

MINUTES OF THE AGM

held on Thursday 8 February 2024

at Chartham Park

Present:

Fiona Bewers, EGBA Committee
Nick Blythe, Paella Fella
Lizzie Calciolli, G&G
Nanette Chandler, We Love Pets
Mims Davies MP (Co-chair)
Martin Dilworth, Hard Fitness
Helen Farren, EG Town Councillor
Lee Farren, EGBA Committee
Darren Greenaway, Greenaway Residential
Charmaine Hallmark, EGBA Committee
John Hallmark, Hallmark Travel
Jamie Hughes, Kingscote Vineyard
Alistair Lycett, Lycett Financial Planning
Grahame Russell, EGBA Committee (Chair)
Stuart Scholes, EGBA Committee
Nancy Holmes, EMS Design
Peter Robinson, Robinson Elliott Surveyors
Lisa Thompson, Business Manager
Tim Thompson, EGBA Committee
Rex Whittaker, EGBA Committee
Guy Workman, Kitchens Bespoke
Rachael Workman, Kitchens Bespoke

1. Apologies

Received from Janice Fearn (Treasurer), John Belsey and Elaine McGloin.

2. Chair's address

Grahame Russell (GR), welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly in view of the atrocious weather. He also welcomed co-Chair of the Association, Mims Davies MP (MD), and invited her to address the members.

3. Mims Davies MP

Mims started by thanking the EGBA for its consistent and valuable support for the town and its businesses, and for assisting with her hosted events during the year such as business breakfasts and the AI meeting at EG Rugby Club. She went on to remind members of challenges such as anti-social behaviour which affected the nighttime economy in the town, and that she was working closely with Police Commissioner, Katy Bourne, to address this. She invited members to share any concerns they had with her. She was also aware of recent proposals regarding increases in parking charges and will try and ensure these are fair and right for the town.

Moving onto Government matters she welcomed the Online Safety Bill which has passed through Parliament, and reminded members of the forthcoming Budget on 6 March and its potential implications for members, particularly with regard to business rates.

At the local level, the draft Mid Sussex District Plan is open for consultation and is not just about housing – commercial developments are affected also. MD said that 70-80% of businesses in Mid Sussex are not located in High Streets, so it needs to work for everyone to encourage local employment and grow the local economy. The process for the 2nd runway at Gatwick is moving to the next stage. Although this would undoubtedly present great business opportunities, if it goes ahead it will put pressure on housing, local services, and transport links – particularly the road network. We need to be clear about the kind of neighbour we want Gatwick to be.

4. Financial report

In the absence of EGBA Treasurer, Janice Fearn, and the final audited accounts, GR reported that the financial position remains healthy. A bottom line loss of £2,800 is as a result of the new website build, otherwise EGBA would be in profit by around £1,500. In view of that he is comfortable that the annual membership subscription remain at its current level of £120 for the time being. The full accounts will be published on the EGBA website when available.

5. Committee members

GR updated members on some staffing news in that our current business manager, Lisa Thompson, is leaving EGBA to take up a new full-time role in a local school. Lisa has had a hugely positive impact on the Association and its events during her two years in post and will be much missed. He added his personal thanks for her tremendous support and hoped she would remain as part of EGBA in some capacity once she has settled into her new job. Fiona Bewers, who has been a Committee member for ten years, has agreed to take over the role. Fiona was previously corporate communications and public affairs manager at the Caravan and Motorhome Club, so is very familiar with membership organisations. She looks forward to working with you all.

As Committee members have a tenure of three years, no-one was up for re-election in 2024. However two new members had been co-opted by the Committee during the previous year.

Election of co-opted members

Nick Blythe	Proposed by Lee Farren, seconded by Peter Robinson
Charlie Martell	Proposed by Stuart Scholes, seconded by Charmaine Hallmark.

Fiona Humphreys, elected at the 2023 AGM had had to step down due to work commitments, and former committee member Rob Bliss had also resigned during the year.

6. Appointed charity

GR invited Darren Greenaway to say a few words about the Greenaway Foundation, EGBA's appointed charity for 2024.

Darren was pleased to report on another busy and successful year for the charity with four new Trustees appointed. Last Christmas they were able to deliver the ingredients for a festive meal to 900 families, and 1,600 'Wish for' children's presents (up to value of £25 per child). During the year the charity also contributes to holidays and school trips, and funds Greenaway Grub – a much-needed school breakfast club. This is all made possible by massive fund-raising efforts during the year including race nights (next one 23 Feb at Crawley Rugby Club) and golf days. Darren thanked EGBA and Chartham Park for hosting a very successful EGBA golf day in September which had raised over £4,000. Another is planned for 27 September 2024.

7. Chair's review of 2023

Although many companies were doing well (such as trades, construction) GR said that the EGBA was very aware of the tough business environment and how this was affecting some members. He had attended one of the regular local business association meetings the previous day when the challenge of changing consumer shopping behaviour from online was discussed.

Taking up the issue of the proposed parking charges in the town, whilst recognising that some increases were inevitable as councils seek to balance their budgets, he was keen that EGBA's views were taken into account. The proposal to extend parking charges into the evening period would have a detrimental effect on the town's nighttime economy, at a time when hospitality businesses need all the support they can get. He felt that the proposed differential parking charges where EG car parks would have higher rates than their equivalents in Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath were unacceptable.

Reflecting on his first year as Chair, GR had been impressed with how the councils at all levels worked together in the interests of the town and district. He extended thanks to Rex Whittaker for his active involvement and for providing regular updates to members with 'Rex's Notes'. He also thanked John Belsey for representing the Town Council, and to Jacquie Russell as County Councillor (West Sussex) for her input.

He felt progress had been made regarding the visibility of the police service in town and our access to senior police personnel. EGBA had actively lobbied for this, attending council and other meetings. The Association is involved with the DISC initiative for sharing information of criminal activity among local businesses. He thanked Committee member Stuart Scholes who had agreed to sit on the board of the Mid Sussex Business Crime Partnership to represent EG businesses.

Networking events throughout the year had been very successful, enjoyable and well-attended. He thanked those businesses who had hosted events including Guy and Rachael Workman (Kitchens Bespoke), Fiona Humphreys (William Robinson Gravetye Estate), the Ashdown Park Hotel, Chequer Mead, Chartham Park and Kings Golf. Another successful joint event (with Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill BAs) was held at the East Sussex National Hotel.

On a personal note he had found the Remembrance Day commemorations showed the town at its best. Other town events of note had been the inaugural EG Bonfire Society event in October, and the massive success of the Big Reveal in November.

EGBA Committee members Tim Thompson and Darren Greenaway have been forging links with educational establishments which, in addition to local schools, include the University of Brighton.

Four member focus groups were held during the year (reports to come) and GR thanks all those who had participated and shared their honest views about what they would like from the EGBA, and from the town. Many topics were aired including shared space (pedestrianisation) in the town and the need to do something to create more space for pedestrians – now moving ahead to a consultation phase.

8. Activities for 2024

GR said a new website was being developed with a target launch timing of mid-March. A key element will be a high quality, high impact, consistent members directory. The website will also feature a 'Resources' area to capture knowledge from members that can be shared – on topics

such as the use of AI, cybersecurity, digital marketing etc as well as non-technical areas. It is envisaged that both these aspects will evolve over time, to become valuable member benefits.

He will continue to run focus groups and report back on actions taken as a result – along the lines of ‘You said, we did’.

And of course EGBA will continue to host high quality events. The next two on the programme being 13 February networking at EG Sports Club, a joint ‘Boosting Business’ event with MSDC at Chequer Mead, and others planned for later in the year including at Kingscote Vineyard (24 May) and a summer paella evening in the garden at Chequer Mead (13 June).

Lee Farren proposed a vote of thanks to Grahame for his excellent efforts in year one of his role.

9. Any other business

Rex Whittaker asked Mims Davies, in view of the Gatwick planning proposals, if there was a Government view on the situation regarding a third runway at Heathrow? She said there was no specific view as it was an independent planning process. She said as regards the Northern/2nd runway at Gatwick there are still opportunities to feed into the process, and there is a wide range of views across the constituencies affected. It’s not a straightforward planning issue as it’s what is known as a ‘variation’. The process should be monitored by interested parties such as business associations so that a coordinated position can feed into it. She said the current documentation contains very little on the road transportation impacts, or the additional housing and services required by an enlarged workforce. GR said EGBA’s stance has been to support in general, but with several caveats.

GR asked Mims Davies what was being done about the diminished rail services being provided by Southern Rail and Thameslink? She has been very active on this issue as she sees the current situation as unsustainable and inadequate for the town’s residents who try and commute to London. She has met with Angie Doll, CEO of GTR (Govia Thameslink Railway who operate Southern, Thameslink and the Gatwick Express) to discuss getting a consistent service (which hasn’t been the case since pre-Covid times), and invited the Minister for Rail, Huw Merriman MP to visit EG. She will continue to make the arguments very strongly so that the town can have a functioning commuter line again.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1915hrs.