Friends
Of
Leckhampton Hill &
Charlton Kings Common

Annual General Meeting 2026

Notice is hereby given of the 27th Annual General Meeting of The Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) to be held at The Wheatsheaf, Old Bath Road, Leckhampton at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 10 November 2026.

AGM PAPERS

The majority of the papers for this meeting (Agenda, Minutes of 2025 AGM, Annual Report and Accounts, Committee Nomination Form) can be accessed from the e-mail.

If you still receive your newsletter in paper form, AGM papers will have been delivered to you.

COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

An up-to-date paper showing the names of individuals either already sitting on FOLK's Executive Committee or nominated for election this year can be found on the FOLK website.

If you are a member of FOLK, you may nominate yourself or any other member.
Acceptance of a nomination implies that the nominee agrees to act in the interests of FOLK.
Should you wish to submit a nomination, please email the Secretary using the details below or send using the details given on the Committee Nomination form **by 28 October**.

If no further nominations are received, the election of those presently incumbent or nominated will be assumed.

Apologies for absence should be sent by e-mail to the Secretary at leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

Annual General Meeting 2026 – Agenda

26.8 Welcome

26.9 Apologies for Absence

27.0 Approval of Minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting held on 13 November 2025

27.1 Matters arising from Minutes

27.2 Annual Report for 2026 (previously circulated)

27.2.1 PowerPoint Presentation of Report

27.2.2 Answers to previously submitted questions

27.2.3 Requested acceptance of Report

27.3 Accounts for 2026* (previously circulated)

27.3.1 Highlights of the Treasurer's report will be included in the Annual Report's PowerPoint Presentation

27.3.2 Answers to previously submitted questions

27.3.3 Requested acceptance of Report

27.4 Election of Officers and Executive Committee

27.5 Any other Business

The formal business of the meeting will be followed by a presentation on **Cotswolds: Field & Folk, an illustrated talk by Cotswolds National Landscape** (CNL), showcased by our guest speaker, Rebecca Waite, Chief Executive of CNL.

*Unaudited at the time of distribution.

FOLK AGM 2025

Minutes of the Twenty-sixth Annual General Meeting of
The Friends of Leckhampton and Charlton Kings Common
on 13 November 2025 at the Wheatsheaf, Old Bath Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham

25.9 Opening and Welcome

The Chair, Mike Donnelly, opened the meeting at 7.05pm. He welcomed the 50 members present, including 6 Committee members, and the guest speaker. He noted that all papers relevant to the meeting had been circulated to members and had been available on the FOLK website.

26.0 Apologies for Absence

Apologies from Andrew Bishop, Tony Duffin, Dianne James, Adrian Phillips and Orlagh Phipps were noted.

26.1 Approval of Minutes of the 25 Annual General Meeting held on 12 November 2024

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

26.2 Matters arising from Minutes

There were no matters arising.

26.3 Annual Report for 2024/2025

The Chair gave a Power Point presentation which summarised issues covered in the previously circulated Annual Report and Treasurer's Report. The themes reported on included

- FOLK's origins: this year is the 25th anniversary of FOLK; it was the vision of the first FOLK Executive Committee that was the foundation for where we were today and its success could be measured in many ways, e.g.
  - significant longevity for a not-for-profit conservation project
  - FOLK's conservation management had brought much recognition, including awards, along the way;
  - solid foundations of strong organisation, robust finances, partnership working and excellent team work;
  - continued investment in enabling our people to deliver.
- FOLK's aims and objectives: FOLK's reputation had been built upon a long track record of volunteering work dedicated to the conservation of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton King's Common, with the primary focus on management that delivered
  - habitat improvement and increased biodiversity;
  - improved site access and facilities.
- Key touchstones:
  - delivering our conservation and education objectives;
  - supporting the widest recreational use of the land;
  - promoting the site's SSSI status and natural treasures;
  - our role in liaising and consulting with site owner's trustees and the site's many user groups.

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- Highlights of 2024/25: continued successful grazing regime, nomination of the site as a National Nature Reserve, purchase of more stone for the continuation of building the dry stone wall by the Coltswold Wardens, and production of the 25th anniversary edition of FOLKtalk newsletter.
- FOLK activities: roll out of important deliverables relating to work parties and development of the management plan:
  - the appointment of six work party coordinators which was working well;
  - improved communications and involvement with all volunteers;
  - increase in number of volunteers;
  - increased partnership working with Cheltenham Borough Council and Natural England;
  - significant volunteer hours had been invested in the latest Cheltenham Borough Council management plan by the steering group and this document had now completed its first phase;
  - the management plan project was now with Cotswold Natural Landscapes for amalgamation with the National Nature Reserve Management Plan.
- Partnership projects:
  - National Grid's Restoring Cheltenham's Escarpment Grassland (RCEG) project had been completed with additional funding securing the continuation of the dry stone wall extension;
  - strong working relationship with Cheltenham Borough Council, with the CBC Senior Ranger and two Cheltenham Borough Councillors attending committee meetings;
  - close working with the Cotswold Wardens, clearing vegetation and debris from the old wall in progression for the next phase; the Cotswold Wardens contributed 1003 volunteer hours building the dry stone wall from Hartley Lane to the Hill Fort and another 398 hours on projects on the Common this year;
  - supporting the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust with their corridor strategy of linking rich diversity habitats across the county, helping to improve conditions for adders, butterflies, etc. adjacent to the Hill Fort.
- FOLK people: statistics included FOLK membership 523; FOLK Facebook subscribers 3,200; a total of FOLK volunteer hours 2,809 which included 1,769 hours working on the hill, time given to meetings, report preparation and admin, production of the FOLKtalk Newsletter, preparing for and attending events, web site management, and hours given by volunteers to attend training courses.
- Works on the site:
  - restoring and upgrading paths;
  - rebuilding and extending dry stone walls;
  - improving and repairing fencing;
  - lime kiln conservation project.
- Looking forward:
  - a focus on youth particularly with High School Leckhampton and Cheltenham Bournside School;
  - specialist training for work party tools, brush cutters, etc. and first aid;
  - enhancing our conservation management skills with use of the new management plan;
  - major challenges included increasing costs and recruitment of committee members and officers.

- ***FOLK AGM 2025 p3***

  The presentation included highlights of the Treasurer's Report for the financial year 1 October 2024 – 30 September 2025:

  - Income for full year £2,186
  - Expenditure for full year £3,014
  - Deficit/Shortfall for full year (£828)
  - FOLK Reserves at 30 September 2025 £3,245
  - Subscriptions were not collected from members and therefore FOLK relied upon the generous support of local individuals and grants from organisations to fund activities.
  - Grants and donations from organisations and individuals totalled £2,158 in the year, all relating to funding of specific projects. Part of the funds raised in 2023/24 had been earmarked for planned expenditure in 2024/25.
  - Unexpected expenses of bank charges and website costs levied for the first time, together with increased insurance costs, had resulted in a shortfall in the year and a reduction in FOLK reserves. These were considered to be an adequate buffer against future shocks.
  - FOLK would be seeking fresh funding to meet the increased level of operational overheads and would also endeavour to reduce overall costs.

  The Chair expressed his thanks on behalf of FOLK to the following for their financial support in the last 12 months:

  - Local individuals.
  - Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council with a grant towards overheads.
  - Cotswolds National Landscapes with a grant towards overheads.
  - Chalton Kings Parish Council for the free use of Stanton Hall for FOLK meetings.
  - It was noted that FOLK had previously received grants from Shurdington Parish Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Cheltenham Borough Council.

  The Annual Report and the Treasurer's Report were accepted.

26.4 Accounts for 2024/25

The Treasurer's Report in respect of the financial year 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025 had been circulated to all members and summarised in the presentation referred to above.

26.5 Election of Officers and Executive Committee

The Chair began this section of the meeting by displaying an image showing the current membership of the Committee and indicating which members did not wish to be re-elected, and advised of some amendments to the slide. The main changes to the Committee were the retirement of Peter Whalley who had been a valued member of the Committee for many years, and Mike Donnelly's retirement from the role of Chair. There were three nominations to the Committee – John Harvey, to be reappointed, and two new nominations from Ruth Cook and Julian Jones. The Chair advised that there were still three vacancies on the committee, and the role of Chair was vacant. He stressed that without an adequate number of officers and active committee members FOLK's future could be at risk. He invited nominations from the floor, but none were forthcoming. The election of Ruth Cook and

Julian Jones, together with giving the Committee authority to fill any vacancies and appoint a Chair, was proposed by Serena Meredith and seconded by Peter Niblett. The Chair thanked all members and retiring member of the Committee for their support and hard work over the previous year. The Committee included two Councillor representatives nominated by Cheltenham Borough Council and the Senior Community Ranger, CBC. The Chair welcomed Cllr. Martin Horwood who was new to the role. Thanks were also extended to Martin Wood, Newsletter Editor and Tim Sugrue, Webmaster

The final list of Officers and Committee Members was as follows:

Chair – vacancy

Mark Dowie, Treasurer

Rachel Watson, Secretary

Andrew Bishop, Ruth Cook, Julian Jones, Clive Lewis, John Harvey, Morgan Miller and co-opted Members Mike Donnelly (automatically co-opted) and Peter Niblett.

26.7 Any Other Business

A question was asked regarding the implications for the Hill of creating a unitary council in Gloucestershire and what discussions, if any, there had been. Cheltenham Borough would cease to exist and therefore might the Parish Councils, with their role of neighbourhood representatives, provide FOLK with lobbying opportunities. The Chair advised that, as yet, no firm decisions had been made in this regard and observed that the two representatives on the Committee who were Cheltenham Borough Councillors were also Gloucestershire County Councillors, thus providing continuity.

To mark the retirement of Mike Donnelly from the role of FOLK Chair, Peter Niblett gave a speech thanking MD for his many years of dedicated work on behalf of FOLK and Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Community Ranger, presented the gift of a painting by local artist, Susie Gilbert, to Mike and his wife, Monica, from the membership.

There being no other business, the Chair closed the meeting at 7.50pm, after which there was an extremely interesting presentation by Giles Alder, Volunteer Coordinator/Reserve Manager of Tewkesbury Nature Reserve and Conservation Officer of Cleeve Common Trust.

FOLK Annual Report – 2025 / 2026

FOREWORD

FOLK continues to support the management of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common. Much has changed since FOLK was formed, but the positive improvements over that time has been appreciated by users of the site, Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) as owners of the land, walking and cycling communities including the Disabled Ramblers Association, and various conservation organisations such as Natural England and Cotswolds Natural Landscape.

The work of FOLK volunteers, either participating in work parties, surveying flora and fauna, cow spotting, or those who work behind the scenes planning and advising activities, contribute to maintaining and improving the rare habitats and species, geology and archaeology for which the site is recognised. Our thanks must go to all the volunteers and members of the Executive committee, both past and present, for the thousands of voluntary hours given to maintain and preserve the Hill and Common.

(Acting) Chairman's Highlights 2025 – 2026

This has been another successful year for FOLK with so many positive things to highlight.

National Nature Reserve (NNR): A prestigious award, as part of the series of 25 NNRs instigated by the King. This is a significant accolade as the new **Cheltenham Escarpment NNR** is one of only 225 throughout the UK, and recognition for CBC, FOLK and other groups for their hard work and dedication over many years. It was apparent from the well-attended event to mark the new designation, just how much the Hill/Common means to so many people and for so many reasons. The ecology, archaeology and geology make this Site of Special Scientific Interest a wonderful place in which to enjoy a range of leisure pursuits.

Work Plan: This was completed recently and will enable FOLK to plan and prioritise tasks more effectively, as well as record work undertaken and measure outputs. The Plan was written by the Glorious Cotswolds Grassland team and based on the Management Plan produced for CBC last year.

Teamwork: I think we can be proud of our work parties and the enthusiasm and hard work displayed by an increasing number of volunteers. Team working is key. One exceptional example: the prolonged dry spell has meant that the saplings planted in a reversion field last autumn were in danger of dying. In response to a CBC request, a number of volunteers came forward to keep the trees watered and organised a rota to do so. Result - saplings saved.

Walks: To mark our new NNR status FOLK organised two walks to celebrate the ecology and geology of the Cheltenham Escarpment. We organised a Flora and Fauna ramble in June. The weather was glorious, the wildflowers provided a colourful carpet across the Escarpment and a kaleidoscope of butterflies were present throughout. This was followed in July with an informative and entertaining Geology walk which was led by Stephen Peacock, for which many thanks. Both walks were well attended and donations from attendees were gratefully received, which contribute towards the costs of running FOLK.

Training: We continue to invest in our volunteers by funding training. For example, a number have attended a brush cutter course, followed by on-the-job training on tasks. In addition, and as part of the Management Plan, ten people received plant identification training on site. This was delivered by the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team. The aim is to arm the volunteers with knowledge, to survey particular areas of the site for key species.

Partnerships: Our work with High School Leckhampton (HSL) and the Green Spaces Team from CBC is proving successful in many ways. Specifically, fly orchids and other wildflowers are now growing in an area of grassland on the western side of the Common - this is a result of an ongoing project to clear the area of gorse and open up the grassland for grazing.

Finances: We have been successful in securing money from a variety of sources this year. This has ensured that FOLK remains in good financial health and also allows us to fund training, purchase tools and meet other commitments.

2026 and Beyond

As mentioned above, earlier this year we celebrated being awarded the status as a National Nature Reserve (NNR). Whilst we may continue to refer to the area as Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, new Cheltenham Escarpment NNR signage will be appearing at prominent locations. Rest assured, FOLK has no plans to change its name!

A Work Plan for the NNR is now in place. It will help prioritise conservation work across the site and is divided into two major components - Grassland and Woodland. FOLK, the Cotswold Wardens, as well as contractors when necessary, will carry out tasks under the management of CBC. A Geology Plan, written by Natural England, will also be implemented - the majority, but not all work, to be carried out by contractors. The aim is to maintain and improve the unique nature of the Hill and Common in terms of its ecology, geology and archaeology, whilst also allowing access for walkers, cyclists and other users.

In the years to come we may face challenges which affect the nature of the hill, and our activities will undoubtedly need to change in response. Recent hot and dry spells of weather will likely become the norm, which could adversely affect the delicate balance of the ecology. Becoming an NNR could result in greater awareness and increased footfall. Whilst the principles of the Work Plan may not change, how we respond will depend on our past and current experience in looking after the site, and what we can learn from regular surveys of species' numbers.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

FOLK Activities 2025 -2026

The work party coordinators, with the aid of planning meetings and a WhatsApp group for all the volunteers, plan and administer the work parties. Two new work party leaders have been added to the coordinating team. FOLK work parties are very well supported with volunteers. Focusing on conservation and access, we work in cooperation with Cheltenham Borough Council and Natural England.

The majority of work party activities involve the removal of invasive plants and shrubs such as hemp agrimony, ragwort, gorse and cotoneaster, in order to expose the underlying calcareous limestone grassland. Areas of gorse have also been cleared to create new fire-breaks; there are now seven fire-break areas compared to only two ten years ago and in these areas regeneration of wildflowers is evident. Hemp agrimony has been reduced to roughly 50% over the past few years; however the aim is not to eradicate it completely as it is a habitat and food source for many insect species. Other activities include maintaining the Cotswold stone walling by removal of bramble, ivy and wild clematis which, if left to grow, would threaten the wall structure. By way of contrast, this past year has seen volunteers planting trees and saplings in the reversion fields, and near the hill fort to replace near end-of-life larch trees that were felled to create an adder habitat. Volunteers have regularly watered these trees and saplings to help them become established, and with increasing frequency during the exceptionally hot and dry conditions earlier this year. Volunteers also sowed wildflowers on the field edges to the south of the site boundary, with the kind permission of the neighbouring farmer.

Partnership Projects

We continue to work with the Cotswold Wardens, contributing volunteer hours clearing gorse to create larger firebreaks and clearing vegetation and debris from the old wall in preparation for the building of the next phase. The Cotswold Wardens have contributed 1,010 volunteer hours building the dry stone wall from Hartley Lane to the Hill Fort and contributed another 445 hours on a number of projects on the Commons.

FOLK members regularly survey the site to monitor butterfly numbers on behalf of the CBC and their results are passed to the Butterfly Conservation Trust. FOLK members have surveyed wildflower populations to support the Glorious Grasslands project for Cotswolds Natural Landscape. It is expected that these botanical surveys will take place annually between April and July over the next 5 years.

FOLK volunteers have, for a number of years, supported CBC Green Space team and HSL staff, giving pupils the opportunity to learn about the management of the hill. Twice yearly around 30 pupils are invited to take part in gorse clearance on an area of the common. As a result of their work, grassland has recovered and biodiversity improved.

We continue to work in partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council, with the CBC Senior Ranger attending the FOLK Executive Committee meetings. The meetings are also attended by two nominated Borough Councillors.

FOLK People

During the past 12 months we have again witnessed yet another extraordinary example of drive and generosity from our friends and volunteers, delivering another full calendar of work party events and partnership conservation results. We are indebted to members, volunteers and the Committee for a staggering 3,485 volunteer hours provided free of charge.

FOLK membership currently sits at 576, and is offered free of charge. We are developing our communications across our various stakeholder groups: the Facebook page remains extremely

popular as a channel for news and debate on local 'Hill' issues, and now has over 3,900 registered followers; FOLK's own website delivers a deep wealth of information to our members, and the regular FOLK Newsletter delivers articles and updates of interest to users and visitors.

We delivered an impressive, well-attended 35 supervised Working Parties in the year, across all seasons and these, together with butterfly and botanical surveys, contributed 1,919 volunteer hours of work on the commons. There is increasing support from a steady stream of new volunteers. Keeping the site in top condition and under control from invasive scrub and gorse is a never ending challenge, but allows open access to visitors and users across the site.

Aside from physical tasks, there are other ways for FOLK volunteers to get involved. We are looking to recruit members to the Executive Committee, particularly anyone with an interest in or knowledge of wildlife, conservation, or other skills that may be useful to publicise the aims and activities of FOLK

LOOKING FORWARD

We are committed to delivering our core conservation and education objectives, supporting the widest recreational use of the land and promoting the site's incredible SSSI status and natural treasures, which has rightly led to receiving NNR status. We recognise the importance of FOLK's role in liaising and consulting with the owners, trustees and the site's various user groups. Our partnership projects with local schools will continue to deliver education and 'in the field' experiences to local young people, whilst specialist training delivered to our volunteers will enhance our own conservation management skills

After 26 successful years, we continue to see many opportunities going forward but we also face some major challenges which demand our immediate attention:

1. The increasing costs of running FOLK and our work party activities, and the impact of new charges for insurance, banking and website, all of which requires funding. Thanks to the Parish Councils for their continued financial support.
2. Recruitment of committee members and officers, together with those willing to support the Committee with specific roles, without whom we cannot deliver on FOLK's programme of conservation and education activities.
3. The past year has been exceptionally hot and dry, leading to cancellation of some work parties during extreme heat periods and fewer fires to dispose of cleared gorse and scrub. Grassland used to graze cattle is less abundant.

In the longer term, we need to address the potential impacts of Local Government Re-organisation, which could result in changes that disrupt our relationships with CBC Green Space team and Parish Councils, and consider how conservation management might be affected by the effects of climate change.

FOLK is well-placed to meet those challenges, and we will continue to deliver our ambitions by working closely with the local partners who have supported us supremely with their generosity. However, we need a new generation of members and committee officials to take FOLK forward – so if you can, please come and join us, and help to deliver those next 25 years!

Financial Year Report 1st October 2025 – 30th September 2026

Highlights. Full Treasurer's Report with AGM Papers

Total income for full year	£3,351.58	up 53% on 2024-2025
Total expenditure for full year	£3,195.28	up 6% on 2024-2025
Surplus / (Deficit if in red) for full year	£156.30	
FOLK cash reserves at 30th September 2026	£3,401.28	up 5% on 30 September 2025

FOLK does not collect subscriptions from members and as a result relies on the generous support of local individuals and organisations to fund activities. Grants and donations from organisations, corporates, individuals and FOLK fund-raising social events such as our popular series of Guided Walks on the Hill, totalled £3,341 in this year. This income supports our conservation activities which includes overheads of significant insurance costs, hosting of our excellent website resource and training of volunteers within the FOLK community.

This year has seen a significant improvement in Full Year position, moving from a trading deficit of £828.31 to a surplus of £156.30, fulfilling the Treasurer's stated aim that funding initiatives would be sufficient and timely in this financial year to deliver a year-end surplus. This had been achieved by (i) effective fund raising effort with full-year income received up by 53% on the previous year and (ii) a year-on-year increase in expenses limited to just 6%, a significant achievement given the unavoidable 32% increase in insurance costs, an essential spend to cover conservation activities. Overheads also include a sizeable fee for the hosting of our excellent website resource. Our Reserves have also improved by 5%, providing an adequate (but not excessive) and prudent buffer against any unexpected financial shocks. We have not pursued funding simply for the sake of building our bank balances, but have taken up funding opportunities to fund essential running costs and agreed expenditure, e.g. towards the purchase of new tools.

There has been a significant spend of £950 on training in the year as part of our Investment in People strategic initiative which aims to up-skill our members and volunteers, e.g. safeguarding our work teams in the safe use of tools and materials; equipping the FOLK community with wildflower identification recording and monitoring skills to support our habitat improvement goals.

Our thanks to the following for their continuing interest and financial support.

Local Individuals and FOLK members.
Charlton Kings Parish Council
Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council.
Shurdington Parish Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Gloucestershire County Council
Cotswolds National Landscape
Cheltenham Lottery

Status of current FOLK Officers and Committee Members and Nominations for 2026

The 2026 AGM is required to elect the following:

- Up to 4**,** the election of whom will bring the Committee to its maximum size of eleven.
- The COMMITTEE may co-opt up to 3 members, at a Committee meeting.
- Nominations should be with the Secretary 14 days before the AGM.
  However, if there are more vacancies than nominations, then nominations may be accepted from the floor of the meeting.

	Current	**Term**	**Comments**
	Chair - Vacancy		(term is up to five years)
1	Treasurer – Mark Dowie	2022 - 2026	To be re-appointed*
2	Secretary – Rachel Watson	2023 - 2026	To be re-appointed*
3	Ruth Cook	2025 - 2028	Term is up to three years
4	Clive Lewis	2023 - 2026	To be re-appointed*
5	Julian Jones	2025 - 2028	Term is up to three years
6	John Harvey	2025 - 2028	Term is up to three years
7	Morgan Miller	2024 - 2027	Standing down*
8	Peter Niblett *(Acting Chair)*	2026 - 2029	Term is up to three years

Mike Donnelly automatically co-opted for one year from AGM 2025 *(G5 of constitution). Confirmed at Committee meeting of 2.12.25.*

*To seek re-election or standing down AGM 2026

CBC representatives – Councillor Angie Boyes and Councillor Julia Chandler

Tim Sugrue – Webmaster

Martin Wood – Editor of FOLKtalk

Peter Whalley – Membership Secretary

Friends
Of
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Charlton Kings Common

27TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, 10 November 2026, beginning at 7pm.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

PLEASE NOTE: If you are a member of FOLK, you may nominate yourself or any other member. Acceptance of a nomination implies that the nominee agrees to act in the interests of FOLK.

I would like to nominate the following person for **Chair/ Vice Chair /Secretary/ Treasurer** (delete as appropriate):

Nominee:	Please print name	**Proposed by:** n/a if nominating self	Please print name
Signature:		**Signature:**	

I would like to nominate the following person as a **Member of the Executive Committee.**

Nominee:	Please print name	**Proposed by:** n/a if nominating self	Please print name
Signature:		**Signature:**	

Please complete and return this form to the Secretary, FOLK, 33 Meadowsweet Road, CHELTENHAM, GL53 0AS or by email to leckhamptonhill@gmail.com by Tuesday, 28 October.