



The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

DRAFT

**MINUTES OF THE THIRTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON
SATURDAY, 11TH OCTOBER 2025 AT 12:00 AT
PRINCE WILLIAM SCHOOL, HERNE RD, OUNDLE, PETERBOROUGH PE8 4BS**

Present: Dr Hilary Allison (Chair), Michael Krause (Vice-Chair), Hannah Bartram (Hon. Treasurer), Professor Samuel Brockington (Chair of Conservation, Education and Community Committee)

Trustees: Matthew Day, James Marsh, Dr Reiner Schulte, Richard Vyse

- 1. Introduction:** The Chair, Dr Hilary Allison advised that the President, Sir Partha Dasgupta, was unable to attend, so she would be leading the AGM on behalf of the Trust, in line with the Articles of Association. The Chair welcomed members to the AGM and thanked everyone for joining. She also thanked everyone who gave presentations exemplifying the dedication of everyone involved in the Trust, including Members.

The Chair then invited the Supporter Engagement Manager, Laurie Harper, to explain how the proceedings would run. The Supporter Engagement Manager explained that questions submitted in advance would be answered under Any Other Business. For those present, questions could be asked during the AGM, and for those streaming, questions could be submitted via email, which would be answered later in the week by staff and Trustees.

The Supporter Engagement Manager explained that members would be asked to propose or second a resolution. To do so members would be asked to raise their hand and clearly state their name in full for the purpose of the Minutes.

The Supporter Engagement Manager then invited the Vice-Chair, Michael Krause, to read out the apologies and to advise on proposing or seconding Resolutions.

- 2. Apologies for Absence:** 32 apologies for absence were received, including from Sir Partha Dasgupta, President, Sir Michael Allen, Vice President, Jan Davis, Hon. Secretary, Caroline Brown, Trustee, Matt Hayes, Trustee, and Michael Samways, Trustee.

Voting would be by a show of hands for those in the room. Members who were absent or who were streaming the meeting had had the opportunity to vote by proxy, and those votes would be read out for each resolution by the Vice Chair and nominated proxy. If the vote was a clear majority, raised hands would not be counted, but if the vote was close, then they would be counted.

The Vice-Chair then handed back to the Chair to proceed with the Resolutions.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2024 (Resolution 1):

The draft minutes for the Annual General Meeting held on 19th October 2024 had been posted on the website and offered to members attending on the day. Members who 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: William Stephens

Seconded by: John Wilson

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 111, Against 0, Abstention 6

There was a visual show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against and no abstentions. The motion was carried.

4. Presentation of the Annual Report of the Board of the Trustees (Resolution 2):

The Chair presented the Annual Report by recounting a few of the highlights. She advised that this was the last year that the Trust would be reporting on its previous five-year plan, and next year's report would show further improvements in how the Trust will hold itself to account to its members on the impact it has achieved.

The Chair advised that the past year had been a challenging one for the Trust as well as for other environmental organisations. However, important milestones had still been achieved in the Trust's mission to bring people closer to nature and make its three counties richer in wildlife. For example, thanks to careful management of habitat, lost wildlife had returned to many of the Trust's reserves, such as the beavers which were reintroduced to the Nene Valley after an absence of at least 400 years. The Chair highlighted how this has caught the public imagination and advised that the beavers had already made a significant mark on the reserve, with their progress documented through camera traps. The Chair also highlighted the reintroduction of water voles to the Nene Valley after a 20-year absence.

Further milestones included:

- Completion of the acquisition of Strawberry Hill, which was the culmination of nearly four years of work by the Trust's team and a result of the Trust's biggest ever appeal.
- Achieving great progress in connecting and creating new wetland habitats in the Great Fen through the Peatland Progress project, enriching wildlife and locking-in carbon.
- The Trust's work to bring people closer to nature had been sustained and enhanced by visits to schools and supporting local community groups and communities who want to enhance their own local green spaces. This has brought the Trust into contact with over 6000 schoolchildren and a further 6000+ people of all ages as a result community events. The Chair highlighted that the work of the Northants Nature Girls group, outlined in the Impact Report, was an example of how local groups can gain momentum very quickly.
- The Trust has also worked as part of the National Wildlife Trust movement, including hosting a ministerial visit with the Environment Minister, Mary Creagh MP, just before the government announced wild beaver releases were to be allowed under licence.

- Sites such as Trumpington Meadows had been used as national exemplars of how development and nature could work together.

The Chair thanked legacy pledgers, appeal donors, members, local businesses, funders and grant givers who have supported the Trust, as without them none of the achievements over the past year would have been possible.

The Chair asked if there were any questions. None was forthcoming.

Council had proposed the formal adoption of the Annual Report. Martin Baker seconded the Annual Report. The Annual Report was adopted.

Voting Tally for adoption of the Annual Report of the Board of Trustees:

Proxy: For 116, Against 0, Abstention 1

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried

5. Presentation and Adoption of the Accounts and Auditors' Report (Resolution 3):

Ms Hannah Bartram, Hon. Treasurer, presented a brief financial overview for the year ended March 2025, as follows:

- The total income for 2024/25 was just short of £14 million.
- Just over one third, 37%, of that income came from grants, partnerships and business activities. There were 51 different funders who supported the Trust through the grants process. The Trust sold conservation expertise to other organisations, and business activities included land rents, running events and selling merchandise.
- Just short of another third, 30%, came from donations, memberships and legacies, and this was highlighted as a critical area of income.
- The other third, 33%, came in the form of a commuted sum to fund the on-going costs of Trumpington Meadows.
- The Honorary Treasurer expressed her thanks to all individuals and organisations who had contributed to the Trust, not just financially but also in terms of strengthening the Trust's voice when advocating and campaigning for wildlife.
- The total expenditure for the year was £7.7 million, spent on maintaining and improving nature reserves and on working with others to improve conservation outside our reserves. This included managing over 100 nature reserves, including rare habitats such as fen, wildflower meadows and ancient woodlands, bringing beavers back to the Nene Wetlands, as well as reintroducing water voles there, continuing the conservation management of Strawberry Hill for nightingales, turtle doves, warblers and the many other species that our monitoring team of staff and volunteers have surveyed, and assisting in the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies across the region.
- The Hon. Treasurer also advised that the Trust also invested in education and community engagement and had a new community focussed approach called Team Wilder, which inspired a love of nature and was integral to the Trust's objectives and mission.
- In total, the Trust reached more than 12,500 people of all ages through staff-led face-to-face events and activities.
- The Hon. Treasurer highlighted that the sale of the Strawberry Hill farmhouse and buildings were completed in April 2025, which generated an income of c.£1.3million, including a surplus of c.£300k.

- The Hon. Treasurer advised that the Trust had faced a number of significant financial challenges during the year, many of which were still ongoing, much due to the prevailing macro-economics.
- The Trust's costs were still rising at a higher rate than the increase of most income streams. Further challenges included needing to recruit and retain staff at the market rate and increasing competition for grants.
- Opportunities included exploring new income streams, for instance, selling carbon credits from Speechly's Farm. Some of these have already been sold to approved buyers and the Trust was confident there were further potential buyers in the pipeline. The Trust's 50% share in Muchwood Green Burials is continuing to generate a good rate of return on investment. Additionally, three sites had been improved for nature, enabling the Trust to sell Biodiversity Net Gain units to developers. The Trust was also continuously looking to improve its digital marketing plan and new ways of support alongside keeping a strong control over costs.
- Looking forward, with so much important work happening, the Trustees had approved another investment budget for 2025/26 with the aim of moving to a balanced budget within two to three years.
- Trustees kept spend and forecast under regular review and took remedial action to stay in budget wherever possible. There were designated funds for unavoidable inflationary costs.
- The Honorary Treasurer thanked members, on behalf of the Trustees, for their ongoing support and commitment to the Trust.

The Chair commended the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report to Members.

There were no questions on the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report.

Council had proposed the formal adoption of the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report. Peter Pilbeam seconded the adoption. The Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report were adopted.

Voting Tally for adoption of the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report:

Proxy: For 115, Against 0, Abstention 2

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

6. Re-appointment of the Auditors (Resolution 4):

The Chair invited the Hon. Treasurer, Hannah Bartram, to give a brief overview of the auditors. The Hon. Treasurer explained that Price Bailey were proposed by Council as Auditors. The Honorary Treasurer confirmed that the Trust were happy with their work and proposed that Price Bailey be appointed as Auditors for a further year.

Council had proposed the appointment of Price Bailey as Auditors. Seconded by William Stephens and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 111, Against 1, Abstention 5

There was a visual show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

7. Re-election of Council Members

The President advised that there are no Council Members proposed for re-election this year.

8. Formal Election of co-opted Trustees (Resolution 5):

The President explained that there was one Trustee, **Dr Reiner Schulte**, who had been co-opted since the last AGM and who now needed to be formally elected to the Council. His biography had been published on the website for the past month but was summarised as follows:

Reiner was the Head of Flow Cytometry at the Cambridge Institute for Medical Research. He graduated as a Biochemist in 2003 at the University of Jena, Germany and in 2007 obtained a PhD (immunology) from the University of Goettingen, Germany. Reiner had an interest in public engagement and community science and joined the Wildlife Trust's Cambourne work party and became a volunteer warden in 2022.

Council proposed Dr Reiner Schulte be elected to Council. Seconded by Martin Baker and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 113, Against 1, Abstention 3

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

9. Council Members Standing Down:

The Chair advised that **Kim Dunn** resigned in June 2025, and she had served from March 2023 to that date. No trustees were standing down at this AGM.

The Chair thanked Kim on behalf of the Council and Staff for her contribution to the effective working of the Trust.

10. Election of Chair (Resolution 6):

The Chair handed over to the Vice-Chair, Michael Krause, for Resolution 6: the election of Chair.

Dr Hilary Allison had spent most of her career advocating for protection, restoration, management and expansion of woodlands, including 25 years at the Woodland Trust and most recently as a Forestry Commissioner. She had been a trustee since 2021.

Council proposed re-election of Hilary Allison as Chair. Seconded by Peter Pilbeam and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 114, Against 0, Abstention 3

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

The Vice-Chair handed back to the Chair, Dr Hilary Allison, for Resolution 7: the election of Vice-Chair.

11. Election of Vice-Chair (Resolution 7):

Michael Krause had worked in nature conservation charities, including Fauna and Flora International, Plantlife, the RSPB and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, for over twenty years in roles including fundraising and senior management. He had been a Trustee since 2023.

Council proposed re-election of Michael Krause as Vice-Chair. Seconded by Nick Hammond and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 112, Against 2, Abstention 3

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

12. Election of Honorary Secretary (Resolution 8):

The Chair advised that Jan Davis was not present and had sent her apologies.

Jan Davis was an experienced Human Resources leader, specialising in developing managers in complex, global environments. Since taking early retirement, she has focused on volunteering, and was also Chair of Trustees of the Hunts Community Cancer Network. She had been a trustee of this Trust since 2020.

Council proposed re-election of Jan Davis as Honorary Secretary. Seconded by Peter Warden and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 112, Against 0, Abstention 5

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

13. Election of Honorary Treasurer (Resolution 9):

Hannah Bartram spent her professional career in the public policy and environment sectors. Hannah became a Trustee in 2019 and was elected Treasurer in 2022.

Council proposed re-election of Hannah Bartram as Honorary Treasurer. Seconded by Clive Hilton and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 114, Against 0, Abstention 3

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with none against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

14. Election of Chair of Conservation, Education and Community Committee (Resolution 10):

Professor Samuel Brockington was Professor of Evolution in the Department of Plant Science at the University of Cambridge, and Curator of the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Sam had been a Trustee since 2017, and Chair of the Conservation, Education and Community Committee since 2023.

Council proposed the re-election of Professor Samuel Brockington as Chair of Conservation, Education and Community Committee. Seconded by Robert McChesney and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 113, Against 0, Abstention 4

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with none against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

15. Resolution to approve the election of Professor William Stephens as Vice President (Resolution 11):

Professor William Stephens was an ecological scientist by background, and he had spent 32 years at Cranfield University in Bedfordshire specialising in the effect of climate on plant growth. He was head of the Institute of Water and environment from 1999 to 2006. He chaired the university board for energy and environment, responsible for Cranfield's environmental performance. He was a Trustee of the Wildlife Trust BCN from 2014, serving as Vice-Chairman from 2016 to 2018 and Chairman from 2020 to 2024.

Council proposed the election of Professor William Stephens as Vice President. Seconded by Robert McChesney and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 113, Against 0, Abstention 4

There was a show of hands at the meeting, with none against or abstentions. The motion was carried.

16. Announcement of Awards:

The President stated that the Trust relied on the dedicated support of a vast range of volunteers, including many in the audience. The awards honoured volunteers whose contribution had been particularly outstanding. The Awards took the form of £75 worth of books. Unfortunately, two of the winners were unable to be present on the day.

The **Richenda Huxley Award** recognised the outstanding contribution to any aspect of the work of the Trust. This year the Trust awarded two volunteers.

Gail Anscombe: Gail had volunteered in Northamptonshire since 2009 and for a large part of that time she went out weekly with the Northants practical reserves volunteers. Since 2020 Gail had dedicated over 400 hours to helping put over 60 years of reserves paperwork in order. This had involved coming in twice a week for about 6 hours in total, going through multiple files for each nature reserve, checking for duplicates and disposing of any found, sorting each reserve folder into management plans, maps, species records, habitat management works, etc.

Without Gail's invaluable effort, the scanning exercise would have been impossible.

Unfortunately, Gail was not present on the day, but the Chair confirmed her books would be sent to her. Gail received a round of applause.

Phil Bray: Phil had been a valuable volunteer on Bedfordshire work parties for many years. He was hard working and reliable with reserve staff knowing they could give him any task and he would work until it was completed. Despite his age, staff struggled to keep up with him when working together. Phil had also been crucial in the maintenance

of Trust equipment; repairing damaged rakes and delivering boxes of kindling for the fire and Kelly kettles.

Unfortunately, Phil was unable to be present on the day but received a round of applause. The Chair advised Phil had very kindly donated his book award money to the Trust.

The **Oliver Rackham Award** recognised individuals who had demonstrated outstanding service to wildlife in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire through conservation, monitoring or research. This year the Trustees decided to award two volunteers.

Martin Baker: Martin was volunteer warden at Lady's Wood and Raveley Wood from January 1986 to 2024, completing practical and monitoring work, as well as supporting work at nearby Upwood Meadows. Martin promoted the Trust to local people via organised walks and on-site at busy weekends. Martin continued a very long running annual Early Purple Orchid monitoring scheme at Raveley Wood (since 1995) as well as having been part of the Upwood Meadows Green-winged Orchid monitoring group. Martin was for many years a member of CECC, and served for six years as a Trustee (2010-2016). He had been a very supportive advocate for the Trust's fundraising team. All staff appreciated his unfailing enthusiasm and positivity. Martin came forward, received his books from the Chair and then expressed his thanks and gave a short speech.

Martin said he received his first membership card from the Trust in the Spring of 1986 and that he had carried on from there. He recalled forming a Local Group with Derek Niemann in the autumn of 1986 and was delighted that the Local Group was thriving to this day. Martin thanked Tim, the current Chair of the Local Group, for continuing their work. He advised that he had had a wonderful time at the Trust, and thanked everyone for their support over the past 39 years. Martin left to a round of applause and a photo of him with the late Oliver Rackham was displayed on the presentation screen.

Peter Pilbeam: Peter had begun volunteering with WTBCN in 1977 and had given hundreds of hours of his time helping both the Reserve Team and Monitoring and Research Team, as well as serving as a Trustee in the 1980s. Since 1979 he had been Reserve Warden at Doghouse Grove, making him the longest serving, still current, warden in Cambridgeshire. As well as working across many Cambridgeshire reserves as a practical volunteer, he was an expert mammal surveyor. With the Ecology Group volunteers, Peter had led numerous bat surveys across several nature reserves and was a regular licenced dormouse surveyor at Brampton Wood. Peter regularly ran Wildlife Training Workshops for the Trust including mammal tracks and signs, small mammal identification, and owl pellet dissection.

Peter came forward, received his books from the Chair and then expressed his thanks. He recalled his time at the original Trust office when there was only one member of staff and a small committee. He also recalled his involvement with the purchase of the first area of the Great Fen project. He left to a round of applause.

The **Jon Smith Award** was constituted in 2017 in memory of our much loved and missed former Great Fen Restoration Officer, a passionate conservationist, and recognised

volunteers who had gone the extra mile in their work for the Trust, having had a significant impact on a particular aspect of the Trust's work. This year the Trustees decided to make one award.

Keith Jones: Keith had started volunteering at the Summer Leys visitor centre when it opened in 2022 and had since been an invaluable help to the team. He was their main volunteer who has turned up every Saturday morning to help in the centre and for events: the team had said that they could always rely on him to be there to assist them and welcome visitors to the reserve. He had also recently started volunteering with the reserves team over the winter, helping with work parties at the Nene Wetlands. Keith was a great asset to both teams.

Keith came forward, received his books from the Chair and then expressed his thanks. He described the benefits of working with the dedicated team at the Nene Valley reserves and expressed his appreciation of the wider vision of the Trust and the Youth Forum. He concluded by thanking the Trust for investing in his training and then left to a round of applause.

17. Any Other Business

Conservation Director, Matt Jackson, was invited to answer the first question received in advance.

Question 1: "Regarding Pegsdon Hills Reserve: these orchid rich meadows, part of the reserve extension, are being lost to hawthorn scrub – really need tree popping and grazing to control scrub unless the plan is to let them develop into woodland."

Answer: The Conservation Director confirmed that the two fields in question did have a significant amount of scrub in them, but there was no intention to allow them to succeed to woodland. The Trust had left the fields deliberately to allow the scrub to get bigger because we were looking at whether we would get a better success rate in terms of treating the stumps after we cut them back if we could identify them more easily. The Conservation Director explained that there were difficulties in getting the grazing pressure right to keep the scrub down to the level we would like, especially as there was no water supply at the top end of the Pegsdon Hills.

Ironically, and co-incidentally, the first work party to cut and treat the scrub had already been planned for and took place the day after this question had been received!

Resources and Business Director, Alison Thompson, and Conservation Director, Matt Jackson were invited to answer the second question received in advance.

Question 2: "I note there is income of £5,948,942 for Land advice, advocacy and management contracts Income resulting from partnerships with land owners such as councils and property developers where an improvement for wildlife can be obtained. How much of this has been received from IM Properties and Newlands Corporation, and is this the reason why BCN has been very reticent to object to the proposed warehouse developments that threaten Titchmarsh Nature Reserve just meters away? If no money was received from IM or Newlands in FY 2024/25, what has been received in previous years?"

Answer: The Business Director confirmed that none of the income received this year or in past years had come from either IM Properties or Newlands Corporation. As explained in the Hon. Treasurer’s presentation, a major part of the income referred to this year came from a commuted sum for the management of Trumpington Meadows for the next eighty years. The Trust had not had any income from the developers in question, neither in the financial year in question nor at any time.

The Conservation Director confirmed that the Trust had objected to the development and to a similar one nearby and continued to maintain that objection. As with all our planning engagement, the Trust was not anti-development but was pro-wildlife, and would only maintain objections to planned development where there was a significant impact on wildlife. In the Nene Valley, the wildlife issues were complicated as they related to the effect on land which was functionally linked to the reasons the Special Protection Area had been designated. The Trust was pushing for a co-ordinated approach to be taken to such functionally linked land.

The President then asked if there were any questions from Members in the room.

Question 3: from Peter Pilbeam for Honorary Treasurer, Hannah Bartram, and Chief Executive, Brian Eversham.

“Do we keep the commuted sum for Trumpington Meadows in a separate account for 80 years or is it kept together with other funds?”

Answer: £3.9 million of the sum had been invested through an investment company, and the rest would be used for undesignated spend. The Trust was confident that the £3.9 million would be more than enough to cover the running costs of Trumpington Meadows for the 80 years.

Question 4: for Engagement Director, Louise Rackham.

“When mentioning nature reserves in communications, could the Trust please include postcodes, so members can easily identify where they are?”

Answer: We would take on board the feedback and would look at ensuring postcodes were added to future communications. There were full details of reserves in the Reserves Handbook, and all members were welcome to request one of these if they did not have one.

Question 5: for Business Director, Alison Thompson.

“How does Muchwood Green Burials generate income for the Trust?”

Answer: The Trust owned 50% of Muchwood Green Burials and the return the Trust had received to date was 8% per annum. This was received as a donation each year.

Question 6: for the Chief Executive, Brian Eversham.

“What is the current arrangement between the Trust and Wildlife Travel?”

Answer: The Chief Executive declared an interest, as he was also a director of Wildlife Travel. Since the organisation was founded in 1988, it had donated all its profits to Wildlife Trusts. Until last year, the profits had been donated pro rata to individual Wildlife Trusts, dependent on where holidaymakers came from. However, there was a concern among Wildlife Travel directors that donations made across the 46 Wildlife Trusts in this

way had little impact, Therefore, in the current year, it was decided that the whole donation would go to one project, the Celtic Rainforest, where it could have a more significant impact.

The Chair ended the Annual General Meeting by thanking Members for joining the event.

The Annual General Meeting closed at 13:00.