

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

Minutes of the twenty-third Annual General Meeting at 12.00 hours on 13 October 2018 at the Manor School, Mountbatten Road, Raunds, Northamptonshire NN9 6PA

Present: Baroness Barbara Young (President), Sir Graham Fry (Chairman), Prof William Stephens (Vice Chairman), Mr James Fanshawe (Honorary Treasurer), Dr Jenna Bishop, (Honorary Secretary), Dr Matt Walpole (Chairman Conservation, Education and Community Committee), Trustees Ms Anne Bland, Dr Sam Brockington, Dr Sharon Erzinçlioğlu, Ms Rebecca Jarrett, Mr Chris Lewis, Mr Paul Solon, Ms Rebecca Stock, and 127 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 had been an amazing year for the Trust which was having a big impact on conservation and wildlife on a landscape scale.

There was a worry that Brexit would not be good for the environment, but the current Secretary of State with responsibility for the environment (Michael Gove) appeared to be making every effort to deal with the challenges and obtain the best deal possible for the environment going forward.

1. **Apologies for Absence:** Vice-presidents Michael Allen, Charles Chadwyck-Healey, Derek Langslow, Trustees Ananya Mukherjee and Ed Turner and 17 members.

2. Minutes of the Meeting on 7 October 2017

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 John Wilson and approved *nem. con.***

Questions would be invited on both the Annual Report and the Accounts following presentations from the Chairman and Hon Treasurer.

3. Presentation and adoption 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 attendee pack.

This year the format of the report had been altered and it was now in three sections:

- What the Trust was doing
- Governance
- Accounts (details of which would be presented by Hon Treasurer James Fanshawe)

The year 2016 to 2017 had had its ups and downs. The year 2017 to March 31 2018 had been better. The problem last year had been that the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) which administered payments to landownerS, had decided that all claims from the Trust from 2015 onwards were ineligible. This was a serious matter for the Trust as it affected some £250K income. The Trust had finally taken the RPA to court last year and the RPA had not defended their position. This meant that, in principle, the problems were now resolved. Thanks were due to Brian Eversham, Charlotte Cane and previous Director of Living Landscapes Oliver Burke for their perseverance and skill in pursuing this result. *Applause.*

Other figures from the year showed that the number of members was lower this year. Although membership income was up, the lower number of members did give Trustees some cause for concern. Programmes were being looked at to turn this situation

around. One of the main reasons was that the recruitment agency used by the Trust had had difficulty in recruiting staff and booking good venues. The agency was responsible for approximately two thirds of Trust member recruitment.

Last year had also seen a significant increase in the minimum levels of membership subscriptions. Trustees did not wish to end up proposing further large catch up sums after 10 years or so. Whilst not recommending any change in subscription levels this year, the situation would be reviewed each year to keep up with inflation.

The Trust continued to benefit from the support of over 1000 volunteers. It was not possible to calculate the value of volunteer time, but the Trust owed an enormous amount to those volunteers in whatever capacity.

Achievements during the year included:

- The opening of the Trust's first Visitor Centre at the **Nene Wetlands**. The Centre had now been up and running for over a year and was going well. It was an excellent venue for the Trust's education activities which continued to be an important part of the work. As a reserve, the Nene Wetlands was exactly what was meant by a Living Landscape as it was a 'joining up' of several reserves.
- Other Living Landscapes were progressing well. Drone footage of Kester's Docking at the **Great Fen** showed water levels rising since we had received permission to pump water into the project which was crucial to the restoration of the northern area. 75 bird species had now bred at the Fen. Cranes had arrived, but had not yet nested.
- A lot of monitoring work had been done at Pegsdon and Totternhoe on the **North Chilterns Chalk** to help inform management planning. Bringing new areas into the grazing regime had resulted in new species rich chalk grassland.
- At the **Greensand Ridge** we had been working with partners to raise awareness of the heritage of the area.
- More generally there had been losses and gains in reserves. The Trust had been managing **Twywell Hills and Dales** on behalf of Northants District Council, but were now unable to effectively manage it for conservation so it had been handed back to the Council. The Trust still maintained an interest however and was closely monitoring how the Council were dealing with the site.
- **Trumpington Meadows** reserve was now up and running amidst new housing and an agreement had been reached with the developers for the Trust to manage the meadows.
- A similar arrangement had been reached with developers at **Lilbourne** where there was now a reserve and barn.
- **The Biodiversity Records Centres** had continued monitoring and recording work and the Bedfordshire Record Centre had taken part in a project to map old orchards in the east of England which remained valuable centres for biodiversity.
- It was important to echo what the President had said about continuing to lobby government particularly through the **Green Alliance**. There were going to be two pieces of legislation – The Agricultural bill which was already in train and would define in future the subsidy to be paid to landowners and farmers and the Environment bill which would be put together in the next few months. This would be the first such bill for several years. The bill would be against the background of the UK no longer being in the European community so would need to set up an independent regulatory agency. It was hoped this would do more for the environment.
- All members were urged to write to their MP to encourage them to act to look after, and protect, the environment.

Applause

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.

- Financial performance had been good this year and the Trust had returned to a surplus which was almost the reverse of last year's deficit.
- Income slide showed that:
 - Membership subscriptions had raised £1.3m.
 - The figure of £1m received from RPA would not be as high in future.
 - Donations, appeals and legacies remained an important source of income
- It had been a difficult year for some aspects of financing. Funding became more difficult to achieve from both government and the lottery and there was a lot more competition for less money.
- The management team were working hard to increase funding as there was always plenty to spend money on.
- **RPA** – funding came to the Trust through Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Countryside Stewardship via the RPA. Current BPS payments were around £250K per annum. This figure would decline over the next 9 years. Problems with RPA payments dated back to 2015 and had had a knock on effect on subsequent years. It was also impossible to accurately predict when payments might come in. The Trust was still owed approximately £600K and we had no idea when that might be paid although, thanks to the efforts of the management team, we now knew that we would be receiving the payment. Adjustments had been made to the financial results for the past two years based on today's knowledge and showed a surplus of £449K to a deficit of £96K and 2017 had been revised from a £443K deficit to a surplus of £103K.
- None of the activities of the Trust were possible without the activities of other people. There had been an increase in membership income to £1.3m including Gift Aid of £266K – thanks to all who had joined the scheme – approximately 92% of members. If anyone else was able to sign up to Gift Aid, please do.
- Timing of any legacy was still impossible to predict. Year ending March 2017 the Trust had received £240K but only £63K in year ending March 2018. We were delighted to welcome Buckles solicitors to the event who were giving free will advice. Legacies remained an important source of income.
- Thanks were also due to all partners and corporate supporters.
- Volunteers remained of vital importance to the work of the Trust donating hundreds of thousands of hours. Dedicated teams of staff were also key and the Hon Treasurer took the opportunity to thank the finance team who were represented at the event by Charlotte Cane, Alison Thompson and Helen Bird for their hard work over the last year.
- In the ongoing search for new income sources, a Prospectus for Developers booklet had been produced to indicate how best we could work with developers to make their developments nature rich with a net gain for wildlife. Copies were available to look at around the hall.
- Expenditure – the Trust expenditure on conservation was approximately 83p in the pound covering both nature reserve management and other conservation and engagement work. It was difficult to assess how much money from fundraising went to core activity. Approximately 10p in every pound was spent on administration however the Trust would be unable to operate without finance, IT and other essential administrative work.
- The balance sheet was quite strong as the Trust had around £20m in heritage and other assets. Of the £1.5m cash however, most was allocated to be spent on restricted projects in the future. Cash which was not restricted to particular projects was not as healthy as £600K was still owed by RPA.

- The Trust had no borrowings and did not have to report to any financial institution or bank.
- Auditors – the Trust had employed the same auditors (Saffery Champness) for some 12+ years. Trustees reviewed the quality of their work, their independence and the audit partner every year and were satisfied with the service they gave. Council were therefore bringing a motion to reappoint them to the meeting.

The President thanked the Hon Treasurer for his report and invited questions on both the Annual Report and the Accounts.

- Normally the number of months of available cash was reported in the accounts. What was the current level? *At the moment the cash reserve level was 2.7 months. It should be 6 but the level reflected the difficulties with the RPS. Unrestricted cash was quite tight. The need to use unrestricted cash to pay bills which were then claimed back through restricted funds put pressure on cash reserves.*

There were no further questions which was a tribute to the Hon Officers and the staff and a mark of a well-managed Trust.

Council had proposed the formal adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts. Marion Hession seconded the Annual Report and Jennifer Dixon seconded the Accounts and Auditors Report. The Annual Report and Accounts were adopted *nem con*. No proxy votes had been cast against the motion.

6. Appointment of Auditors

Saffery Champness were proposed as Auditors by Council. Denis Woodbridge seconded the motion. **The appointment was approved *nem con*.**

The next items of business were for re-election/election of Trustees/Hon Officers to Council. Short biographies of all those proposed had been on the website and were in the pack for today.

7. Re-election of Council member

Professor William Stephens was standing down as vice Chairman and was therefore standing for re-election as a member of Council.

An ecological scientist, specialising in the effect of climate on plant growth. William was Head of the Institute of Water and Environment at Cranfield University and had recently retired as University Secretary. He became a Trustee in 2014 and was elected a Vice Chairman in 2016.

Council proposed William Stephens be re-elected to Council. Seconded by John Showers and elected *nem con*.

8. Formal Election of co-opted Trustee

Ms Becky Stock was co-opted as Trustee in March 2018 and was standing for formal election.

Becky had worked in Senior Purchasing roles for a variety of very large manufacturing and construction companies and was particularly interested in how the Trust interacts with big businesses to produce a net benefit for wildlife.

Council proposed Becky Stock be formally elected as a Trustee. Seconded by Carl Jarrett and elected *nem con*. Becky was welcomed with a round of applause.

9. 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 in 2016. The Trust was privileged to have Graham as Chairman.

Seconded by Marion Hession and elected *nem con*.

10. Election of Vice-Chairman

Council has proposed Dr Jenna Bishop

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

Seconded by Lesley Armstrong and elected *nem con*. Jenna was thanked for her input as Hon Secretary and welcomed as Vice Chair.

13. Election of Honorary Secretary

Council has proposed Mr Paul Solon

Paul worked for many years as a commercial lawyer in the City of London and now specialises in trusts, including charitable trusts and practises independently for a select number of high net worth individuals and families, and as an advisor to several charitable institutions.

Seconded by Peter Pilbeam 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.

Seconded by Robin Bligh and elected *nem con*. James was thanked for his input helping deal with the financial issues which had arisen over the last year.

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

Council has proposed Dr Matt Walpole

Matt is a conservation biologist with 20 years post doctoral experience in conservation research, practice and policy in academia and international NGOs. He is also part of the senior management team at Fauna and Flora International. The President declared an interest as a Vice President of FFI.

Seconded by Peter Pilbeam and elected *nem con*.

14. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The President offered a personal thank you to all who made the Trust such a wonderful institution including Brian Eversham who as CEO was one of the most effective in the Trust movement backed up by a great team of staff. The Council of Trustees was also to be thanked for their much valued support and guidance, as were the many volunteers who undertook all sorts of tasks for the Trust. Members were also to be thanked for their vital support. The President thanks all for coming along and looked forward to seeing everyone in the future. *Thanks was expressed by a sustained round of applause.*

15. 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 was Marion Hession. Marion was for many years the chair of the Bedford Local Group, continued to help organise their events and gave talks to other groups. She was a member of CECC from 2011 to 2018, where she had encouraged the Trust to think broadly about their education and community work and was briefly co-opted to Council as a very supportive and pragmatic trustee.

Marion felt privileged to accept the award on behalf of all volunteers and regarded it as good fortune to have worked with such a dedicated team for whom she had great admiration.

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 was Robin Bailey recognised for his long service as an office volunteer both in administrative roles and inputting and analysing survey data, and in the field. He had become quite an expert on almost every aspect of the Trust's monitoring work, and even helped to train new volunteers, especially for work on bats, dormice, insects, plants and birds.

Robin thanked all for the award which he accepted gratefully although he did not volunteer for recognition, but because he enjoyed it and got a lot out of it.

JON SMITH AWARD

The Jon Smith Award is an 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 year's recipient was Judith Line, a very committed churchyard volunteer who helped to boost the number of churches that were involved in the scheme and encouraging them to do more for wildlife in their churchyards. She was also Chair of the Kettering and District Natural History Society who surveyed all of the churchyards within the Kettering district. A couple of years ago Judith had moved back to Northumberland but still regularly visited and would suggest a churchyard suitable for a 'quick survey'.

Judith thanked all for the award but would particularly thank one lady, Gill Gent, who she wished had been able to attend but who at 90 years of age was reaching the end of her life journey.

All award winners received rounds of applause.

The President thanked all three winners who were great examples of how vital a passion for wildlife was to the work of the Trust. The President was thanked with a round of applause.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 12.50.

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