

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE AGM
held on Thursday 26 February 2026
at Chartham Park**

Present:

Lucie Ager, In-Line Safety
Jane Axford, Delta Security Management
John Bardsley, InterGo Group
Fiona Bewers, EGBA business manager
Nick Blythe, EGBA Committee & Paella Fella
Peter Brooks, Felbridge & Sunnyside Cricket Club
Lorraine Chalk, In-Line Safety
Helen Farren, EG Town Council
Lee Farren, EGBA Committee, BGL & MSDC
Ian Gibson, MSDC
Jenny Green, EG Jazz Festival
Darren Greenaway, Greenaway Residential
Charmaine Hallmark, EGBA Committee
John Hallmark, Hallmark Travel
Nancy Holmes, EMS Design & Print
Nicolette Howard, The Atrium (Uckfield Picture House)
David Kent, Being Neighbourly/EG Jazz Festival
Louise Lucas, The Colour Suite
John McManus
Rebecca Newman, Caravan and Motorhome Club
Steve Ody, True Potential Wealth Management
Graham Radford, Felbridge & Sunnyside Cricket Club
Matt Rew, East Grinstead Memorial Estate
Lloyd Richards, East Grinstead Memorial Estate
Peter Robinson, Robinson Elliott Surveyors
Grahame Russell, EGBA Committee (Chair)
Julia Russell, Kicks Dance
Stuart Scholes, EGBA Committee
Jack Smith, Merranti Accounting
Tim Thompson, EGBA Committee & Imberhorne School
Rex Whittaker, EGBA Committee, EG Town Council & MSDC

1. Apologies

Received from Karen Brown, Mims Davies MP, Fiona Humphreys, John Plumb, Christine Wise, and Aaron Woolhouse.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the AGM held on 26 February 2025 were approved.

3. Chair's welcome

Grahame Russell, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and thanked the management and staff at Chartham Park for hosting. He had received apologies from co-Chair Mims Davies MP who was

out of the constituency. She had sent over a report which he read to the members. He was delighted to relay the good news just received that Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) had voted to remove the evening parking charges from its car parks. This was welcomed as a great success story for EGBA's campaign and petition back in 2024, and continued pressure for MSDC to review and improve the parking offer in the town.

4. **Mims Davies MP**

Mims started her report by addressing the **current challenges** faced by businesses. The British Retail Consortium's survey of retail CFOs found that 69% are pessimistic. Youth unemployment in the UK is now above the EU average. As Mims chairs the All-Parliamentary Party Group (APPG) on Youth Employment this is deeply worrying and she will be holding the government to account. Economic growth has remained sluggish with GDP growth of 0.1% in the three months to December, after a fall of 0.1% in the three months to November, while the rate of inflation is rising.

Business rates – in the Autumn Budget 2025, the Chancellor set out a new system of five separate multipliers. Three general multipliers: small (43.2p), standard, (48p), and higher (50.8p), as well as two retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) multipliers: small (38.2p) and standard (43p). The Chancellor also announced a £4.3 billion support package over the next three years for sites facing a large increase in their rates bill. The Chancellor claims this will permanently lower tax rates for 750,000 RHL properties. However, for most smaller operators in this sector the changes amount to an increase of 5-15% in business rates next year because rates discounts for small RHL properties have been cut from 40% to an average of 11%. She said that according to the Financial Times, average rateable values have risen 76% for hotels, 30% for pubs, and 14% for restaurants – and 3,480 retail properties will pay an extra £112 million in rates in April 2026. Following immense pushback from industry and the Opposition the Government announced plans to mitigate the impact of business rates on pubs.

Mims reported that she was pleased to launch a new **APPG for Southeast and Gatwick Diamond Growth Gateway** with the aim of building consensus, driving investment, and growth for the benefit of communities throughout the region. This APPG serves as the primary cross-party platform dedicated to the area's economic and social vitality.

She has launched a petition on **Water Compensation for Businesses** affected by the outages in January, and invited members present to sign if they wished. She was grateful for everyone's support with this which she will present to the House of Commons.

Her report ended by saying how her party have a plan to save British farming and work with farmers to give them certainty and confidence to plan and invest.

5. **Financial report**

Newly-appointed EGBA Treasurer, Jack Smith, had kindly stepped in to provide an income and expenditure summary for the year ending 31 December 2025. This showed a profit of £924.03 on the period which is in line with anticipated outcome.

6. Committee members

Grahame reported on some changes to Committee membership as a result of some standing down, and others up for re-election having completed their 3-year term of office.

He was personally sad that **Stuart Scholes** was stepping down from the committee after around 13 years of dedicated service, including three in what was then a Chief Executive role. He had been a great help and mentor. Stuart has agreed to be EGBA's first non-executive director, so we look forward to many more years of his sage advice and support. As many know, Stuart is a fantastic ambassador for East Grinstead. He had a major role in the vision which led to the installation of the McIndoe statue in front of Sackville College and was instrumental in promoting the town via his vision for a 'Station to Statue' route to encourage visitors into the centre from the mainline station and Bluebell Railway. Stuart said he had really enjoyed being part of the committee and felt its fresh direction was making a real difference.

Lee Farren was also reluctantly stepping down due to his other demanding roles in the town and district including as a trustee of East Grinstead Sports Club and district councillor for Mid Sussex. Lee had been voted onto the committee in 2015 and had accepted the position as 'temporary' CEO which had lasted six years! Grahame thanked Lee for his excellent service which included bringing together the other mid Sussex business associations, and his invaluable technical support. Lee replied that it had been a great pleasure and he was confident he was leaving EGBA in safe hands.

Charmaine Hallmark had served on the committee for over 10 years under three different chairs. She had been persuaded to extend her tenure for another year which had just ended. Grahame thanked her for her expertise, flexibility, offers of help and willingness to contribute. Charmaine said she had thoroughly enjoyed her time, and felt there was a real buzz around current actions and visions for the town, sparked by EGBA.

All three will remain as EGBA members and on hand to support.

There was just one committee member up for re-election, **Darren Greenaway** of Greenaway Residential and the Greenaway Foundation. Darren was happy to serve for another three-year term and was duly proposed by Stuart Scholes, and seconded by Lee Farren. John Plumb of Plumb Digital Media who had been introduced at last year's AGM had subsequently been co-opted. He was formally proposed by Darren Greenaway, seconded by Stuart Scholes.

Three new committee members were elected for a 3-year term:

Christine Wise of Utility Warehouse was proposed by Tim Thompson, seconded by Lee Farren.
Louise Lucas of The Colour Suite was proposed by Lee Farren, seconded by Stuart Scholes.
Jack Smith of Merranti Accounting proposed as treasurer by Lee Farren, seconded by Stuart Scholes.

Louise outlined what she would bring to EGBA in terms of refreshed brand assets and her experience with a range of clients as a fractional designer. The EG community is very important to her and she is one of the co-founders of HerMove which encourages the continued participation of women and girls in sport and physical activities at all life stages.

Working for a local accountancy business, Jack is keen to help more local businesses as an essential part of a vibrant, local community.

Grahame thanked all and looked forward to working with them in the coming months.

7. Appointed charity

GR invited Darren Greenaway to say a few words about the **Greenaway Foundation**. Grahame also revealed that EGBA would be nominating a second local charity.

Darren introduced the charity to those who were not aware of the work it does in support of families affected by poverty across an ever-widening area. Last Christmas, thanks to raising £125,000 during the year, they were able to deliver the ingredients for a festive meal to 1,003 families, along with 2,114 'Wish for' children's presents. The charity also works throughout the year to support children with for example, school uniform, prom expenses and school trips. They are honoured to have appointed one of the charity's first beneficiaries, Tiffany, as an ambassador.

He thanked EGBA for hosting a very successful EGBA golf day at Chartham Park last October which had raised over £8,000. Another is planned for 2 October 2026.

He thanked Grahame and congratulated him on his epic coast-to-coast USA bike ride which had raised over £10,000 for the charity. And asked if he could please do it again in 2026!!

8. East Grinstead Jazz Festival 2026

Grahame invited David Kent of 'Being Neighbourly' and Jenny Green of the East Grinstead Jazz Club to speak to members about their plans for this summer's event, 13-16 August. David gave a short introduction to Being Neighbourly and the work its 50 volunteers are engaged with including befriending, helping with hospital transport, and refugee drop-in centres for language help. He said the Jazz Festival with its jazz trail took in many different parts of the town and gave it a 'lovely buzz' over the four days. He requested EGBA's help with closing the High Street, and for spreading the word to attract sponsors as they did successfully in 2025. Jenny explained that this would be the third year the festival had run and the range of excellent musicians and roving bands, and free events would bring people into the town and be great for local businesses. She saw it as a way of 'giving back' to the community while having fun doing it.

9. Chair's review of 2025

Grahame looked at what had worked well over the last 12 months.

- 36 new members is a good result in terms of attracting people, however the nature of the membership base means that there is a high 'churn' rate of particularly with the micro-businesses.
- We continued to support and provide a voice for members in the challenges they face around parking, footfall in town and cost pressures.
- The profile of EGBA has been raised by appearances on local TV and radio but we would like to be able to back up interviews with data, and to be able to 'take the temperature' of how members are feeling/reacting to live issues.
- In an effort to brighten up shop windows in empty premises, he had asked Broadleys if some of their space in their key High Street location could feature a display from the East Grinstead art group. This has attracted a lot of interest and we are looking at ways of involving other local groups who could provide (and benefit from) similar displays.

- Raising nearly £20k for EGBA's appointed charity was a great achievement.
- We have built up excellent working relationships with at least two tiers of local government – at town and district council level. Thanks should go to councillors Rex Whittaker, Steve Ody and Helen Farren, and the economic development team at Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) for facilitating this.
- We have held events and promoted connections with East Grinstead Sports Club – a fantastic community asset, and our local vineyard at Kingscote.

Turning to the 'better if' category

- We would have liked to see the evening and weekend parking charges overturned totally and quicker. Having said that we are proud of the impact of we had, working with Mims Davies, and many others to get the evening parking charges dropped, and the fact that MSDC will be investing in the parking offer with ANPR etc.
- It might have been better if I hadn't had 10 weeks out of the country cycling across the USA! But not so good for the charity ...

10. The year ahead

Turning to EGBA's strategy for 2026, Grahame said the focus is on:

- Building awareness of EGBA
Through a greater presence in the town and at events, refreshed branding, walkabouts and continuing to build/activate EGBA's social presence and CRM system.
- Joint business associations event – 9 June 2026 at Chequer Mead. EGBA's turn to host this annual event and welcome members from Haywards Heath Business Association, Burgess Hill Business Parks Association and Gatwick Diamond. It will demonstrate the value of networking and will be an opportunity for EGBA to put a spotlight on the town, and a positive narrative around that.
- Town centre improvement/Business Improvement District (BID)
We will continue to work with our local councils to look at ways to put the consultants' recommendations into practice – looking at 'quick wins' and medium- to longer-term projects as and when funding becomes available. We're keen to promote the staging of more events in the town to increase footfall and create a destination for visitors – and importantly, residents. Buy-in from EGBA members, town businesses and residents will be essential. The logical next step would be for EG to become a BID (as Oxted, Horsham and others have done).
- Other EGBA events
Will continue with monthly networking and breakfast briefing/early evening events in a range of venues and with a variety of topics of relevance to members.

He went on to invite questions from the floor.

11. Any other business

Rex Whittaker thanked Grahame for his creativity and vision for EGBA and the town. He reminded members that his was a voluntary role and that he has devoted much time and effort to building a successful association and developing networks from scratch to benefit the town and its businesses.

Rex went on to say that he felt the imminent reorganisation of local government would open up greater access and influence for EGBA.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1910hrs.