



The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

**Draft Minutes of the twenty-eighth Annual General Meeting at 12:00 hours on
14 October 2023 at Cambourne Village College, Sheepfold Lane, Cambourne. CB23 6FR**

Present: Michael Allen (President), Professor William Stephens (Chair) **Trustees:** Dr Hilary Allison, Professor Sam Brockington, Caroline Brown, Matt Day, Matt Hayes, Michael Krause, Dr Ananya Mukherjee, Richard Vyse and 135 registered members.

- 1. Introduction:** The President, Michael Allen, welcomed members to the AGM. He 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 to be submitted via email or to telephone the Trust. Those questions would be answered later in the week by staff and Trustees.

The President 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. Furthermore, if there was a clear majority in favour, he would ask if there were members who opposed the recommendation or abstention.

The President then invited the Chair, Professor William Stephens, to read out the apologies and to advise on proposing or seconding Resolutions.

- 2. Apologies for Absence:** Hannah Bartram (Honorary Treasurer), Janet Davies, Kim Dunn, Rebecca Jarrett (Vice Chair), Chris Lewis, Dr Matt Walpole (Chair Conservation, Education and Community Committee), Michael Samways, Paul Solon (Honorary Secretary), Rebecca Stock and 51 Members

Voting would be by a show of hands for those in the room. Members who were absent or who were streaming the meeting have had the chance to vote by proxy which would be read out for each resolution.

- 3. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2022**

The draft minutes for the meeting held on 8 October 2022 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 John Wilson. Seconded by Peter Pilbeam

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 127, Against 0, Abstention 4

There was a visual show of hands at the meeting, with no votes against and 5 abstentions. The motion was carried.

4. Presentation of the Annual Report

The President advised that the presentation of Annual Report would be given by Professor William Stephens, Chair. Unfortunately, Hannah Bartram, Honorary Treasurer was unable to attend.

The Chair said that it was a pleasure to commend this year's Annual Report and hoped that members had enjoyed reading the report and had found it both useful and informative. The report is continually evolved to make it more accessible and to show the impact the Wildlife Trust is having in meeting its Charitable objectives. The Chair went on to thank the production team for the work undertaken to get the report out to members.

The Chair mentioned that last year he had commented on the turbulent times faced by the Trust and that this year was no different. The Trust was still feeling the effects of the climate and biodiversity crisis and would do so for a long time. The Government are now backsliding and their erosion of standards that have been hard fought for is undermining the legal protections for wildlife. This has forced many environmental charities, including the Wildlife Trust, to speak out and try to maintain the vital environmental protection that has taken so long to develop. He went on to say that many members had lobbied their MPs which proved helpful. It was good to hear that the Youth Forum are trying to bring the idea that conservation is important to MPs in the three counties.

Inflation brings its own challenges as the Trust tries to maintain its charitable activities and ensure that staff are paid fairly for the valuable work they do. Despite the rather gloomy outlook, the Chair was pleased to report that the Executive, led by Brian Eversham, is doing an excellent job in making the most of resources and ensuring that the Trust does meet its Charitable objectives. The enthusiasm and dedication of the Trust's staff is always inspiring, as is the time and effort of the many volunteers without whom we would not achieve nearly so much. The Chair thanked staff and volunteers.

He went on to thank the Trust's members for their continued support. He added that the Trust recognised the current difficult economic climate. The Trust had not increased membership rates for several years but asked members who feel able to do so to voluntarily increase their subscriptions and he thanked those who have done so. He reminded those who are thinking about it but hadn't managed to do so yet.

The Chair added that the Trust continued to get wonderful responses to the various appeals. He confirmed that for the request for the latest appeal would be used for fencing to not only keep the beavers in, but to also keep things out. As well as the fencing, there are other expenses that urgently require funding. Finally, the Chair thanked members for their generosity to date and asked members to continue to support the Trust and its important work. He added that, Trustees would endeavour to put the funds to the best possible use in bringing nature back.

The Chair commended the report and reminded Members that they would have an opportunity to vote on the Annual Report and Annual Accounts after the Honorary Treasurer's talk, with the Resolutions taken together.

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

The Chair explained that, unfortunately, the Honorary Treasurer was not present due to family circumstances. The Chair gave a brief financial overview for the year ended March 2023.

- For the first time ever, the Trust had an annual income of more than £10 million.
- This was largely due to a National Lottery grant of almost £4 million which went towards the purchase of Speechly's Farm, which had resulted in a connection between Holme Fen and Wood Walton.
- Investment is vital for halting biodiversity decline and tackling climate crisis.
- Donations, legacies and membership made up 27% with grants, partnerships and services 73%. Members were referred to the Annual Report for further information.
- The Trust had spent £7.2 million in revenue expenditure on top of the capital expenditure. Revenue expenditure was made up of Land management 67% and Fundraising, education 33%.
- There was an overall operating deficit of £1 million. The deficit was because Trustees aimed to spend money left in legacies and given in previous financial years. This ensured that the Trust could continue with its works and put the money left to the trust to good use.
- This year there will be again be a deficit of approximately £1 million as we make sure that the money the Trust has been left is put to good purpose rather than sitting in a Bank account.
- The challenges and opportunities are clear. Everyone is experiencing rising costs and salary inflation. It is important that the Trust keep their staff and pay them appropriately.
- As money gets tighter, so the competition for grants increases. The Trust will continue to look for large grants. Strawberry Hill, for example, will need a lot of money to ensure that the Trust can secure the future of the site.
- The Trust has a great Grants team who are continually looking at a number of Trusts/Grant giving organisations who can help with our work. The Chair thanked the Grants team for their vital work.
- With regard to opportunities and future income streams, there is Strawberry Hill and the new acquisition of Muchwood Burials. To have green burials and be able to expand that close to some of our some of the nature reserves is a wonderful opportunity for members thinking about their final resting place, especially knowing that would contribute to the work of the Trust. The Chair encouraged members to visit the site in Ramsey to have a look for themselves.
- The Trust aimed to improve digital marketing. The Chair informed members that he was attending an RSWT Conference, along with the CEO, and would raise social media to try and push forward a Youth Forum digital media platform across the whole of the country.
- The Trust, along with Trustees, were committed to strong control of costs.

The Chair commended the Annual Report and Annual Accounts to members.

There were no questions for the Annual Report of the Board of Trustees or the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report.

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

Voting Tally for Annual Report of the Board of Trustees and the annual Accounts and Auditors' Report:

Proxy: For 130, Against 0, Abstention 1

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

6. Appointment of the Auditors

The President explained that Saffery's were proposed by Council as Auditors, who carried out the Audit.

The Chair advised that the Board of Trustees regularly reviewed the advice received from a range of organisations. The Chair confirmed that the Trust were happy with the work from Saffery's. The Audit went well, and the Chair congratulated the team involved. The Chair proposed that Saffery's be appointed as Auditors for a further year.

Council had proposed the appointment of Saffery's as Auditors. Seconded by Martin Baker and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 127, Against 3, Abstention 1

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 biographies for proposed Council Members and Officers had been published on the website and would not be read out.

Janet Davis was standing for re-election having served her first term. Unfortunately, Janet was not present on the day.

Council proposed Janet Davis be re-elected to Council. Seconded by Sharon Gray and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 129, Against 0, Abstention 2

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

8. Formal Election of co-opted Trustees

The President explained that these were six Trustees who were co-opted during the year and now needed to be formally elected to the Council. Their biographies had been published on the website for the past month.

Caroline Brown was standing for formal election as a Trustee, having been co-opted since the last AGM and was present on the day.

Council proposed Caroline Brown be elected to Council. Seconded by James Marsh and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 129, Against 1, Abstention 1

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

Kim Dunn was standing for formal election as a Trustee, having been co-opted since the last AGM. Unfortunately, Kim was not present on the day.

Council proposed Kim Dunn be elected to Council. Seconded by Charles Chadwyck-Healey and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 131, Against 0, Abstention 0

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

Matthew Day was standing for formal election as a Trustee, having been co-opted since the last AGM and was present on the day.

Council proposed Matthew Day be elected to Council. Seconded by Kevin Hennessy and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 126, Against 4, Abstention 1

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

Michael Krause was standing for formal election as a Trustee, having been co-opted since the last AGM and was present on the day.

Council proposed Michael Krause be elected to Council. Seconded by Ann Tomlinson and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 128, Against 3, Abstention 0

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

Michael Samways was standing for formal election as a Trustee, having been co-opted since the last AGM. Unfortunately, Michael was not present on the day.

Council proposed Michael Samways be elected to Council. Seconded by Susan Jordain and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 128, Against 1, Abstention 2

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

Richard Vyse was standing for formal election as a Trustee, having been co-opted since the last AGM and was present on the day.

Council proposed Richard Vyse be elected to Council. Seconded by Martin Baker and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 129, Against 2, Abstention 0

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

9. Council Members Standing Down

The President advised that three Trustees were standing down:

Dr Matt Walpole stood down as a Trustee and Chair of the Conservation, Education and Community Committee (CECC), having served since 2014 as a Trustee, and a six-year term as Chair of CECC. Matt has since become Chief Executive of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust.

Dr Ananya Mukherjee stood down having served her six-year term.

Chris Lewis stood down having served his six-year term.

The President thanked all three Trustees on behalf of the Council and Staff for their contribution to the effective working of the Trust, which was met with a round of applause.

10. Election of Chair

William Stephens an ecologist had spent most of his career at Cranfield University. He was first elected Chair in 2020.

Council proposed re-election of Professor William Stephens as Chair of Council. Seconded by Martin Baker and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 129, Against 1, Abstention 1

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

11. Election of Vice-Chair

Rebecca Jarrett an experienced HR professional. Rebecca became a Trustee in 2017 and was elected Vice-Chair in 2022. Unfortunately, Rebecca was not present on the day.

Council proposed re-election of Rebecca Jarrett as Vice-Chair. Seconded by Reiner Schulte and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 131, Against 0, Abstention 0

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

12. Election of Honorary Secretary

Paul Solon a lawyer, specialising in Charitable Trusts. Paul became a Trustee in 2013 and Honorary Secretary in 2018. Unfortunately, Paul was not present on the day.

Council proposed re-election of Paul Solon as Honorary Secretary. Seconded by Martin Baker and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 131, Against 0, Abstention 0

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

13. Election of Honorary Treasurer

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. Unfortunately, Hannah was not present on the day.

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

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 128, Against 0, Abstention 3

There was a visual 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

Sam Brockington a Professor of Evolution in the Department of Plant Science at University of Cambridge, and Curator of the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Sam has been a Trustee since 2017.

Council proposed Professor Sam Brockington as Chair of Conservation, Education and Community Committee. Seconded by Richard Price and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 130, Against 1, Abstention 0

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

15. Election of Vice-President

Dr Jenna Bishop became a Trustee in 2010 and was elected Honorary Secretary in 2016 and Vice-Chair in 2018, having stood down at the AGM in October 2022. Jenna trained as a Solicitor, has an MA in Environmental Law, and a PhD on the impact of land tenure on the rural environment. Unfortunately, Jenna was not present on the day.

Council proposed Dr Jenna Bishop as Vice-President. Seconded by Peter Pilbeam and approved.

Voting Tally:

Proxy: For 130, Against 0, Abstention 1

There was a visual 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, some of the winners could not be present on the day.

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

Julia Rushton a volunteer for many years, as a regular stock checker and livestock assistant, a consistent member of the Nene Wetlands Work Party and even helped with canoe-guided dawn chorus events and bat walks. Unfortunately, Julia was not present on the day but received a round of applause.

Suzy Boys a regular in the Northamptonshire conservation volunteer work parties, and also volunteers in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, monitoring birds and reptiles in the Great Fen or at Strawberry Hill. Suzy came forward, received her books and left to a round of applause.

Tim Burke a volunteer with the Trust for over 20 years, as warden at Dogsthorpe Start Pit nature reserve and in weekly volunteer tasks across all Peterborough Reserves. Unfortunately, Tim was not present on the day but received a round of applause.

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

Andy Frost was not present on the day but has been a member of the Trust for over 50 years, starting as a young child. Andy attended Trust work parties with his father back in 1972 in the fen edge woods. For over 12 years he volunteered at the Great Fen, carrying out surveys of birds, botany and insects. Andy received a round of applause.

Christine Newell has volunteered for almost 30 years, in roles, from scrub management to treasurer of her Local Group, helped with botanical and insect surveys, and as a key member of the small team of office volunteers, analysing breeding bird survey data. Christine came forward, received her books and left to a round of applause.

Jon Smith Award was constituted in 2017 in memory of the Trust's much loved and missed former Great Fen Restoration Officer, a passionate conservationist who sadly died in 2013. This Award was intended to recognise volunteers who had 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 the Trustees decided to make two awards.

Caroline Lewis has volunteered at the Great Fen for over eight years. Unfortunately, Caroline was not present on the day as she was taking on the role of Chair at The Cambridgeshire Alliance of Lifelong Learning and felt it appropriate to attend that AGM. Caroline received a round of applause.

Ian Scaife has volunteered for the past decade, as a Cambourne Ranger spending 40-50 hours every month on the reserve. He also helps the local total patrol and has built well over 500 dormouse boxes for the Trust. Ian came forward, received his award and left to a round of applause.

The President said the Trust felt it important to reward volunteers, particularly the ones like Julia, Suzy, Tim, Andy, Christine, Caroline and Ian who have put so much into the Trust. They are models for all in the work that the Trust undertakes. So many are willing to help, and the Awards are an element of the gratitude that the Trust feels for all the work that volunteers put in. The President thanked all volunteers and praised those that had been awarded.

17. Andy Other Business:

Matt Jackson, Conservation Director was invited to answer the two questions received in advance from Liz Williams. The first question was about beavers. Matt reminded members that Matt Johnson from Northamptonshire and Nik Shelton, Head of Communications, were available to answer any further questions.

Question: Was the Nene Wetlands the right location for beavers to be introduced as the Nene Valley had only just recovered from the impact of gravel extraction. Should the Trust pause before introducing a species that would make significant change to the area.

Answer: The Trust is cautious about introductions. It is necessary to understand why a species had disappeared and whether the underlying issues had been addressed for its decline. Beavers were hunted to extinction and recent experience across the country, and abroad, shows beavers can be accommodated and fit into their surroundings.

The proposal addresses a management issue for the Nene Wetlands, part of a Special Protection Area in the Nene Valley, where gravel was extracted up until the 70's, and a lot of pits have scrubbed, up creating an even aged, unstructured, non-diverse habitat. The biodiversity of the habitat could be improved manually, but clearing 17ha of scrub on a regular basis is prohibitive. Beavers would do that naturally as a management tool, addressing the management issue in a sustainable way. It is costly upfront, but the long-term management process is much more sustainable.

Question: Relates to access in the Nene Valley, with attention drawn to the Summer Leys site. The path had become degraded and what was the Trust's focus on access improvement, particularly for those members who have difficulties getting access around some of the sites. The Nene Valley sites are largely very flat and provide the Trust with opportunities for access.

Answer: On some sites the Trust controls part of the access and not the full circuit. At Summer Leys, a third of the circuit around the nature reserve is completely outside the control of the Trust. The Trust tries to influence the management of that section but has struggled to get the landowner involved. In terms of the Nene Valley, the Trust continued to seek to put in access improvements. The Nene Wetlands has seen a change in terms of access improvements and how it is managed in terms of wildlife. There is conflict between dog walkers, ground nesting birds, wintering wildfowl and the ability to separate people whilst providing sufficient access for dog walkers and people with access needs. The Trust is not complacent and always strives to improve access to sites and will continue to look for grants, but it is challenging and a constant battle. The Trust has spent £7,000 over the last year at Summer Leys on access improvements.

The President then asked for any questions in the room.

David Gough asked about the Trust's approach to the East West Rail.

Matt Jackson advised that the East West Rail was an ongoing project to improve rail connectivity from Oxford to Cambridge. The section from Bedford to Cambridge is controversial. When the Trust interacts with planning issues our approach is always based on the wildlife impact. The Trust is broadly supportive of rail initiatives, but any infrastructure development of this size will have impacts. There are concerns about connectivity around Bedford where the route will run between Ancient Woodlands, affecting bat migration/feeding corridors. The route into Cambridge is particularly controversial. The Trust analysed the proposed routes and a southern

approach into Cambridge would affect more wildlife sites (the threshold used in planning issues) than a northern route, but the decision has been taken to go with a southern route. The Trust has been broadly supportive of pushing for a better business case to be looked at. The Government's decision about route taken has been about the ability to drive forward house building alongside the route that was chosen. There are significant environmental concerns about house building in the area because of the problem of water supply, which is particularly constrained in Cambridge with impacts on important chalk streams which are.

David expressed a personal view that the East West Rail was unwarranted and does not see any benefit on the local area, and certainly no benefit for nature.

Mary Morgan wanted to raise awareness of the wildlife black hole that exists around Market Harborough, which is not within BCN territory, and on the border of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. North of the A14 and South of Leicester, there are no nature reserves, lakes with public access, woodlands or National Trust properties. There is potential to create a living landscape, in a T-shape between Northampton and Market Harborough, along the Brampton Valley Way, a long-distance footpath and cycle route, to get the people out of the centre of town and straight into the countryside. Building work is happening around Market Harborough with minimum mitigation for nature. She acknowledged that the Trust has many projects on the go and was impressed with what BCN is doing.

The Chair thanked Mary for her question. Matt Jackson responded that it was an area that the Trust were interested in and explained that the Welland Valley is the border between Northamptonshire and Leicestershire and loses out due to the boundary problem. Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust recently contacted BCN as there was a possibility of them taking on some land on BCN's side of the border that links to an area they have some interest in. They were talking to BCN to make sure there were no concerns.

The Chair said that it does raise an important issue about boundaries and borders. The 46 Wildlife Trusts are now working together, with co-ordination from the Royal Society for Wildlife Trust and to start thinking about larger scale nature restoration which does not confine itself to the borders of BCN's three counties. The Chair also added that as a Charity the Trust has responsibility for its three Counties, but wildlife does not respect that. We also need to think more broadly as to how we can work with our neighbours to bring wildlife back.

The President added that it was a good moment to reflect on how important collaboration was with colleagues in the Royal Society for Wildlife Trust and how that has been dreamed for so many years and we really are seeing changes.

The President then handed over to the Chair of Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust who added that she was a long-term member of BCN. Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust hoped to make an announcement, as soon as they could, about a new piece of land they had been given in that area which will have public access. It is hoped that this would lead to more cooperation between the two Trusts. Nature has no respect of boundaries and the Welland Valley has a fantastic nature corridor and more collaborative work could be undertaken in terms of nature's recovery. The Chair thanked the Chair of Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust.

John Wilson said that we now have four counties – North Northants and West Northants are completely separate, so which county does the Trust actually deal with.

Brian Eversham said that the Trust dealt with all the 20 local authorities. The Trust's name has

changed once since merger by shortening it and dropping Peterborough from the formal title; the Trust is still active in Peterborough and was active with all the preceding Northampton authorities. The Trust remains active with the two current authorities in Northamptonshire, and it was worth noting that, for example, Luton is a unitary authority, as is Peterborough. There was no intention to change the name of the Trust.

The President ended the AGM by saying how good it has been to have such a good a lively turnout in the room as well as to those live streaming. The Trust was very grateful for members presence, ideas and enthusiasm.

The AGM closed at 13:04.