BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST
21st Annual General Meeting Saturday, November 14th 2026
Backwell Parish Hall 2.00pm

Present:

Roy Ackrill, Marion Baddeley, Roger Baddeley, Ann Belcher, Mo Bowerman, Diana Bramall, Ian Chambers, Gillian Collinson, Hugh Dale, Jill Dale, Jane Elliott, Chris Elliott, Lindsey Evers, Paul Fricker, Patricia Gilbert, David Gray, John Hawley, Richard Ivens, Rosemary Lawson, David Legg, Peter Longden, Tony Medland, Michael Phillis Carrie Riches, Keith Riches, Andy Smith, Anne–Marie Smith, Peter Speight, Andrew Stagg, Michelle Stagg, Amanda Swannell, David Treleaven, Colin Welch, Denis Wilmott, Janet Wilmott, Graham Woods, Bernard Yeo.
(37 people)

Apologies from: Caroline Hoult, Sue Ivens, Viv French, Bob and Di Lee, Trevor Riddle. Bruce Stewart.

Peter started proceedings by remarking on how good it was to see so many of our members present. This is BET's 21st. year so we have now come of age! He then listed the order in which we would proceed. We would go through the business matters quite quickly, elect the trustees for the coming year, and then Ian will give a presentation of the work achieved on the Reserves. Finally there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions, before we take a break for tea and cake.

After tea we will have a talk by Martin Brasher, a long-time member of BET, who will be discussing problems with the Illegal Wildlife Trade that he has been following for many years.

2025 AGM Minutes – they were recorded by Anne-Marie and reviewed by the Trustees. They have been on the website since the last AGM and submitted to the Charity Commission website. We have received no comments and I am happy to confirm that they are an accurate record of the 2025 AGM proceedings.

Chairman's Report

The year has followed the usual pattern of work activities, with no special projects. However the wet stormy start to the year made tree felling and logging a difficult challenge. A wet but sunny April however produced magnificent wildflower displays across the reserves. This was shown on the big screen. The result of the exceptional summer heatwave however caused problems for our plants, and accelerated the demise of ash trees suffering from ash dieback disease. Many more trees will need to be felled for safety this winter.

Peter then proceeded on a more positive note by mentioning the benefit to butterflies. Another drawback however has been the exceptional growth of bramble needing to be dealt with. He praised our regular team of volunteers for their hard work which is so necessary to maintain our wildlife habitats. Also it is encouraging that we now have some enthusiastic younger people joining us. Recently, 21 volunteers on a Monday morning!

Treasurer's Report and Accounts

Peter then moved on to the accounts and report, on behalf of Andy, our Treasurer. A screen shot was shown for our members to see clearly. Peter pointed out that it was similar to previous years, and that our membership had remained steady. He also gave thanks for the many generous donations, pointing out that one member had even given his winter fuel allowance. Peter then drew attention to the Cambridge and County savings accounts which had yielded a healthy amount of interest.

The chart also showed our merchandise sales bearing the BET logo. Sales have now dropped off but a stock of sew-on badges are still available.

This year we have the added cost of commissioning a survey of the condition of all our trees, rather than the felling cost of the previous year. So we are expecting more to pay out in order to keep our woodlands safe.

It was pointed out that the bottom line showed that our bank balance had risen slightly over the past few years, which keeps us in a strong position to respond to unexpected opportunities or costs. We know that we will have hefty costs for both tree felling, and for the required work on the pathway to Badger's Wood viewpoint. So thanks was given for continuing financial support.

Finally, thanks was given to BET member and Independent Examiner Chris MacDonald, for reviewing our accounts and giving us a clean bill of health again.

Any Questions

The first question came from Tony Medland about the HM Land Registry charge. Peter explained that this was to do with the title deeds for the land we hold. The land is actually held by named trustees and because trustees come and go, we have a problem trying to keep things updated. So what we've done is we're making a move to have the land vested in the Official Custodian for Charities as a way around the problem. However nothing is simple and we now have to go through the process of updating the title deeds with the Land Registry. This is the first part, just making sure we have the right documents from them. We've now submitted the application with a £100 fee to make that transfer.

Another question was then asked about the profit and loss section. Peter replied that the receipts, less payments, equals the profits. It was then asked what the assets of the charity were. Peter explained that obviously the land value was the main asset, which we still have on our balance sheet valued at the original purchase cost. So that's the extra item we have. He said that when applying to the Land Registry, he had to estimate the current value which was roughly double, but it's very hard to estimate the value of a woodland which hopefully has no value for development, and is really just a conservation and community amenity.

Another question was then asked by Dave Gray about the fact that our bank charges are a fifth of what they were last year. Peter replied that it was due to HSBC, who out of the goodness of their heart, dropped their monthly charge. So the remaining charges are just basically 40p for every cheque that we pay in. It was then asked if that was because we are a charity? To which Peter said that as we have always been a charity account, it must be a change in the system. He assumes that this now applies to all charities that have HSBC accounts.

Peter then asked for someone to propose that the accounts were accepted as an accurate statement of our finances. Tony Medland did this, and it was carried unanimously.

Election of Trustees for the coming year

Each year current trustees stand down but are eligible for re-election. Unfortunately Jenny Greenslade is now unwell, so we are sorry to lose her as a long standing trustee. She has been a trustee for 18 years, with a particular passion for archeology. We would like to thank her for all her support, and to wish her well for the future. The rest of us have been proposed by BET members for re-election, and I have a piece of paper with the proposers signatures and our names on.

I am very pleased that Paul Fricker has agreed to join us as a new trustee. Paul knows the reserves and the wildlife very well, having lived next door for many years. He is also involved in monitoring developments in the quarry and maintains close contact with the Parish Council. As he is so good at the telling of jokes, maybe he should be our entertainment officer!.

The five elected trustees for the coming year are:

Ian Chambers:	proposed by Mark Grifton
Paul Fricker:	Proposed by David Elder
Andy Smith:	proposed by Sarah Davies
Anne-Marie Smith:	proposed by Michael Fishwick
Peter Speight:	proposed by Brian Smith

The election of the five trustees was put to a vote and accepted unanimously with no objections.

Peter was elected to be Chairman; Anne-Marie Smith as Secretary and Andy Smith as Treasurer.

Before Peter handed over proceedings to Ian, he said he was going to hijack the presentation. He told Ian that although he was assuming we were going to be discussing the one past year, in fact we would be going back over 20 years.

Ian has been a BET Trustee and Reserves Manager for a remarkable 20 years. He has been our woodland leader for all those years, directing our conservation projects and other initiatives, and producing over 50 brilliant bulletins, which we all enjoy. His knowledge and inspiration have been what's made BET so successful, and for us to have such a loyal band of followers doing all the hard work he gets them to do. So, in recognition of your 20 years as our Woodland Leader, I would like to give you this one-of-a-kind long service award.

The award was an engraved glass tankard which Ian was impressed by when Peter admitted to doing the engraving. Peter remarked that without Ian's leadership BET would not be as it is today, so sticking with us, and other local groups as well, Is truly remarkable.

Everyone in the hall then began clapping as a big thanks of appreciation to Ian for all he has achieved over those 20 years.

Reserves Manager Report

Ian then commenced our meeting by going through the work process of the last 12 months. He began by saying that we are now running into our sixth year of Ash Dieback disease. He explained that in the early days we were having to plan around 150 trees per year being felled, but this has gone significantly down now as we are past the worst of it. Every year Ian views the situation with our resident tree surgeon, but every five years a much more detailed report is commissioned, and this has been done this year. A preliminary report looks like about 40 trees will need to be felled urgently this winter due to the response to the hot months, loss of water and nutrients.

Another problem we have had, due to taking our eye off the situation for a while, is the very tall bracken growth. The National Trust has done research and found that if it is cut in June and August it knocks it back quite a lot. So this process will be tried this year.

The next work task that was mentioned was our constant need to cut back excessive growth along all the pathways, and steps. The trail that runs from the car park to Badgers Wood viewpoint has deteriorated considerably, we will be having a contractor in to put this right. Fortunately, Tarmac have kindly offered to give us free aggregate, so this will be a considerable saving.

The other thing we will be changing this year is the pond water storage. There are two ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood, and with the summer we have had they have not been able to keep their water. For the last 20 years we've had 16 ash bins hidden in the woods, covered with tarpaulins, which we collect water to use in the summer months. Now that they have reached the end of their useful life, we have decided to replace them with robust 1,000 litre containers to improve winter collection, and summer top-ups for the ponds.

The other thing we have been doing is our many wildlife surveys. A bat survey using an ultrasonic detector was installed in mid-October; the results of which will be reported on in the next bulletin.

The Clouded Yellow, a Mediterranean migrant, was everywhere this year – a first for me in 40 years of wildlife work. During a survey with Viv French, a fast, bright orange butterfly flew overhead; I suspected it was a Clouded Yellow, and after initial doubt we confirmed it. They became common in the following weeks. The highest figure we have ever recorded on past surveys was 390 butterflies, but this year we recorded 946.

This has been another excellent year for BET volunteers: nearly 2,500 hours logged, including a record 21 volunteers attending last Monday's work morning. Ian then said that their unstinting help is vital and gave a huge thank to all involved.

Richard Ivens asked a question about the state of play regarding Ash Dieback.

Ian observed that all ash trees on the reserve are diseased; some died within 18 months, others survive after six years – a positive sign. None are immune, but some cope better. He hopes to save the tree by the Jubilee stone: despite annual infection, its airy position limits canopy loss to 30–40% – below the 50% felling threshold – so it may endure.

Hugh Dale then asked a question regarding the Cave and if there had been any developments.

Peter answered this. For 10–12 years we've been promised the cave and 75 acres for BET; despite letters, there's no reply. Peter surveyed the site with a drone and the photo was shown of the 15 industrial units and warehouses at Stoneforge Works which Savills hopes to sell.

Peter then said he had walked round the rear of the site, and there was the cave, bathed in sunshine and looking lovely. A well-used path attracts many visitors; we'd love to secure the untouched cave and the peninsula area. As Ian notes, it's been promised but ownership is unclear; Lancer Scott Directors bought the quarry, but the company has changed hands over the years.

He also viewed the old quarry. North Somerset Council has ruled that a screening application requires an environmental impact assessment, which will take time. The Environment Agency deems it high risk due to potential aquifer contamination affecting Bristol's water supply. The plan is to fill the hole with 430,000 cubic metres of material – rising from 70 to 110 feet. This is claimed to be clean, but the Agency cannot verify sources or risks and currently objects. A full application will follow, then public consultation; none is open yet.

BET is a designated Site of Nature Conservation interest (SNCI). Although lacking legal protection, it attracts Natural England's attention. Paul regularly liaises with the Parish Council; no further comments were offered.

Two points: after a hack, we rebuilt the website on a new platform. Peter has updated the content using past bulletins and photos to create a 20-year archive. It should serve as a repository.

Secondly, he recommended Viv's bimonthly blog on birds, butterflies and her other sightings such as a weasel crossing Cheston Combe Road.

Finally, our anniversary Quiz Trail launched last July, was enjoyed by Martin and Liz, who repeated it with their grandchildren. Given the effort involved, we are relaunching it for Christmas: a walk around the reserves to work off festive food. It will be on the website.

The meeting was then adjourned for tea and cakes, after which Martin would give his talk.