

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

Minutes of the twenty-second Annual General Meeting at 12.00 hours on 7 October 2017 at Parkside Community Hall, Woburn Street, Ampthill Bedfordshire MK45 2HX

Present: Baroness Barbara Young (President), Sir Graham Fry (Chairman), Prof William Stephens (Vice Chairman), Mr James Fanshawe (Honorary Treasurer), Dr Jenna Bishop, (Honorary Secretary), Mr Stewart Lane (Chair Conservation, Education and Community Committee), Trustees Dr Sharon Erzinçlioğlu, Mrs Marion Hession, Mr Chris Pullen, Mr Paul Solon, Dr Matt Walpole and 132 members.

The President welcomed members to the AGM, especially those for whom this was their first AGM, and reminded the room that only members were eligible to vote. This was an amazing time for the environment. Brexit offered a small window of opportunity to make agricultural policy more rounded and working better for bio-diversity. This was a major objective for the Trust movement to ensure that changes went in the right direction.

1. **Apologies for Absence:** Vice-president Mr Ioan Thomas, Trustees Sam Brockington and Ed Turner, proposed Trustees Ananya Mukherjee and Margaret White and 29 members.

2. **Minutes of the Meeting on 8 October 2016**

Draft minutes had been posted to the website and were in the packs issued. The members who had attended last year's meeting were asked to approve the minutes of the meeting as a true record. There were no matters arising which were not on the agenda. Proposed by Peter Pilbeam, seconded by Michael Allen and approved *nem. con.*

3. **Presentation of the Annual Report**

The Chairman presented the Annual Report. Copies of the Annual Report had been posted to the website and a shorter, more readable version of the Report was in the pack.

It had been a year of ups and downs. One major blow for the Trust had been the sudden death of John Harrison. John had been elected as Hon Treasurer at the last AGM, was just getting to know the Trust and we were just getting to know him. He had chaired his first Resources meeting but unfortunately shortly afterwards we were informed of his death on 21 November 2016. The Trust had however been fortunate in that James Fanshawe had stepped into the vacancy for which we were most grateful.

Thanks were due to Stewart Lane and Marion Hession who were both stepping down as Trustees. Stewart had been Chair of the Conservation, Education and Community Committee and Marion had been a long standing member of the same committee.

The Trust had encountered some major problems this year. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) had rejected claims for 2015 and 2016 totalling approximately £250,000. RPA were the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) agency with responsibility for making payments to farmers and landowners. The Hon Treasurer would explain the situation and the effect on Trust finances in more detail, but a lot of money was at stake. It had proven very difficult to get decisions from RPA which had resulted in the Trust taking legal advice the result of which was the commencement of Judicial Review procedures against the RPA. When the legal proceedings started, the RPA did not contest them, however, although they had conceded all points in our favour, there was still uncertainty about the payments. The Trust continued to take professional advice. This Trust was not alone in having problems and was being supported by RSWT.

In Bedfordshire, the Trust had historically managed the SSSI at Houghton Regis Quarry under a planning agreement and volunteers and staff had transformed what had been a wasteland into an excellent chalk habitat. The funding agreement had, unfortunately, now ended so the site was not currently one of the Trust's responsibilities. It was hoped that planning problems would however be resolved and the Trust would be able to restart their good work.

There had also been some significant good news this year. Work continued to be focussed on the Trust's nine Living Landscapes. Our first Visitor Centre had opened in the Nene Valley at the new Rushden Lakes Retail Centre. The Trust had also taken on the management of the new reserve at the Centre which had been formed by the connection of four existing reserves to one large unit of 667 acres resulting in outstanding wildlife next to a retail area which anticipated approximately 5 million visitors a year. Additional funding had been provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the reserve had recently been featured on BBC's Countryfile programme.

The Great Fen was now at the end of the 8 year HLF funding. A substantial evaluation report on the project during the grant period had been put together and submitted to HLF. The project had clearly been a remarkable success in terms of both habitat restoration and creation and public engagement. A great deal of hydrological work had been undertaken at Corney's and New Decoy Farms. A memorial had also been dedicated to pilot Harold Penketh who had died when his Spitfire had crashed during the war. Work had also been done on carbon storage at the Fen which would be an attractive way for businesses to offset their carbon emissions and would also offer other benefits.

In the Ouse Valley, the nature reserve at Godmanchester had been further enhanced. In Bedfordshire, a river warden scheme had been started. Active management continued on all the Living Landscapes in collaboration with other landowners.

Rushden Lakes had shown how important partnership working was for the Trust, especially with developers. Badly planned development could pose serious threat to the environment. The Trust had in the past year objected to several including in both the Flitwick and Castor Hanglands areas. Well planned developments would consider at the very earliest stages how to enhance the environment. The Trust would continue to engage with, and advise, developers wherever there would be a net gain for bio-diversity. Two other such partnerships had been successful for the Trust: Trumpington Meadows which was a major new reserve adjacent to new development in Cambridge, and Lilbourne Meadows where a major new logistics centre was being built and a new reserve created which would be managed by the Trust.

The new Monitoring and Research team had now been in place for a full year building on the success of the existing ecology group programme and ensuring that the Trust's conservation work was based on sound evidence. Volunteers had contributed over 5,700 hours on 174 monitoring programmes over 65 reserves. Results included:

- At Totternhoe: 100 slow-worms had been found including juveniles and pregnant females which showed that there was a healthy breeding population following the translocation from the Luton and Dunstable busway.
- Hazel dormice had been found outside of Brampton Wood showing that the population was spreading beyond the reintroduction site there.
- Drone imagery had allowed us to look down and see that grassland vegetation was returning to Cherry Hinton East Pit
- Hoverfly recording at Old Sulehay had generated 5,000 records with 91 species

- 75% of the bat boxes at Grafham had been used for roosting with evidence of a large breeding colony in one.

The education and community team had engaged with 16,451 people during the year. Highlights included:

- The Lego map of the Great Fen created at Hinchbrook Park in February attracted 1,000 visitors who learnt more about the Great Fen and helped build the Lego flora and fauna.
- The support of the Esmé Fairbairn Foundation in the North Chilterns Chalk had enabled the Trust to engage with about 5,500 people and to run 100 outreach activities and 75 on-site events over the last three years.
- The completion of the Go Wild! Project in Peterborough funded by the Caterpillar Foundation through Perkins had engaged directly with 5,308 people over the past three years and many more indirectly
- There had been a variety of events at Trumpington Meadows including a puppet show, community event and the installation of sculptures and interpretation panels as well as a reflection garden in memory of Lord Lewis, the late Chairman of Veolia.

All of this work depended heavily on support from Trust volunteers in Local Groups, Watch Groups and those who regularly support the staff in the education centres to whom warm and grateful thanks was due.

The Chairman also thanked all members for their continued support for the Trust.

The President thanked the Chairman for a report which showed the breadth of activity within the Trust. The vote on the Annual Report and questions would be held after the presentation of the accounts.

5. Presentation and Adoption of the Accounts and Auditors' Report

The Honorary Treasurer presented the Accounts and Auditors' Report, copies of which had been posted on the website. Paper copies of the Report would be available on request. The Honorary Treasurer gave a short PowerPoint overview of the accounts to highlight salient points and hopefully enable members to understand the finances of the Trust better.

- This year showed a deficit of some £443K.
- £398K of this was unrestricted funds.
- £45K of this was restricted funds.
- Unrestricted funds meant money that could be spent anywhere
- Restricted funds were limited by terms under which it was received eg for a specific project, group or area of work.
- The restricted deficit was mainly due to timing differences ie income was received after expenditure
- The main reason for the larger unrestricted deficit was the problem with the RPA payments which it was hoped would be reversed
- The balance sheet remained strong and included assets of £20m most of which were heritage assets, including the nature reserves, which were managed for the benefit of nature and in the long term
- Members still remained very important to the funding of the Trust and subscriptions, including Gift Aid remained a major source of unrestricted income.
- As unrestricted funds were the "banker" for the restricted funds which had been spent prior to being claimed, it was vital that unrestricted income be maintained.
- The importance of this income was highlighted especially in light of the motion on subscriptions to be considered later.

- There were two big issues impacting on Trust finances.
- The problem with the RPA meant that there was currently a potential loss of £500K unrestricted income in the year. Previous year's accounts had shown £250K anticipated income. Due to the current uncertainty this amount had been written off this year.
- There was also uncertainty regarding the situation with a long closed pension scheme which was a multi-employer scheme in deficit.
- This Trust was currently paying £25K per annum towards a 10 year recovery plan.
- Due to this being a multi-employer scheme, it was proving very difficult to quantify this Trust's share of the liability in the long term. Trustees had been working hard to try and find out.
- There was no reference in the accounts to this liability as it was not known. Auditors had confirmed that this did not need to be included in the shorter term.
- There was a resolution to reappoint the current auditors. Trustees had undertaken the annual review of their independence and quality and been satisfied that they could recommend their reappointment.

The Honorary Treasurer hoped that the brief overview had been useful.

Queries/comment were invited from members on both the Annual Report and the Accounts.

- The numbers of Wildlife Watch Groups had decreased and also the attendance figures had gone down. Was this related to resources, or did we know what had happened? .
It was agreed that engagement at a young age through Watch was very important. The Trust still had more Watch Groups than other Trusts. A few volunteers had stood down and parents who were involved dropped out when their children were no longer involved. Groups did tend to fluctuate. There was a half member of staff working with Watch as well as the education team support provided. Events held over holiday periods at the education centres tended to attract more people than the weekly Watch meetings and were often fully subscribed but were dependent on volunteer support. If anyone knew someone who would like to help, please let us know.
- There was a query on exactly what carbon storage entailed.
Carbon storage meant restoring wetland habitat where carbon would be secured which would otherwise be lost. Farming in the Fens was responsible for half the carbon output in the Fens as peat soils eroded. Companies would pay the Trust to manage land to keep the carbon in the ground to offset the carbon loss that they incurred. Carbon capture and carbon storage were two very different processes.
- What was the situation with the current pension scheme?
The historic scheme with the deficit was a defined benefit final salary scheme. The current scheme for employees was a defined contribution scheme and depended on the value of the funds invested on behalf of the employee. There was a risk that the asset values could go up and down, but this liability was with the individual pensioner and not the Trust.
- Who were RSWT and what was their function?
The 47 separate Trusts together constituted The Wildlife Trusts (TWT) movement. The Royal Society of the Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) was a charity in its own right and acted as a central focus for the TWT and acted at a national level on their behalf on such things as political lobbying etc. All the WTs supported RSWT. TWT remained the brand name for the collective of WTs and as a conglomerate were one of the big four conservation groups at a national level.

Council had proposed the formal adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts. Peter Pilbeam seconded the motion. The Annual Report and Accounts were adopted *nem con*. There were no proxy votes cast against.

6. Appointment of Auditors

Saffery Champness were proposed as Auditors by Council. As they had now been Trust auditors for 12 years, a thorough review of their processes had been undertaken this year by Council to ensure that they remained objective and to check the quality of their work. A second partner within Saffery had looked at the work done and there had been spot checks made to ensure independence.

Derek Langslow seconded the motion. There was one vote against from a member who believed that it was good practice to change auditors every 3-6 years.

The Honorary Treasurer confirmed that the review would be undertaken annually. Changing auditors would have a cost implication for the Trust without necessarily gaining a better service.

7. Re-election of Council member

Dr Matt Walpole was standing for re-election having served his first three year term. Matt is a conservation biologist with 20 years post-doctoral experience in conservation, research, practice and policy. He is also part of the senior management team at Flora and Fauna International, responsible for the performance, strategic growth and sustainability of the organisation.

Matt was nominated for re-election by Council, seconded by Jeremy Payne and re-elected *nem con*.

8. Election of New Council members

Council had proposed five new Trustees whose biographies had been on the website, sent out in advance with details of the AGM and were available in the pack today:

Mrs Anne Bland was Deputy Leader of the Finnish Green League and Founding Chair of the Finnish Rural Greens before moving to Kingsthorpe in Northamptonshire.

Mrs Rebecca Jarrett is an HR professional at Cranfield University with a background in communications who lives adjacent to the River Ouse so habitat conservation and management is high on her list of personal priorities.

Mr Chris Lewis has been the link between developers Prologis and the Trust since 2008 and been instrumental in creating the partnership between the two organisations, particularly at Lilbourne Meadows wildlife area.

Dr Ananya Mukherjee has worked in various roles on environmental issues or nearly 10 years including monitoring and evaluation projects, in assessing the impact of climate change and in climate change adaptation work.

Mrs Margaret White's chief contribution to wildlife is through her work as Deputy Head teacher at St Faith's School, Cambridge including helping to introduce a Great British Nature Day to encourage all children, and their families, to learn more about, and appreciate the richness of British Wildlife.

Council proposed the new Council members *en bloc*, seconded by Derek Langslow and elected *nem con*. The meeting welcomed the new Council members with a round of applause.

9. Formal election of co-opted Trustee

Dr Sam Brockington was co-opted as a Trustee in January 2017. Sam is a Curator of the Cambridge University Botanic Garden and Lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

Sam was proposed by Council for formal election as a Trustee, seconded by Michael Allen and elected *nem con*.

10. Trustees Standing Down

Mr Stewart Lane was standing down as Trustee and Chairman of the Conservation, Education and Community Committee. Mrs Marion Hession was standing down as Trustee having been co-opted in April 2017. We were grateful to both for their valued contribution and unstinting support of the Trust.

11. Election of Chairman

Council has proposed Sir Graham Fry

Graham is a retired diplomat, his last overseas posting as Ambassador to Japan. He has been bird watching since 1973, and helped translate A Field Guide to The Waterbirds of Asia. He became one of our Trustees in 2012 and took over the Chairmanship last year. The Trust was privileged to have Graham as Chairman.

Seconded by John Wilson and elected *nem con*.

12. Election of Vice-Chairman

Council has proposed Professor William Stephens

William is an ecological scientist, specialising in the effect of climate on plant growth and he was Head of the Institute of Water and Environment at Cranfield University and is now University Secretary. He became a Trustee in 2014 and was elected as Vice-Chairman in 2016. The President declared an interest as Chancellor of Cranfield University.

Seconded by Derek Langslow and elected *nem con*.

13. Election of Honorary Secretary

Council has proposed Dr Jenna Bishop

Jenna's professional career was as a solicitor, including a period in the National Trust's Legal Department. She has an MA in Environmental Law, and her PhD was on the impact of different land tenure arrangements on the rural environment. Jenna has also worked as a university lecturer and has been a Trustee in 2010. Jenna was elected as Hon Secretary in 2016.

Seconded by Michael Allen and elected *nem con*.

14. Election of Honorary Treasurer

Council has proposed Mr James Fanshawe

A chartered accountant and a livestock farmer from Northants, specialising in rare and native breeds and with a background in policy work in Defra. James became a Trustee in 2016 and agreed to step in as Hon Treasurer in November 2017 following the sad death of John Harrison. The President thanked James for stepping into the breach and for his input into the complex issue of RPA.

Seconded by Stephen Oliver and elected *nem con*.

15. Election of Chairman of Conservation, Education and Community Committee

Council has proposed Dr Matt Walpole (as above). Seconded by Marion Hession and elected *nem con*.

16. Re-election of President (chaired by Chairman Graham Fry)

Baroness Barbara Young is standing for re-election as President.

The Chairman thanked the President for being a tremendous source of help and encouragement to Council and for her unique chairing of the AGM.

Proposed by Council, seconded by David Sedgley and re-elected *nem con*.

17. Election of Vice-President

Council has proposed Dr Derek Langslow as Vice President

Having trained as a biochemist, Derek was senior ornithologist at the Nature Conservancy Council from 1978, becoming Chief Executive of English Nature in 1990. Since leaving in 2000, Derek has served on the boards of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Marine Management Organization and the Natural History Museum. He became a Trustee in 2008 and was our Chairman from 2013 until 2016.

Seconded by Peter Pilbeam.

18. Special Resolution: increase of Wildlife Trust subscription rate

The Chairman explained the background to the resolution. As had already been highlighted by the Honorary Treasurer, subscriptions, Gift Aid and membership remained the bedrock for the funding of the Trust. Trustees had discussed membership at their Awayday and had realised that the minimum subscription rate had not been changed since 2007. Despite low inflation, it had been decided that now was the time to review the minimum rates. 70% of members already paid above the minimum and over 50% already paid above the proposed new minimum. Each year approximately 10% of members lapsed and the Trust needed to recruit to maintain levels. Those that were recruited now paid above the minimum so the proposal would try and close that gap.

The President believed that there was a lesson to be learned in not waiting 10 years to review the levels to avoid high increases. However, membership still remained a bargain for the access and knowledge that came with it.

Comment/queries

- Was it anticipated that there would be further rises over the next few years?
Although it was now intended to review the rates every year, it was not expected that there would be another rise for a few years.
- Had any thought been given to a reduced rate for Under 25s to include students?
We did offer concessionary rates for children, those in full time education and those out of work, but they were not widely advertised and needed to be applied for. If anyone contacted the Trust with a change of circumstances, they would be offered the lower rates. It was however probable that more impact could be made within Cambridge University were student rates made more available.
- There was a concern that a 50% rise would have an effect on those members who were less committed to the Trust with those falling by the wayside. Had phasing the increase been considered?
There was a risk of losing some members. There was however the question as to whether it would be better just to send out one letter with an increase rather than the psychological risks involved in having more than one for a phased increase.
- Was there also a risk that the numbers of members lost may offset the benefits of the increase?
Communication to members would be very important in order to show that membership was still excellent value for money.
- Was it possible to become a life member?
Life membership was available at 25 times the annual subscription so there was an age at which this was not good value.

The President thanked all for their input and recognised that all the points raised were very important and concerns were noted. The process had also highlighted the need to review the rates regularly.

The Resolution was put to members present. The Resolution was carried with one vote against and four abstentions from proxy votes were noted.

19. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

20. Presentation of Awards

RICHENDA HUXLEY AWARD

The Richenda Huxley Award recognises an outstanding contribution to any aspect of the work of the Trust.

This year's recipient Brian Smithers has been coming out with the Northamptonshire mid-week volunteer team for about 14 years but unfortunately, due to ill health, is now no longer to continue.

Whatever the weather, Brian always came out and was a very hard working, conscientious and very amusing member of the volunteer crew, always ready with a discussion point or witty quip, and willing to share his vast experience with others. This camaraderie was always appreciated by fellow volunteers and staff alike. Even when he was well into his 80's, he put the team to shame with his continuous hard work. Not only was he a valued practical volunteer, he also regularly updated Alan Smith with any planning matters that were going on in and around the Daventry area.

Brian was honoured to receive the award and thanked the Trustees and the staff at Lings who had nominated him. He had enjoyed every minute of his time volunteering with the Trust and it had been a privilege to meet and work with like-minded people committed to wildlife conservation. He had fond memories of the banter and camaraderie. He wished this Trust and others well for their growth in the future and hoped that they would all flourish.

OLIVER RACKHAM AWARD

The Oliver Rackham Award for an individual who had demonstrated outstanding service to wildlife in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire or Northamptonshire, through conservation, monitoring or research.

This year's recipient, Graham Bellamy, is well known to most Bedfordshire members through having managed the Chilterns National Nature Reserve of Barton Hills for Natural England for many years, before joining the staff of the Trust as conservation manager (1998-2008) and Reserves Manager (2008-2012). However, he volunteered for the Trust as a trainer (a botanist with particular expertise in chalk grassland), and helped with livestock before he joined the staff, and he has also been a stalwart of two Local Groups (Flit Vale and South Beds Chalk). He has run well a large number of well-regarded training workshops for the Trust. Throughout his time in Bedfordshire, Graham has been an active supporter of the Beds Natural History Society (county recorder for Crustacea and long-serving committee member), and a significant contributor to the Flora of Bedfordshire (2011). For many years Graham has led orchid monitoring at several important Beds reserves, continuing research on orchid population ecology begun in the 1980s by the late Terry Wells. This provided much of the fieldwork for his recent book on the Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire, which was published in 2015.

Graham thanked everyone in Bedfordshire who had worked and helped him over the years.

JON SMITH AWARD

The Jon Smith Award is a new award constituted in 2017 in memory of our much loved and missed former Great Fen Restoration Officer, a passionate conservationist who passed away in 2013, and is intended to recognise a volunteer who has gone the extra mile in their work for the Trust, having a significant impact on a particular aspect of the Trust's work.

This recipient of the inaugural award is Jessie Boucher whose outstanding service to wildlife and heritage in Cambridgeshire at the Great Fen is recognised, through delivering our education and community programmes.

In particular, Trustees noted Jessie's tireless commitment to bringing the Great Fen to life in schools and care homes across the area, inspiring hundreds of people, who might otherwise have felt no connection with their natural environment, to engage with the wildlife on their doorsteps. The time and boundless creativity that she has put into developing resources and ideas over the last three years has been an inspiration to the team, and her commitment to the Great Fen Heritage Group has been fundamental in developing a completely new area of work for the Wildlife Trust, which we shall be looking to build on across our three counties in the near future.

Jessie thanked all those at the Great Fen who had put her name forward for the award. She loved the Great Fen and all that it represented. She was still learning as she went along and felt very supported in her love of nature which had started with her father who had been a farmer who cared very much for nature and had taught her a lot. It was very important that the younger generation understood what was out there in the natural world and that life was not all on a screen.

The President thanked all three winners who were representatives of everything that made the Trust what it is through volunteers, staff and Council members; a family which could do wonderful things.

The President requested a sustained round of applause for all involved in the Trust.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 13.30.