

MINUTES OF THE AGM

held on Thursday 27 February 2025

at Chartham Park

Present:

Jane Axford, Delta Security Management
John Bardsley, InterGo Group
Tony Baulch, Ashdown Solutions
Fiona Bewers, EGBA Committee
Peter Brooks, Felbridge & Sunnyside Cricket Club
Lee Farren, EGBA Committee, BGL & MSDC
Gary Fodor, Humbl Creatives
Dawn Goodes, Dawn Goodes Therapies
Darren Greenaway, Greenaway Residential
Charmaine Hallmark, EGBA Committee
John Hallmark, Hallmark Travel
Stuart Hallmark, Hallmark Travel
Ian Gibson, MSDC
Chris McGloin, McGloin Services
Elaine McGloin, McGloin Services
Charlie Martell, EGBA Committee & Martell's
Hannah Martell, Martell's
Sarah Martell, Martell's
James Peters, Artemis Marketing
Graham Radford, Felbridge & Sunnyside Cricket Club
Peter Robinson, Robinson Elliott Surveyors
Bob Russell
Jacquie Russell, EGBA Committee and WSCC
Grahame Russell, EGBA Committee (Chair)
Stuart Scholes, EGBA Committee
Emily Wescott
Miles Wescott, WeCo Solutions
Rex Whittaker, EGBA Committee, EG Town Council & MSDC

1. Apologies

Received from Nick Blythe, Mims Davies MP, Janice Fearn (Treasurer), Nancy Holmes, Andrew Mackie, Darren Maddox, Rebecca Newman, John Plumb, Michael Stratford, Tim Thompson.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the AGM held on 8 February 2024 were approved. Outstanding item was the ongoing refinements to the members' directory and resources area on the website, to build its effectiveness and value to members.

3. Chair's welcome

Grahame Russell (GR), 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 'duty minister' and therefore had to be in Westminster that evening. She did however send over a report which GR read to the members.

4. Mims Davies MP

Mims started by berating the Government for their attitude to business, accusing them of not understanding the impact of their actions – particularly on small businesses, and particularly with regard to the employers' National Insurance contributions. She wrote that they don't understand the responsibility business owners have to take on when they decide to employ people.

She said the Conservatives will continue to hold the Government to account for their actions and stand up for business, as her colleague and fellow Sussex MP Andrew Griffith did during a recent Opposition day Debate on Family Business.

She said they would continue to oppose the proposed Inheritance Tax changes and highlight the damage to farming across the UK as well as the likely increases to food prices.

Looking more locally, the Lib Dem-led Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) had delivered a crushing blow to the vibrancy of our towns and villages by imposing evening, Sunday and Bank Holiday charges. The local Conservative Councillors and Mims will ensure the communities' views are heard on the unfair increase to East Grinstead parking charges.

She said she would continue to stand up and fight for our businesses along with the local Conservative team.

Re Gatwick, the Secretary of State for Transport, has given conditional approval to a development consent order application to bring its emergency runway into routine use. A final decision is due 27th October this year. We will need to ensure we strike a balance between the clear and vital economic benefits and jobs an expanded Gatwick can bring to our area, she said, while maintaining standards and environmental protections.

She wrote that we must ensure local people, our communities and key stakeholders such as the railways receive a fair deal and uncertainties around future changes in airspace, additional noise, surrounding infrastructure, housing and transport needs, as well as the environment, are properly addressed.

In conclusion she said that if we want economic growth, we need entrepreneurs to succeed, and we should celebrate that success. She said that businesses only succeed when they operate in an environment where they can take risks. The Leader of the Opposition, the whole Shadow Cabinet, herself and the whole Conservative Party will continue to hold the Government to account and champion businesses who are so important to both our local and national economy.

5. Financial report

In the absence of EGBA Treasurer, Janice Fearn, GR reported that the financial position remains stable. A bottom line loss of £2,000 is equivalent to the balance of costs for completing the new website build, so the Association broke even, in line with predictions and the nature of its activities and ethos.

6. Committee members

GR thanked members Nick Blythe and Charlie Martell who had been officially voted onto the Committee at the 2024 AGM. He said that their active contributions since they had been co-opted, were very much appreciated. He thanked Fiona Bewers for her support as business manager. He

thanked past CEOs Stuart Scholes and Lee Farren for their valuable, continued support and fantastic insights. Darren Greenaway had also been actively supporting marketing efforts, and had introduced John Plumb of Plumb Digital who had supplied a CRM database to accelerate EGBA's growth plans to double membership levels. Meanwhile our local councillors, Rex Whittaker and Jacque Russell had provided invaluable insights and a voice for members with local government.

Turning to the three committee members up for re-election having completed their current three-year term, Grahame thanked them for their valuable contributions and for providing insight and links into their business areas, and into the education sector in the case of Tim Thompson. Charmaine Hallmark would like to serve for a one-year term during which she has kindly agreed to provide some much-appreciated support to FB with EGBA events. All were re-elected as follows:

- Tim Thompson for three years, nominated by Stuart Scholes, seconded by Lee Farren
- Rex Whittaker also for three years, nominated by Charlie Martell, seconded by Lee Farren
- Charmaine Hallmark for one year, nominated by Grahame Russell, seconded by Stuart Scholes.

7. Appointed charity

GR invited Darren Greenaway to say a few words about the Greenaway Foundation, EGBA's appointed 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 £104,000 during the year they were able to deliver the ingredients for a festive meal to 953 families, along with 2,500 'Wish for' children's presents delivered. In the rest of the year they work with eight local schools to support children with other needs such as school prom expenses, and school trips. He was delighted to confirm the appointment of Mims Davies as the new patron of the charity, which aims to raise £200,000 in 2025.

He thanked EGBA for hosting a very successful EGBA golf day at Chartham Park last September which had raised £7,000. Another is planned for 2 October 2025. Fundraising events during the year include a USA Coast-to-Coast sponsored bike ride by EGBA Chair, Grahame Russell in May/June 2025.

8. Chair's review of 2024

Grahame gave an overview of the contribution EGBA is making to town improvement initiatives so that East Grinstead is a 'great place to live, to work and to do business', working closely with EG Town Council and the Mayor Steve Ody, MSDC Economic Development team and West Sussex CC. Need to create optimism in the town and community so EG can buck the trend of declining towns and high streets. He felt that more could be done to promote the town as a place to do business, and as a visitor and resident 'destination' through hosting events such as 'Jazz in the High Street'. He welcomed ideas from members and will be involving them in discussions about routes to revitalising the town. He invited anyone interested in being part of this to come forward. Proposals around 'shared space' (creating safe routes for pedestrians and active travel modes) and traffic flows through the town will be considered along with the idea of creating a 'Business Blueprint', and considerations around asking local businesses voting for the town to become a BID (Business Improvement District).

Turning back to EGBA key activities over the past year, in addition to monthly networking events had included getting the new website up and running, hosting a Business Growth session at Chequer Mead with MSDC, coordinated action around opposing the new parking charges regime (petition, council discussions/written responses), pre-General Election business-focused Hustings with all local candidates, and a sunny, summer event at Kingscote Vineyard. EGBA had also hosted an event where a representative from the new Gatwick Airport Economic Zone had explained the plans around the airport expansion and bringing the second runway into use. As mentioned in Mims Davies's report, this now has official Government backing - with certain caveats. EGBA was supportive of the proposals due to the economic, employment benefits it could bring to the local area - whilst being mindful of environmental effects (noise, traffic, emissions). EGBA is in dialogue with the Gatwick group.

9. The year ahead

Turning to EGBA's strategy for 2025, GR said the focus is on:

1. Growing membership.
Current level is around 100, but turnover is over 10% so requires constant effort to remain viable. GR working with committee member Nick Blythe, FB and Committee members with a target of doubling the membership in the next 12 months.
2. Continue support of arts and sports organisations.
Working with Chequer Mead, the Sports Council, and others including schools, to promote their benefits, including the health and wellbeing of the community.
3. Continue to run successful networking events, showcasing members' premises and activities, and supporting local events and the cultural life of the town.

Grahame thanked Hannah Martell who was revitalising EGBA's social media channels. These will reinforce messaging and support members in their own social/business activities.

He went on to invite questions from the floor.

These included an observation that EG is too 'quiet' about what goes on in the town, and its events. These should be promoted beyond the town to surrounding areas in Sussex, Surrey and beyond to increase economic activity (visitor spend) and footfall/vitality in the town.

Another suggestion was for more 'wellness' focussed activities, bringing together practitioners, therapists, sports, dance and other activities to encourage the community to be healthy.

As regards other areas in the town, Queens Walk was highlighted as a large, under-used, traffic-free area with potential for upgrading. The St Margaret's Loop project for creating a pedestrian/cycle route to create a link from the Worth Way has been given the go-ahead - unsure of timeframe.

10. Any other business

Grahame asked the members present for their views of the modest subscription increase from £120 to £140. The views expressed were that membership still represented excellent value. He

said the networking events were important but the Association was about 'more than events' and membership indicated support for the town and business community as a whole.

New member, Graham Radford, echoed this, and was invited to give an overview of Felbridge & Sunnyside Cricket Club's efforts to secure funding for a new community facility at their ground just to the north of the town.

Rex Whittaker thanked GR and FB for their efforts on behalf of EGBA members over the year. He said the next 12 months were likely to see many changes in local government with the proposed 'devolution' and collapsing a 3-tier council structure into 2-tiers, ie one large unitary authority for Sussex, and a town council. It could present great opportunities. He appreciated the pivotal role Jacquie Russell played and her strong connections to ensure the town is represented at all levels of local government.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1920hrs.