequent well being. The new minibus was launched in October by Marcia Reid Fotheringham, the High Sherrif of the County. The cloud on the horizon was that our financial situation would deteriorate drastically if BLF funding did not renew or be replaced. Wingspan Consulting was engaged to provide an evaluation report on the work of the Village Agents, in accordance with terms laid down by the BLF. Such was the glowing nature of this evaluation that we were in

a good place when the application was submitted to the BLF early this year. By then the spectre of COVID was present.

The BLF short-cutted their usual process and we were awarded £222,000 over five years for the Village Agents and Men in Sheds. Further, they added an extra £15,000 which we had not applied for. This was targeted at work in the area of Dementia awareness and support. They have subsequently awarded us £13,800 for COVID work and we have had significant sums for same from Cumbria Community Foundation and the Princes Trust.

COVID hit and we went into lockdown. Activities shut down. It is a huge tribute to the organisation and all its staff that the Northern Fells Group has transitioned and still is achieving its objectives. We have proved to be resilient and this has achieved recognition from outside. However, there has been a cost. We have not been receiving income from activities or fund raising events. Sadly, children's programmes envisaged for Easter and Summer could not proceed. It may be some time before we discover what a new 'normal' will look like.

Looking ahead, the trustees may need to consider how we engage in partnership working with bodies whose geographical boundaries do not match those of the NFG. These have been tested in our support of the work of Caldbeck Surgery.

I close with more thanks and acknowledgements. For funding we are grateful to the Caldbeck Surgery Charitable Trust, Cumbria Community Foundation, The Big Lottery Fund, The Joyce Wilkinson Trust, The Prince's Countryside Fund, The Co-op Community Fund and others. The grants we receive from our Parish Councils are particularly appreciated because they are rooted in the community we serve.

A special mention for our small army of volunteers through 'Lend a Hand'. They have brought not just practical help to so many, but compassion and friendship.

Finally, my thanks to my fellow trustees for their work and for their support. A special mention to our treasurer, Geoff Batey, as he steps down. Thank you Geoff for your years of dedication and support; and for your words of wisdom in our meetings.

I am very proud to be a part of this organisation and am confident in its future success and achievements.

Geoff Hine

**Treasurers Report :-** I am pleased to present the Unaudited Annual Accounts for the Northern Fells Rural Community Development Group for the Year Ended 31.03.20.

These have been prepared by Andrew Liddle of Saint & Co of Penrith.

Total Funds for the Group stand at £77592 (page 18) a decrease of £8186 over the previous year and this represents the excess of Expenditure over Income for the year. The Funds of

£77592 reflects the current level of available funding which the group is able to benefit from. During the year we received the balance of a legacy which benefited our Funds by around £2400. The excess £8186 of Expenditure over Income in the financial year was anticipated due to the withdrawal of funding of our Core Activities by the Princes Trust. I am happy to report that Core Funding has now been restored from a different source for the coming financial year and that and that indications are that this will continue in future. We have also obtained funding through the Big Lottery for the next three years for Village and Men in Sheds. In the present financial climate this puts us in a very stable position. Incoming Resources at £116594 were £2277 higher than in 2019, the major part of this increase was the gain we made of £9685 on the disposal of the old Minibus which had to be replaced earlier than planned due to an accident. Our policy at the moment is to reduce our reserves to around 70% of our annual expenditure, so this is a step in the right direction. At 31 March this stood at 66.5%.

Resources Expended increased from £116958 in 2019 to £124780, an increase of £7822 which was mainly due to a spend of £5679 on an Evaluation Report for the Big Lottery. We are continually reviewing both Income and Expenditure as to whether it is necessary and if it is value for money. However we are mindful at all times of the aims and objectives of the Group and the responsibilities we have to those in need and to our employees. It is also important for us to continue to monitor and react to the criteria which funders are using to evaluate the needs and requirements of charities. We are presently considered by some funders to have sufficient resources and we are therefore finding it more difficult to obtain appropriate funding. With this in mind we are reducing the level of our total funds by funding some activities out of our reserves.

Our Net Current Assets (Page 19) decreased from £85778 to £77592 a decrease of £8186. We expect this reduction in Net Assets to continue in the current year because of our policy of financing some of our activities out of our own resources. We also had to purchase new Minibus in the financial year.

Financially we continue to be in positive position overall, our major commitments to Village Agents and Men in Sheds are funded until September 2023 by the Big Lottery and our Administration is funded until July 2021 by CCF.

It continues to be difficult to obtain new sources of funding with regular funders of recent years reviewing their criteria. We review our pay policy each year and have continued to implement pay rates at least equal to the Real Living Wage rates. This rate is higher than the National Living Wage and will mean that Wages and Salaries will continue to form a major part of our costs.

The Coronavirus only impacted the Group for part of March 2020 so has had little impact on these Accounts but the new financial year will be dominated by this virus and will mean a major upheaval in the way we work and the manner in which we finance and spend our funds. It will therefore be a major challenge to all our staff.

All Charities continue to be in a similar situation regarding funding and I sure there will continue to be more organisations chasing the fewer funds available.

I would therefore like to present these Accounts to the meeting for Approval but if there are any questions I will do my best to answer them.

**ADOPTION OF ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS:** - Our treasurer then recommended adoption of the accounts, proposed by Geoff Hine and seconded by Andy Rose. All were in favour.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS:-**

Nominations were asked for chair. Geoff Hine was proposed by Jenny Bland and seconded by Andy Rose. There were no other nominations and Geoff Hine was duly elected as Chair. All were in favour.

Nominations were asked for vice-chair. Tim Cartmell was proposed by Geoff Hine and seconded by Antoinette Ward. There were no other nominations and Tim Cartmell was duly elected. All were in favour.

Geoff Batey confirmed he was standing down as treasurer. Andy Rose had volunteered to take over proposed by Geoff Hine and seconded by Diane Barraclough. All were in favour.

The Parish Council representatives are:- Geoff Hine – Castle Sowerby, Peter Pearson - Sebergham & Welton, David Ward – Caldbeck, Keith Bridges – Ireby & Uldale, Steven Brockbank – Westward and Andrew Rose – Mungrisdale. Boltons is vacant.

The remaining trustees - Malcolm Threlkeld, Mike Richardson, Peter Huntington, Anne Burgess and Jenny Bland were proposed en-bloc by Geoff Hine and seconded by David Ward and were elected unanimously.

**ELECTION OF SECRETARY:** - Diane Barraclough was willing to continue as company secretary. She was proposed by Geoff Hine and seconded by David Ward.

**APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER:** - Geoff Hine proposed we continue with the present independent examiners, Saint & Co, this was seconded by Diane Barraclough.

**FIXING OF ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:** - Geoff Hine proposed it continued at £5.00 for single membership and £15.00 for families. This was seconded by Diane Barraclough and agreed unanimously.

There was no other business to discuss and Geoff Hine closed the meeting at 7:30 pm

Company Secretary. Diane Barraclough.

Chair. Geoff Hine.