

Minutes of the Coordination Group Meeting April 3rd 2019

Those present

Bob Miles
John Twibell
Miriam Brown
Stephen Pemberton
Jean Twibell
Jill Gray
Graham Hutchinson
Mary Walden-Till
Rita Hedley
Jenny Alexander
Liz Bramley
Robert Crick
Jeremy Woodward
Michael Brittain
Peter Murphy
Dave Bramley

Chair for the meeting

Dave Bramley

Secretary for the meeting

Mary Walden-Till

Item 1 Review of Agenda.

Dave Bramley drew attention to the fact that several people wished to resign from the Coordination Group and ran through the other headings to be discussed. It was mentioned that a previously included discussion on branding was no longer present. This was agreed to be inserted after item 8, where it had been in the draft agenda.

Item 2 Minutes of last meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting were passed as a true record.

Item 3 VGS issues eg Constitution, Resources, Funding (future revenue raising), Officers, liabilities

Dave reviewed the recent efforts to find a new Treasurer and the efforts made prior to the last two years. The result is that a new Treasurer has not been forthcoming even though Sidmouth Town Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the new Lighthouse hub have been approached, as well as the individual efforts people have made.

Mary Walden-Till offered to take the position on in a caretaker role while the VGS is so quiet but the meeting felt that inappropriate. It was then offered that Roger Till take on the role. This was accepted and he was elected by a show of hands. Mary and Jeremy agreed to be additional signatories to the account. Jean Twibell has therefore been able to resign as she has long wished. Hearty thanks were given to her by all present for her long service.

There then followed a comprehensive discussion about the format of the VGS including the Constitution, the role of the Coordination Group, the role of insurance within the group and its limitations, the place of the Futures Forum, and VGS links with other groups most notably the Science Festival. This included interesting input from Michael Brittain and Robert Crick about the early days of the VGS.

After discussion about how the current wording of the Constitution suggested that the Coordination Group was a management group; and therefore raised the possibility of members becoming liable for costs not covered by insurance (eg insurance excess payments in the event of a claim); it was agreed to reword the Constitution. Mary agreed to attempt it and Dave said he could get it checked by a solicitor. His offer was gratefully received by all. Dave explained the scope of the current insurance and how it is helpful to consider extreme chains of events when determining what insurance you decide to take out.

Michael made a strong point that he finds it difficult to explain the VGS and/or Futures Forum to people, it was agreed to discuss this later under the inserted item Branding.

Graham Hutchinson asked, and Dave confirmed, that the Science Festival is now completely separate from the VGS in all ways. It was determined that any joint initiatives should bear branding of both groups.

John Twibell pointed out that with groups moving on from within the VGS, groups losing momentum, and lack of new groups coming forward the VGS was at the moment a hollow shell. Robert Crick said that themes and projects emerge from discussion and that he was hopeful for the future. Attention was drawn to a later Agenda Item about the Neighbourhood Plan.

Miriam Brown referred to the fact that even strong projects like the sustainable energy project SVEAG (later Sid Energy) can be derailed by changes in Government priorities.

In the discussion about the connection between VGS and the Futures Forum it was explained how the split had originally occurred for practical reasons to spread the load of VGS activities. The meeting felt that it would be good to clarify that the Futures Forum was an arm of the VGS to help public understanding, but that the distinct identity of the FF blog should not be lost. How the FF was presented to the public would be discussed under the inserted item Branding.

Item 4 Clarify resignations from Group

Dave stated he wished to resign from the Coordination Group but remain active and available within the VGS. The following people tendered their resignations on the same conditions.

Liz Bramley

John and Jean Twibell

Jenny and Dave Alexander

Bob Miles

Stephen Pemberton

It was agreed that members would not be prevented from rejoining at a later date and would retain access to the Forum on the website. The resigning members were thanked for their support and input over the years, recognising that the VGS would not have survived without them.

Dave offered to stand down as Chair for the rest of the meeting but was asked to continue.

Item 5 Formulation of the new Co-ordination Group

It was agreed that the people remaining as members of the Coordination Group should have an informal and flexible role, where they were not required to undertake pre-determined tasks. This should be clearly reflected in the new wording of the Constitution.

Item 6 Identification and election of Officers

Everyone agreed that it was very difficult to find people willing to do the job of officers in a voluntary group. The outcome was that VGS needed to be as flexible as possible while complying with relevant legislation. One way this might be achieved was if the number of officers varied to reflect the activity within the group. The thinking being that the more projects were happening under the VGS umbrella the greater the pool of potential officers. This should be borne in mind when rewording the Constitution.

Item 7 Discussion on a formal framework to the FF blog - JW

There was much discussion about how the Futures Forum had come to be as it is; all agreed it was very useful. It was pointed out that although Jeremy also created the content for the News blog on the VGS site the two things were different and FF served a separate purpose. Michael reiterated the point about the confusion of outsiders between the VGS and the FF and Jeremy offered to stop using the label FF if it would help matters. It was felt that this was going too far and Mary suggested that always using the VGS branding in conjunction with FF might be a way forward. It was agreed to consider this under the inserted item of Branding.

Item 8 Neighbourhood Plan, update and Community Actions.

Peter Murphy reported back on the Sidmouth Town Council meeting with the Neighbourhood Plan steering committee. He explained how STC could not take forward any of the Community

Actions identified in the Plan but was instead reliant on Community Groups to do so. He felt very strongly that the VGS could and should rise to the challenge. He pointed out that there was a 'pot' of £10,000 to be bid for as an aid to getting these Community Actions off the ground. There followed a lively discussion of things Sidmouth residents had asked for in the past or in the Neighbourhood Plan surveys. It was felt that there were many things which could be of benefit to Sidmouth if we could involve people with the right skill sets. It was accepted that it is mainly the young who have some of these skills and it was vital to reach out to them and give support.

Peter suggested a rolling monthly programme of talks or meetings to bring groups into contact with each other while Graham pointed out the synergy created where different groups overlap in their concerns. Rita is to approach the Town Clerk Chris Holland to discuss, after the Local Elections have taken place.

Item 9 Hustings for upcoming elections.

Dave said that he had received a request for the VGS to run hustings for the upcoming Local Elections, as it had done in the past.

Past hustings were reviewed and the problems encountered were elucidated. It was felt that as both Town and District Council hustings would be required and that there was now only a window of a fortnight to get them arranged and carry them out the idea would, regrettably, have to be given up. Stephen pointed out that the timing of Easter this year meant that many people would be away.

Despite the fact that hustings were not practicable it was felt that the VGS needed to help raise awareness of the candidates standing for office. Rita Hedly suggested we use the Twitter and Facebook accounts to post answers from candidates on a series of standard questions put to them by residents. Graham suggested those questions needed to be posed by 18 year olds. Jeremy Woodward and Peter thought that a partnership with The Herald might be a useful way forward. Peter is to talk to Clarissa Place of The Herald.

Inserted Item Branding.

Following on from earlier comments about the VGS and the FF it became evident that if we wanted to make the VGS as well known as it once was we needed clear branding. This branding should include a recognisable logo and short slogan to allow us to be identifiable at a glance. Reference was made to the circular blue and white logo created by Mary, and people approved it for use. Jeremy showed the business cards which were made as a short term measure for use at the meeting about the proposed South West Mutual Bank. People were asked to take some and to consider them as a starting point for an approved version. It was agreed that it was important that FF was clearly identified as part of the VGS not a separate entity, that branding needed to be consistent, and that any messages were kept short and to the point.

Stephen pointed out that the FF was a well known (even to non-residents) resource and it was important to identify it as a reference website from the VGS website. Jeremy responded that it was already prominently shown there.

Jeremy raised the question of the Sustainable Sidmouth logo and asked where people saw it fitting in. Graham felt that, as the VGS was greater than just Sustainable Sidmouth, using that logo could create further confusion. It was agreed that the Sustainable Sidmouth logo should be kept in reserve for when someone came forward to provide a leader for that aspect of VGS.

Mary pointed out that although we do not do fundraising at the moment we need a clear image for the VGS if we should ever apply for grants or do other forms of fundraising. It was agreed that a sub-group composed of Jeremy, Rita, Peter and Mary should look at the whole issue of branding with a view to having a clear identity in place for after the Local Elections in May.

Item 10 Identifying a Chair and Secretary for next meeting.

As there were no volunteers to be Chair, Mary offered to do it but Jeremy stepped into the breach. The role of Secretary was not discussed, so Mary will act as Secretary for the next meeting; and in future continue to include the role along with that of Webmaster and Publicity Officer under a catch-all title of Communications Officer, until it is feasible to split the roles again.

Item 12 Any other business.

Jeremy raised the subject of the The Word Forest Organisation which had been in contact with both the Arboretum and the VGS. Jon Ball of the Arboretum and VGS Coordination Group (not present at the meeting) felt that a meeting showcasing and fundraising for the group was better done by the VGS, so Jeremy was asking whether the VGS felt we should offer to pay for a venue as well as arranging one. If so, how much did people feel appropriate?

It was agreed that although it was a good cause with local connections it was not part of the VGS stated aims, therefore any meeting should not pose a financial burden on the VGS. A meeting will go forward on those principles.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm with further warm thanks to those who are stepping down from office or coordination group to return to the ranks of ordinary VGS members.

Summary

Agreed

- 1) The Minutes of the last meeting are a true record
- 2) New Treasurer Roger Till
- 3) Constitution to be reworded
- 4) The identity of FF should not be lost.
- 5) Resignations accepted, but access to forum retained for those members.
- 6) VGS to work on Community Actions
- 7) Hustings not to be held, but VGS to work with The Herald and consider other ways forward.
- 8) Strong branding required, joint effort needed to make the message short and clear.
- 9) The logo for Sustainable Sidmouth is important but should not be used at the moment.
- 10) A meeting should be arranged in support of The Word Forest Organisation but the VGS should not subsidise it.

Actions

- 1) Roger to arrange with HSBC to take over as Treasurer.
- 2) Mary to reword Constitution and give to Dave for checking by Solicitor before circulating for formal approval
- 3) List of Coordination members displayed on website to be amended
- 4) Rita to contact Chris Holland about integrating talks and group meetings with community actions
- 5) Jeremy and Peter to liaise with The Herald about election coverage and actions.
- 6) Jeremy, Rita, Peter and Mary to form a 'branding huddle' with a view to hammering out a clear message on VGS before May 5th.
- 7) Jeremy to arrange a meeting for The Word Forest Organisation.