

## The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

### Draft Minutes of the twenty-fourth Annual General Meeting at 12.00 hours on 12 October 2019 at the Clay Farm Centre, Trumpington, Cambridge, CB2 9FN

**Present:** Baroness Barbara Young (President), Sir Graham Fry (Chairman), Dr Jenna Bishop (Vice Chairman), Mr James Fanshawe (Honorary Treasurer), Mr Paul Solon (Honorary Secretary), Dr Matt Walpole (Chairman Conservation, Education and Community Committee), Trustees Dr Sharon Erzinçlioğlu, Ms Rebecca Jarrett, Ms Jenny Neild, Ms Rebecca Stock, Prof William Stephens and 127 members.

- 1. Introduction.** The President welcomed members to the AGM, her last one after 14 years. A sad day, but she had enjoyed her tenure. The President reminded the room that only members were eligible to vote. Proposers and seconders of votes were asked to state their names clearly for the minutes.
- 2. Apologies for Absence:** Trustees Hannah Bartram, Chris Lewis and Ed Turner and 13 members.
- 3. Minutes of the Meeting on 13 October 2018**  
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 Marion Hession, seconded by Bill Block and approved *nem. con.***

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

#### **4. 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.

The past three years had had mixed results but the third year, to 31 March 2019, had been better for the Trust. A number of legacies had been of huge help, most especially that from Mr H K Bean, a long standing member who had left the Trust £1.8 million. This gave the Trust financial security and the ability to invest in its nature reserves, education work and more.

The freehold of Woodwalton Fen had also been transferred to the Trust by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT). This reserve had been bought 100 years ago by Charles Rothschild who donated the reserve to the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves for Britain and the Empire (SPNR), (now RSWT) in 1919. Woodwalton Fen would continue to be managed by Natural England under a long lease and remained at the heart of the Great Fen Project.

The Trust had been awarded a £1m grant by the People's Postcode Lottery for the *Water Works* project at the Great Fen to take forward research into growing crops in wet peat soil.

The statistics on engagement demonstrated the reliance that the Trust continues to have on its many volunteers.

Membership subscriptions were reviewed every year in order to avoid large increases. However, it had been decided that there would be no increase this year and a further review would be held in 2020. Most members paid more than the minimum in any case.

Highlights for the year included:

- Joining up of reserves to increase Living Landscape areas including in the Nene Valley.
- 180,000 visitors to the Visitor Centre at Rushden Lakes and increased focus on Trust education work at that site.
- Brampton Wood – further conifer removal and surveying work done with drones. The dormice population was thriving and there were good numbers of Black Hairstreak butterfly.
- The website was now more mobile friendly and had received 52,000+ visits.
- Education and community work continued to be inspirational, engaging with different groups
- Monitoring continued to be a very important part of Trust work and, during the year had included work on routes that bats used following hedgerows

None of this work would have been possible without the help and support of members and volunteers to whom a vote of thanks was due.

In the wider context, there was generally a greater consciousness of the environment and profile was being raised.

RSWT and the Wildlife Trusts had produced a film based on characters from 'Wind in the Willows' which had been shown over 50,000 times in cinemas.

The national '30 Days Wild' had been a success in June.

There seemed however to be no joined up thinking from the government on the Ox Cam growth arc and expressway. The WT for Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire (BBOWT) were seeking a judicial review of the proposals which this Trust was supporting. Although development was accepted as necessary, it was essential that it took account of the environment.

RSWT were part of the national Green Alliance. There was the possibility of a new environmental bill in the next week or so. Whilst it was not sure what this would contain the movement had long been in favour of Nature Recovery Networks as detailed in the David Attenborough video which was shown to attendees.

Questions on the Annual Report would be taken after presentation of the Accounts.

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

The Hon Treasurer presented the accounts for the year ending 31 March 2020.

- The financial performance resulted in a large surplus of £1.8m.
- There was however a story behind that surplus:
- The three items to be considered were;
  - The H K Bean legacy - £1.8m. The Trust was very grateful for all legacies.
  - Pension provision of (£248,914) which had now been reflected in the accounts as there was greater certainty on the Trust's share of the liability for the Defined Benefit Scheme. This scheme is now closed, but a small number of past staff remain in the scheme.
  - Woodwalton Fen and the Rothschild bungalow bringing £450K into the assets of the Trust.

- There were still residual difficulties with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) which were very slowly being resolved and which had taken a lot of management time.
- Securing funding remained difficult. There was a lot more competition for Lottery grants.
- The 'tree' slide from the Annual Report gave a broad brush analysis of where Trust money came from and where it was spent.
- There was a diverse portfolio. Legacy had become a large part of the income. £564K of income still came from RPA Basic Payment (BPS) and environmental stewardship schemes. The government intention for the future was that BPS would be reduced but it was hoped that new environmental schemes might increase income although there was as yet no certainty.
- The major part of expenditure remained nature reserve and conservation work.
- Education and community work on which £500K had been spent was also very important.
- None of the work of the Trust was viable without membership income. Subscription levels had held up well.
- Partnerships and sponsors also remained vital to the Trust as well as the volunteers who contributed tens of thousands of hours to the Trust.
- Staff also played a big role in the financial stability of the Trust. Special thanks were due to the finance team who produced numbers which could be relied upon but thanks were also due to staff across the Trust.
- The Trust balance sheet was strong and borrowings remained at nil.
- In light of the H K Bean legacy, the Trust had put monies in designated funds for the first time. These funds would be expended at the discretion of the Trustees and would include capital projects which would bring improvements in the long term.
- Restricted funds were those which were held for a specific purpose.
- The concept of accounting for nature was gradually being evolved.
- Offset of carbon, especially focused on the Great Fen, could be a big income stream in the future.
- It was hoped that the hedgehog in the final slide was emerging into a world of hope and adventure.

Approval of the Annual Report and Accounts was proposed by Council and seconded by Charles Chadwyck-Healey.

Questions on either were invited:

- Further explanation was requested on the amount of cash in hand/at the bank. The Hon Treasurer explained that the management of cash reserves was taken seriously and investment advisers, Sarasin, had now been engaged to deal with the legacies and the money put into a charity specific fund. Unrestricted income was needed as it generated cash for the day to day bills. Restricted assets were spent and then recovered.

There being no further questions, **The Annual Report and Accounts were adopted *nem con.***

The President believed that the report showed how well the Trust was doing, the clear strategy resulting in winning funding bids and the carbon for the future was a vital addition to the portfolio.

## 6. Appointment of the Auditors

**Saffery Champness were proposed by Council as auditors.** 1 proxy vote had been received against the motion. The Hon Treasurer explained why the Trust was intending to reappoint Saffery Champness for another year:

- The audit was an important item in corporate governance
- Saffery's performance was reviewed every year at Council
- Council were satisfied that Saffery gave good service at a reasonable price and that the audit partner which whom the Trust worked was more than competent.
- It was not a good time to change auditors as a new accounts system was going to be put in place and there was value in having people who understood the working of the Trust at this time.
- The situation may need to be considered in the future, but timing and the review had given rise to the resolution this year.

**The appointment of Saffery Champness was seconded by Robin Bligh and approved with one vote against.**

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

Dr Sharon Erzinçlioğlu had completed her first three year term as Council member and was standing for re-election.

*Sharon studied Zoology at Bangor University and gained a PhD in Animal Behaviour at Durham. Returning to a full-time research career in the 1990s, Sharon joined the Medical Research Council's Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit where she joined the Environment Group. Sharon enjoyed the countryside and volunteers with the Cambridge Mammal Group and the WT's Ecology Group.*

**Council proposed Sharon Erzinçlioğlu be re-elected as Trustee. Seconded by Joy Dingley and elected *nem con*.**

## 8. Formal Election of co-opted Trustees

Ms Hannah Bartram, Ms Jenny Neild and Dr Edgar Turner were standing for formal election having been co-opted as Trustees.

*Ms Hannah Bartram had spent her professional career working in the public policy and environment sectors including for the RSPB on a range of domestic and European conservation issues, Hannah currently worked as Chief Operating Officer for the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport. Hannah is a governor at Potton Lower and Middle Schools.*

The President declared an interest having worked with Hannah in the past.

*Ms Jenny Neild was Bursar and Strategic Development Director of the Stephen Perse Foundation, a family of seven schools across Saffron Walden and Cambridge. A chartered accountant and strategy consultant by background she had significant strategic, operational and financial experience. Jenny was interested in environmental issues and was working with Stephen Perse students on sustainability.*

The President declared an interest having worked with Jenny in the past.

*Dr Ed Turner was Curator of Insects and a University Lecturer at the Museum of Zoology and a Fellow at Clare College, Cambridge. He had been involved with WTBCN since 2006 when he worked as an Ecology Groups Officer on a project studying Duke of Burgundy butterflies at Totterhoe Quarry. Since then his work has focussed on impacts*

*of deforestation and oil palm extension in Malaysia and Indonesia. Ed joined CECC in 2014 and became a Trustee in 2015.*

**Council proposed all three be elected at Trustee. Seconded by Liz Chipchase and elected *nem con*.** All were 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 Michael Allen 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, was elected as Hon Secretary in 2016 and as Vice Chairman in 2018.*

**Seconded by Marion Hession and elected *nem con*.**

**11. 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 Charles Chadwyck-Healey and elected *nem con*.**

**12. 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 and Hon Treasurer in 2016.*

**Seconded by Steve Oliver and elected *nem con*.**

**13. 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.*

**Seconded by Jeremy Payne and elected *nem con*.**

**14. Election of President**

The Chairman took the chair of the meeting for the election of the President. **Council had proposed Mr Michael Allen.**

*A full biography was in the papers for the AGM. Michael had been Chair of the Council of WT BCN from 2002 until 2008 and a Trustee of RSWT from 1999 until 2005, subsequently serving as Chairman from 2005 until November 2011 so was extremely well qualified.*

**Seconded by Charles Chadwyck-Healey and elected *nem con*.** The President was delighted to have such an eminent successor and Michael Allen was welcomed with applause.

**15. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.



The President commented that she had been in post for a long time and still regarded WTBCN as the best Trust in Britain. The work of the Trust was vital at this time of so many threats and opportunities. There was also an upwell of public sympathy for conservation. The new Environment Bill would be in the Queen's Speech and the President hoped it would be as good as Michael Gove had envisaged. There were huge changes to agricultural policy proposed and a lot of challenges locally.

The message was to get on with what need to be done locally – salvation was in our own hands, do not wait for the government.

The President wished the Trust continued success on what it does on the ground, in research, engaging with children and engaging in campaigning work. This was only possible with the help of the wonderful members and volunteers. The President felt it a huge privilege to be part of this work and would continue to be both a member and a volunteer.

The Annual General Meeting closed at 12.45.

## **16. 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 Peter Allen. Peter, our volunteer accountant, was a key and consistent resource in the finance team and contributed ideas on continuous improvement to the effectiveness of the finance department. Peter had worked two days a week for the past 9 years on many aspects of finance work and had designed and written many of the financial information analysis reports.

### **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 Sarah Lambert. Sarah was Chair of the Peterborough Local Group and had run and organised many events. Sarah was also an active botanical recorder and photographer whose work often appeared on the Trust website and in the magazine. She had also helped to judge the WT photographic competition.

### **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 Peter Bungay. Peter was a biochemist by training and had supported the Trust in several in depth pieces of work including reviewing previous studies and the relevant scientific literature on carbon in peat, analysing the total carbon store in the Great Fen and developing a formula for costing the carbon offset backed by a detailed paper, giving credence to presentations to businesses. Peter had also worked on GDPR systems and presentation and analysis in H & S reports. Peter also volunteered with the Cambridge midweek practical team.

### SPECIAL AWARD

*In recognition of exceptional circumstances, the Trustees had decided to present a special one off award.*

Cliff Dean and Dick Allston, voluntary wardens at Felmersham had been, and continued to be, a huge help in looking after the reserve especially during the time when the Trust had to deal with cattle which had been abandoned at Felmersham for a period of 5 months. One, or both, had helped to feed the animals and check the site on a regular basis and had also in their conversations with local people deflected any adverse comment. Cliff and Dick had in total more than 60 years of voluntary wardening for the Trust.

Cliff and Dick were unable to be present at the AGM, but had already received their books of choice. It was also indicative of the type of person they were that one had donated the balance of his award for equipment at Felmersham.

The message taken from all the above was: volunteer if you do not already!

The President thanked all the award winners and thanked the Trust for having her – it was a wonderful organisation.

The Chairman thanked Barbara Young, the outgoing President, and wanted to put on record what a fantastic President she had been. Not only had she chaired the AGMs so entertainingly, but she had also been a great help behind the scenes with contacts and wise advice.

The Chairman thanked Barbara on behalf of all at the Trust for everything that she had done and presented her with a bouquet. There was sustained applause.