

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

Draft Minutes of the nineteenth Annual General Meeting at 12.00 hours on 11 October 2014 at Ormiston Bushfield Academy, Ortongate, Peterborough, PE2 5RQ

Present: Baroness Barbara Young (President), Dr Derek Langslow (Chairman), Miss Margaret Goose (Vice Chairman of the Council), Ms Karen Silcock (Honorary Treasurer), Ms Fiona Chesterton (Honorary Secretary), Mr Martin Baker, Dr Jenna Bishop, Sir Graham Fry, Mr Paul Solon, Mr Stewart Lane and 72 members.

The President welcomed members to the AGM and reminded the room that only members were eligible to vote.

1. Apologies for Absence: Ms Aileen Adams, Ms Stella Baylis, Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey Bt., Mr George Cottam, Mr Paul and Mrs Marion Darnell, Dr Pat Doody, Prof David Gowing, Mr Tony Hindley, Mr Tony Juniper, Ms Christine Newell, Sir John Robinson Bt., Mr James Stephens, Mr William Stephens, Mr Ioan Thomas, Ms Florence Warrington.

2. Minutes of the Meeting on 13 October 2013

Draft minutes had been posted to the website and were in the packs issued. The meeting was 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 Marion Hession and approved *nem. con.*

3. Presentation of the Annual Report

The President presented the Annual Report. Copies of the Annual Report had been posted to the website and copies had been distributed to the meeting. A shorter, more readable version of the Report was also in the pack and would appear in the next issue of *Local Wildlife Magazine*, but the report and accounts had to follow the layout as recommended by the Charity Commission.

The first two pages summarised the organisation of the Trust which hopefully reassured members that the Trust was a well-run organisation. The meeting had already been told of progress made and details of the new Development Plan. Page 3 detailed our charitable objectives and mission, which was still to conserve local wildlife, by caring for land ourselves and with others; to inspire others to take action for wildlife; and to inform people, by offering advice and sharing knowledge.

Page 3 also highlighted the 50th anniversary of the establishment, on 11 May 1963, of the Naturalists' Trust for Northamptonshire, which would become the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, merging with the then Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust in 1994 to form our present organisation. The Trust now had nearly 9,000 members, hundreds of active volunteers and over 20 paid staff in Northamptonshire, and managed a huge range of habitats of a total area in excess of 100 hectares. In June 2013 we celebrated these 50 years of nature conservation with some of our longest-standing supporters who collectively had transformed nature conservation in Northamptonshire. Hosted by our Trustee Sir John Robinson and his wife at their family home, Cranford Hall, the celebrations included a wonderful presentation of the last 50 years' activities from Ioan Thomas, a founder member and Vice President of the Trust, and an opportunity to look forward to the future, which for wildlife in Northamptonshire looked brighter than ever.

Highlights of our conservation work began on page 4. Our land holdings were now 8,389 acres (3,945 hectares) across 126 nature reserves: an increase of about 1300 acres due to the expansion of several existing sites.

Work continued apace in our four priority Living Landscapes, including the start of the most ambitious phase of habitat restoration so far at the Great Fen. The creation of Rymes Reedbed in the north-west, which had already attracted a wealth of wildlife (including great grey shrike and short-eared owls) despite being 10 years away from full maturity, was being swiftly followed by a mixture of reedbed, open water, and wet and dry grassland which would be known as Kester's Docking. We were awarded a further £1.89 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable us to restore Engine Farm, which would increase the area for wildlife by almost one-fifth and connect the areas already restored in the north and south of the Great Fen through a mixture of grasslands, meadows and wetlands.

We celebrated the official opening of the new guided busway ecological compensation area at Blows Downs in Bedfordshire; engaged 100 volunteers in a major tree-planting at Browne's Piece in Cambridgeshire; and created new scrapes and pools at Titchmarsh in Northamptonshire, attracting birds to the new habitat in great numbers. A huge amount of work had been done in habitat creation.

On pages 8-9, members could read about wildlife highlights, including nine species of bat recorded at Grafham Water; the Large Velvet-ant found at Rymes Reedbed in the Great Fen, the only known population in central England; and Houghton Regis Chalk Pit (Bedfordshire) being hailed by the national press as being one of the best sites in the country to see wild orchids during spring 2013 as well as thousands of Chiltern gentians carpeting the reserve in late summer, making this reserve arguably the best site in the UK for this nationally scarce wildflower.

Our work in the wider countryside beyond our nature reserves was covered on pages 11-12, including the Trust's participation in the Coronation Meadows initiative launched by HRH The Prince of Wales, which would establish at least one new wildflower meadow per county to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Coronation. The Trust would be donating wildflower seed from four of its reserves to help restore a number of recipient sites across the three counties.

Members had already heard about outreach within local populations to encourage them to value what they had on their doorsteps. Perhaps even more so than in previous years, our education and community work had concentrated on communities within our Living Landscape schemes, where influencing people could do the most good for wildlife, and members could read about this on pages 13-14 of the report. We still had one of the strongest Wildlife Watch networks in the country, including a new group in the North Chilterns Chalk Living Landscape Scheme, which together with a new Local Group would increase long-term support for our work there. We now had an Ouse Valley Education & Community Officer, doing sterling work engaging communities around the new reserve at Godmanchester Gravel Pits. And our education and community work around Irthlingborough Lakes and Meadows in Northamptonshire, funded through the Living Nene project by the Heritage Lottery Fund, was reaching an ever wider range of community organisations and local people.

On pages 15-16 was information about the many people and organisations without whose support and contribution our work would not be possible, including our wonderful members, who increased in number by 2% to 35,032, and our no less wonderful network of over 1,100 volunteers. We were also grateful to our generous corporate supporters and to our growing network of Wildlife Guardians – those members who felt able to give

more to the Trust than the standard annual membership. For anyone seeking more information about Wildlife Guardian membership, Emily Alexander had leaflets and would be pleased to discuss it.

It had been an amazing year for the Trust including the work that staff and trustees had done on the new five-year development plan, and information on this and other plans for the future was contained in pages 17-18, including a new partnership with the retail development at Rushden Lakes in the heart of the Nene Valley, which would fund the Trust to manage an area of internationally important wildlife habitats and link four of our existing reserves together.

The President believed that this was the best Trust in the country and passed personal congratulations to Council, staff and volunteers.

Questions were to be held over until after the presentation of the Accounts and Auditors' Report.

4. 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 and were in the pack. Ruth Evered from Safferys, the auditors, and Terry Hazeldine (Finance and Administration Director) were present to answer questions.

The current year had again shown a good, steady performance in conditions that remained far from easy. The pressure was still being felt by government, businesses and individuals alike, and we thank all our supporters and partners most warmly for their continuing support of our work for Wildlife.

This year's accounts needed to be looked at in two halves, restricted and unrestricted. By 'restricted' was meant funds that we had been given to use for specific purposes and projects; the Great Fen was our largest example. 'Unrestricted funds' were funds we raised and received for our general charitable purposes, for instance maintaining and developing our own wonderful nature reserves – sometimes not as "headline grabbing" as the big restricted projects, but absolutely the engine room of the whole Trust in terms of our work with both nature and people.

Taking the application of restricted funds first, we were delighted to have received further Heritage Lottery Funding for the Great Fen, supporting ongoing work and giving us a grant of £1.89 million to assist in the buy-out of the Engine Farm tenancy. Our restricted income increased by some £1.7 million compared with last year, but this increase was accounted for by this one-off grant. So whilst we were delighted, the pressure was still on to maintain the flow of funds needed to support other specific projects for which restricted funds needed to be raised, and the broad spectrum of our work which was financed by the unrestricted funds we raise.

In this latter category, we were carrying forward just under £200,000 of unrestricted funds (compared with some £100,000 last year) for allocation to future work. This had enabled us to sustain our financial reserves at a similar level to last year, with a slight improvement to a financial reserve equivalent to 3.6 months unrestricted expenditure, compared to 3.5 months last year. This was slim when one considered that many of our income sources were unpredictable, and also vulnerable.

Except for the Great Fen grant, our sources of income, and expenditure on our work were overall fairly consistent with last year, although we were assisted by some earlier, and larger than expected, payments from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) which was the main cause of the increase of some £150,000 in our unrestricted grants.

Our expenditure on charitable activities continued to grow steadily from some £3.9 million, to just over £4 million.

Members may have noted an increase in marketing costs. Part of this was due to the higher levels of commission charged by the new membership recruitment company (WFC) set up last year and owned by a group of Trusts including ourselves. This replaced a third-party provider which became insolvent. This was a difficult sector to operate in, with no other credible providers who could give us the service we very much need in the medium term for face-to-face recruitment. Its performance had been satisfactory, helping us increase our membership, but we were keenly aware of the fact that we needed to find a range of new methods to reach out to existing and new members and supporters more cost effectively, using internet and other technologies. We had also invested recently in some new fundraising initiatives, the results of which were being analysed to assist us in directing resources most effectively. This was partly offset by reductions in other Fundraising costs.

We had a small reduction in staff in the year, working in the short term for part of the year with two county Conservation Managers rather than three, following the promotion of Oliver Burke to Director of Living Landscapes, and special thanks were due to John Comont for covering two counties during this period.

Our expenditure in general continued to be tightly controlled, and directed towards areas of greatest need and also investment in our ability to raise funds for the future. Our team had been very effective in continuing to contain costs, and the Hon. Treasurer commended their efforts.

Moving on to our balance sheet, the Hon. Treasurer was pleased to report that we had successfully concluded our discussions with the RPA on a reasonable basis, but we continued to be cautious in income recognition in this regard and we had made some provision against amounts received to allow for a normal level of ongoing challenge.

The Hon. Treasurer was pleased to note that the Manor House head office in Cambourne had now passed fully into our ownership from the developers. Members would also see the acquisition of the Engine Farm tenancy in our fixed assets, and the transfer from land in tenure to heritage assets of two areas of the Great Fen (Top Farm and Stoke's Farm) successfully put into restoration in the year.

The Hon. Treasurer repeated her usual caution about the apparently huge bank balances we carry: members were reminded that the great majority of this was restricted funds, committed to particular projects for expenditure over many years, so we did need to keep raising lots more!

A key ambition remained the strengthening of our unrestricted income base. This was vital to allow us to deliver effectively what we want to do for local wildlife and local people, as it would enable better forward planning and resource use. As ever, we faced the twin challenges of raising money for specific projects, such as our Godmanchester Nature Reserve, and raising funds to support the full range of existing reserves. We were currently completing our five-year strategy and planning process, and as part of this were developing new ways of working and ideas for partnerships to enable us to continue delivering on our mission.

The Hon. Treasurer believed that our Trust had great strengths in its membership base and its partnerships with developers and other businesses, all of whom wanted to support wildlife. The Hon. Treasurer looked forward to working with the Trust to put its new plans into action with the support she knew all would give, and thanked everyone for that support.

Questions were invited on both the Annual Report and the Accounts.

It was asked why there were such large sums against the Luton and Dunstable busway. *This was because there was a 60-year commitment to manage the land and the Trust had been given a large lump sum against this commitment which was in a restricted fund in order to make it work for the next 60 years.*

It was asked if the continued low interest rates were impacting on such large sums held by the Trust. *This was a real issue, particularly as some long-term funding had been based on rates of interest which were now not available. The finance team worked hard to get the best rates available whilst avoiding having "all eggs in one basket".*

It was asked if the figures for Engine Farm included the loss of income from the tenancy. *The figures going forward did include for this and, although there would be a loss in rental income, there might be some other income to be had from grazing and hay letting.*

It was asked whether or not lump sums could be invested in such things as Premium bonds. *Although an appealing suggestion, these were restricted to individuals and the Charity Commission would not approve. The Trust was always exploring different methods of raising funds, but Trustees did have to remain prudent.*

It was asked if any consideration had been given to sharing various services with other Trusts? *A debate needed to be continued with other Trusts, but there was already some sharing in place such as the new website which was a collaboration with many other Trusts and had reduced costs as a result.*

Members were also encouraged to ask questions outside of the main meeting if they wished.

Martin Baker proposed the acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts and the Auditor's Report, which Peter Pilbeam seconded.

The Annual Report and Accounts and Auditor's Report was adopted *nem con*.

5. Appointment of Auditors

Saffery Champness were proposed as Auditors by Council, seconded by Michael Allen and appointed *nem. con*.

6. Election of Returning Council Members

Under the terms of the Articles of Association, Mr Stewart Lane was eligible for re-election having served a three-year term. His re-election was proposed by Council and seconded by Marion Hession. The returning Council Member was elected *nem. con*. Stewart would also be taking over as Chair of the Conservation, Education and Community committee following the retirement of David Gowing.

7. Election of New Council Members

Council had proposed three new Trustees:

Ms LINDA DOUGHTY

Based in Northamptonshire, Linda was recommended to us by the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, where she had been a strong supporter. She was Trade Marketing Director of Travis Perkins, based in Northamptonshire, and was looking for a new challenge and a change of career direction. She had expressed an interest in being a charity trustee and had a wealth of experience in marketing. Linda was at the meeting and introduced herself to members.

Professor WILLIAM STEPHENS

Living in Steppingley, Bedfordshire, William was Registrar and Secretary to the Council of Cranfield University. He was previously a professor in the Department of Water and Environment at Cranfield's Silsoe campus. He had advised the Trust on Flitwick Moor in the past. He and his wife, Elizabeth, were knowledgeable about birds and getting into butterflies.

Dr MATT WALPOLE

Based in Cambridge, and currently a co-opted member of CECC, Matt worked at the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge. He edited the National Ecosystem Assessment. After graduating as an ecologist from Cambridge in 1993, Matt spent ten years with the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) at the University of Kent, focusing on interdisciplinary approaches to conservation research and practice in the tropics, particularly Africa and Asia. In 2004 Matt moved back to Cambridge and into the charity sector to direct Fauna and Flora International's Biodiversity and Human Needs programme. Matt joined the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre at the beginning of 2008 to lead the Ecosystem Assessment Programme. This encompassed a broad range of work to provide the best available information on biodiversity to governments and other decision-makers worldwide. Most recently this had involved co-ordinating the UK National Ecosystem Assessment, documenting the current and potential future values of nature to society in the UK. Matt was at the meeting and introduced himself to members.

The proposal was seconded by Angela Smith and the three Trustees were elected *nem. con.*

A round of applause welcomed the new Council members who would be an excellent addition to Council.

8. Election of Chairman

Dr Derek Langslow was standing for re-election as Chairman. He was proposed by Council and seconded by Barbara Young and elected *nem. con.* The President thanked Derek for the work he had done in the past year.

9. Election of Vice-Chairman

Miss Margaret Goose was retiring as Vice-Chairman. Council were proposing Sir Graham Fry for the post. Sir Graham Fry had retired from the British diplomatic service in 2008 and now lived just outside St Neots. He spoke Japanese and had spent a total of twelve years in Japan on three different postings, the last as ambassador. His other overseas postings had been to France and Malaysia. He now had a number of part-time appointments with companies and a university.

Watching birds had been his main recreation since 1973. In 1993 he helped to translate the text of "A Field Guide to The Waterbirds of Asia" published by the Wild Bird Society of Japan and distributed to Asian conservationists. Since 2009 he had been a member of the Council of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. The proposal was seconded by Michael Allen and Sir Graham was elected *nem. con.*

10. Election of Honorary Secretary

Ms Fiona Chesterton was standing for re-election as Honorary Secretary, proposed by Council and seconded by Margaret Goose. Ms Chesterton was elected *nem. con.*

11. Election of Honorary Treasurer

Ms Karen Silcock was standing for re-election as Honorary Treasurer, proposed by Council and seconded by Pam Peacock. Ms Silcock was elected *nem. con.*

All the above were thanked with a round of applause.

12. Any Other Business

None

The President felt lucky to be involved with such an excellent Trust and thanked the members for their tireless energy, huge interest and support over the year as volunteers, donors and supporters. The success of the Trust was also testament to the devotion of Council and the staff. There were still undoubted pressures which would not go away and which remained important.

There was sustained applause.

13. Presentation of the Cliff and Joyce Christie Award to Ms Mary Clugston

The Cliff and Joyce Christie Award was a memorial to Cliff Christie, a long-standing volunteer and employee of the Trust, and his wife Joyce. Cliff had been warden at our nature reserve at Pitsford Water and a leading Northamptonshire naturalist, which was why the award was reserved for someone who had made a contribution to natural history or conservation in the county. Joyce had also been a keen botanist, and had volunteered alongside Cliff almost every day while he worked at Pitsford. In their retirement they had spent their free time botanising in south Northamptonshire.

This year's winner was Mary Clugston, who had been involved with the Trust since 1983 and had discovered Boddington Meadow, been instrumental in the saving, and purchase, of the site and been warden there ever since. In fact, the Meadow had been named as the Coronation Meadow for Northants in 2013. On behalf of the Meadow, wildlife and the Trust, a huge thank-you was due to Mary. Mary thanked the Trustees for considering her for the award. She had been out and about with Cliff and Joyce on many occasions and benefitted from their incredible knowledge and was very honoured to receive an award in their name.

The discovery of the Meadow in 1983 had been by accident when large-scale drainage works were being undertaken in the area and Mary and a friend had taken a walk to see if anything of interest had been uncovered by the excavations. The walk had led them into a small field where they realised they were looking at flowers they had never seen before. This had encouraged Mary to look in reference books and make a list of species there including Betony, Common Spotted Orchid and Great Burnet. In 1986 the Meadow was eventually saved from being ploughed up and its full beauty became apparent once it was a reserve. Mary felt privileged to have worked at the Meadow over the last 28 years and thanked the Trust for the opportunity.

There was applause.

14. Presentation of the Richenda Huxley Award to Mr Brian Broughton

The Richenda Huxley Award was in memory of a previous Chairman, Richenda Huxley, and recognised an outstanding contribution to any aspect of the work of the Trust.

Brian had been a volunteer at the Peterborough office since the early 1990s, helping with IT and admin and particularly with three office moves. Brian had also logged and analysed attendance at events and was one of the “behind the scenes” volunteers undertaking essential work. Brian thanked Trustees and the Trust for the award.

There was applause.

The President closed the meeting by again thanking everyone, staff, volunteers and members, for their huge efforts on behalf of the Trust, and hoped that all would enjoy the visit in the afternoon.

There was a sustained round of applause for the President.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 13.15.