

Minutes of AGM for the East Grinstead Business Association
held at Chartham Park Golf Club
On Thursday 6th February 2020 at 6.30pm

Present: Lee Farren CEO ("LF")
Samantha West, Marketing Administrator ("SW")
Margaret de Jong, Treasurer ("MdJ")
Roger Martell ("RM")
Margaret Martell
Norman Webster, Councillor ("NW")
Rex Whittaker ("RW")
Stuart Scholes ("SS")
Philip de Jong ("PdJ")
John Belsey, GolfGuard ("JB")
Martin Robinson, Blackland Farm
Robert Bliss, The Tasting Rooms
Jonathan Woodhead, Jon Woodhead & Associates
Dick Rowberry, EG & District Assoc. For Mental Health ("DR")
Peter Robinson, Robinson Elliott Surveyors
Carol Everest, Everest Events
Richard Tramontin, EGT Football Club
Oliver Harwood, RH & RW Clutton ("OH")
Dean Brooker, SignatureMe Limited ("DB")
Lenny Walker, Airtech
Fiona Bowers, Caravan and Motorhome Club
Charmaine Hallmark, Hallmark Travel
Nick Caunter, APH
Jonathan Nye, Trave 5o
Darren Greenaway, Greenaway Residential
Sarah Loxton, Kitchens Bespoke ("SL")
Sasha Brown, MSVA
Holly-Jade Ryder, MSDC ("HJR")
Bob Shelley
Elaine McGloin

Apologies: Mimms Davies
Tim Thompson
Fiona Humphries
Penny Macfarlane
Jon Cornell
Nancy Holmes
Tessa Basson
Helen Farren
Kate Bennett

LF welcomed everyone and thanked Chartham Park for hosting.

Dick Rowberry of East Grinstead and District Association for Mental Health

DR thanked the EGBA for making them our charity. Mental health is underfunded but we can do a lot with a little money. Most will suffer with mental health in their lifetime. The big challenge for people recovering is that they feel isolated, nobody to talk to. (Dick passed information around to everyone).

EGDAMH have put together daytime activities under the umbrella of Mental Health Oakley, picking up GP subscribers, social subscribers, talking is most beneficial for mental health.

They have created drop ins, grants in the transition of independent living, funding teachers training, for those teachers to be equipped with dealing children with mental health issues. Have already put in place training at Imberhorne and Sackville. Grant to counseling services. Music group and drop in cafe once a week at Chequer Mead. Attendance has been very high which proves that there is a need. Discovered people visiting are bringing dementia partners. Running a successful art group. They are encouraging conservation, looking after Chequer Mead gardens, encouraging wildlife with flowers. Open air is great for improving mental health. Providing somewhere to go on a Friday morning. Clearing a trail at Eastcourt. The most important is tea and conversation.

LF: Thank you Dick, we need to be more aware of mental health. We also work closely with the Business Development Team at MSDC and Holly would like to talk about Open4Business.

HJR: This is an annual event: Economic Business Strategy. The theme this year is Business Growth. There will be lots of things going on, exhibitions/speed networking/business panel with a Q&A session. You can register on line. Free to attend. Over 100 businesses in the South East, procurement will have a stand. We will be re-launching the Micro Business Grant this year. The Wellbeing Team will be there. Revenue and Rates to get relief on business. We are looking at £21m to improve transport in Burgess Hill. There is a wider infra-structure plan. Council will be there to answer questions on this.

OH: Electric car charging, will this be spoken about?

HJR: I can speak to someone from the team who can attend.

JB: Is the shop front scheme still going on?

HJR: No that's finished.

RM: Is money being spent on infrastructure for East Grinstead?

HJR: I believe so, but I cannot speak about that, there will be more information coming out later in the year.

LF: I highly recommend that you go, we will have a stand there.

NW: We have been working very hard with West Sussex and are now pleased to announce that full fast fibre will be rolled out in Sussex, including East Grinstead. With more people working from home and on the internet, huge demand for this, it follows the train line which will go from Brighton, Crawley, Three Bridges up to London, we've had to fight for EG to be included. Geographical location data. Virgin and BT Open Reach project. They are building a lot of new homes in Burgess Hill and these will all have ultra fast fibre. It is being rolled out at the end of this year until 2023. There will be new infrastructure in and around EG. Working on A23 to be a dual carriageway. Business Parks in that area will all have access to Ultra Fast Fibre.

CEO Report

I would like to thank Kate & Sam for the excellent work they do in keeping the EGBA running. It wouldn't happen without them, and they are key to its continued success. They chat, engage, pursue, invite, cajole, coax, flatter, tickle and love our existing and potential members.

I would also like to thank our committee for their continued work for us. It is an unpaid job and I am appreciative of the time they put in.

Would also like to thank the local town council and Mid-Sussex Councillors who are staunch supporters of the EGBA. In particular Norman Webster, John Belsey, Rex Whittaker, Helen Farren, Danny Favor and Dick Sweatman.

The Town Council and Mid Sussex Council also provide us with grants which helps us with special projects and our continued commitment to our town.

Sir Nicholas Soames, who created the Business Association some 14/15 years ago, following his retirement from politics has decided to step down as the EGBA Chairman. We will miss his insight, rhetoric and political honesty at these AGMs.

We are very lucky though as Mims Davies, our new Mid Sussex MP has agreed to step into the role as chairman. Unfortunately, she cannot be here this evening due to prior engagements. But we look forward to working with Mims over the forthcoming years.

Mims has also mentioned that she will endeavour to attend as many of our events as is possible for a busy member of Parliament.

JB: Can you send Mimms a list of events? (SW will do this)

Treasurer's Report

MdJ: The budget that was set at the beginning of 2019 showed it was going to be tight to make extra funds to cover further donations and local charitable assistance. The main area not meeting the budget was the income from subscriptions. Along with a few companies

paying early in 2018 for their 2019 subscription there was a further change of invoicing structure and payments which is already showing results in that this January's collection of subscriptions is higher than the previous two years.

There was a cost to the Buzz Meeting which we held in June 2019. We did get four new members sign up on the day.

Re-election of Committee Members

Stuart Scholes - Proposed Samantha West. Seconded Oliver Harwood

Nick Blythe and Philip de Jong are stepping down, thank you to both of them and all their hard work, it is a real shame to lose them.

We have approached two members to be our new Committee Members who are Darren Greenaway, who is a great supporter of the EGBA and is involved in his foundation which he does at Christmas to help families who need a little help.

Darren Greenaway - Proposed Rex Whittaker. Seconded Richard Tramontin

Secondly, Rob Bliss of The Tasting Rooms is also a great supporter of the EGBA.

Rob Bliss - Proposed Samantha West. Seconded Darren Greenaway

Re-election of Lee Farren as CEO, Kate Bennett, Business Manager, Margaret de Jong, Treasurer and Samantha West as Marketing Administrator.

All approved, no objections.

A big thank you to Margaret for all her hard work that she does.

Review of 2019 and The Year Ahead

We've had some great events and a good mix, ranging from Wall Climbing at Hindleap, discovering the History of EG at The Museum and finding out how East Grinstead is changing in the terms of development and regeneration in the future at Cluttons. To a joint event at Wakehurst.

Attendance at these events varies and moving forward this is something that we will be actively focusing on to increase.

We also held our own networking event to explain and promote ourselves with our new marketing campaign:

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF US

There has been a decrease in Membership over the year and we have gone from 120 to 103 which is down to Brexit as Sir Nicholas Soames predicted.

DB: How do you know that?

LF: I have asked Members this is what they've said.

[There have been several other reasons why Members have left including a change of direction with their business, moved away, trying another networking group, left the company, no reply to the question.]

This will hopefully pick up

We have had lots of chats with HHBA who have increased their membership numbers and the attendance at their events. But, their member demographics are very different to ours. They have a high number of 1-2 person companies that are in the service industry. Whilst we have those types of business, we also have a lot of High Street and corporate members.

Committee members were assigned a sector or category during the year. This helped us focus on these specific areas when it comes to updates, blogs and especially committee meetings.

We are looking at setting up a surgery for the EGBA, whereby you can come along and chat with us any thoughts you may have or advice we can give.

DB: Why can't you ask members to help spread the word?

SW: We would love for our members to help, but it is hard enough trying to get a lot of our members to engage. I send out numerous emails requesting information from them to market themselves or attend events and most of the time I do not get any response. It is always the same ones that respond and attend meetings. I will keep plugging away at this.

LF: We are looking to focus on social media this year and raising our profile within this.

I need to find time to update our website. I had a quick look at the stats for this as follows:-

5273 users - 15636 page visits

Which means 3 pages per person

Check out our latest news (blogs). Especially Norman's Notes.

I shall be putting some time aside to update the VEG website. This runs itself through advertising. This is run alongside the Tourist Office which is based in the library.

Really difficult for us to find time to keep this fully updated.

Visit EG has grown into the go to site for anything happening in EG.

We also send monthly updates through our email system, so please sign up.

45k users - 128k page views

We are always looking for new contributors.

SS: Bob Shelley?

PdJ: Could we put Norman's Notes and similar on VEG?

LF: Yes, it doesn't have to be one set thing. It is well visited. 128,000 page views.

Perfect for advertising, we have many slots that are cheap. From what we can gather from our analytics, 25-30 clicks through to advertisers per month.

See rate cards which are up here on the table and a few on chairs.

Going Forward

LF: We have changed our events, we no longer hold our Drink and Meet at La Farola once a month. Though a few of us still meet up if anyone wants to join us.

We are working on more bespoke events (**what is this?**).

Sackville School event was well attended. The Young Enterprise Scheme presented their ideas to us, which was really good.

Social Media - this will be something we shall be focussing on the future, but this is always restricted by the amount of time we have. We have the following followers:-

Facebook 261

Twitter 790

LinkedIn 121

We are looking to add Instagram, but another channel to manage.

What is your social media platform of choice?

Hands up who's on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Tinder?

As I said we are looking at being more active on social media.

SL: You could have Guest Takeover Days. Where members take a page for the day.

Everyone agreed this was a great idea and SW to look into setting up.

We are hoping for Guest Speakers and Ask the Expert at quite a few of our events.

RW: It's great to see everybody working together. Sackville School have just got involved in the Young Enterprise Scheme and it was amazing to see their presentation and it was a

great event. There is lots going on in East Grinstead. Huge investment is coming into the town. Lots of construction work and new housing. I would like to say a big thank you to Lee and his support and hard work in the EGBA, he contributes a lot of his own time and to Sam who has worked hard with trying different things and new ideas.

JB: I'd just like to say that it was much harder to get the fast fibre to East Grinstead as it follows the train track up from Brighton and initially it was not going to come over to EG. The Councillors have really had to push for this. Thank you to them.

RW: For those that haven't already met Mimms she has great energy and vision. Late February she is coming to the Sports Club, if you would like to come along. She is going to drive the town forward and is a great standard bearer.

LF: Thank you to everyone who came tonight.