

Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust
Minutes of the 63rd Annual General Meeting held at Trinity Methodist Church Oadby,
on 20th November 2019

Present

Andrew Cotton (Chair), Bob Bearne, Anthony Biddle (Vice-Chair), John Bleby, Tony Clarke, Linda Jones, Maggie Morland (Hon. Secretary), Ray Morris, Helen Nott, Ann Tomlinson (Hon Treasurer), Peter Williams (all Trustees) and approximately 90 members.

In Attendance

Simon Bentley (Director), Jonathan Burt (Trainee Reserve Officer), John Clarkson (Head of Conservation), Mat Cottam (Reserve Manager, Rutland Water), Joe Davis (Senior Reserve Officer, Rutland Water), Ben Devine (Conservation Officer), Uta Hamzaoui (Conservation Officer), Seb Haggett (Trainee Reserve Officer), Harriet Hickin (Supporter Development Officer), Claire Install (Senior Conservation Officer), Ben Jacklin (Trainee Reserve Officer), Andy Neilson (Conservation Officer), Jo Taylor (Membership Officer), and Matthew Taylor (Assistant Reserve Officer, Rutland Water)

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Andrew Moffat (Trustee) and Hugh Dixon (Vice President)

1. Welcome

The Director welcomed everyone to the meeting and was pleased to see so many members attending

2. Notice of the meeting

This was taken as read

3. Minutes of the 62nd Annual General Meeting held at Trinity Methodist Church, Oadby on 14th November 2018 (circulated before the meeting)

There were no comments and Anthony Biddle proposed acceptance of the minutes, David Duckett seconded. This was carried by the meeting and the minutes were accepted and signed as a true and correct record.

4. Report of Council 2017/18

The Report had been circulated before the meeting. The Chairman commented that it was amazing to see how much has been achieved in the last year and this was down to the hard work and dedication of staff and volunteers across the Trust. Bob Bearne proposed acceptance of the report and Helen Nott seconded. The report was accepted by members.

The Director then gave a retrospective of the 19 years he has been in post with LRWT. Despite a first day marked by closure of reserves due to the foot and mouth outbreak, there were many highlights including:

- huge expansions in membership numbers and Trust finances
- purchase of premises as a permanent location for Headquarters after moving from two previous rented buildings
- the building of the Volunteer Training Centre at Rutland Water
- the success of Birdfair over 31 years, reaching the milestone of raising over £5 million for projects worldwide

- the Osprey Project's success and World Osprey Week, enabling schools across the globe to follow the amazing migratory journeys of satellite-tagged ospreys and make contact with other schools on the migratory flyways
- expansion of the hides and creation of 9 new lagoons at Rutland Water
- restoring, enhancing and expanding the Trust's management of nature reserves generally
- managing an extensive area of the river Soar floodplain at Loughborough Big Meadow, Cossington and Wanlip Meadows, Mountsorrel and Syston
- heathland restoration on the Trust's nature reserves in the Charnwood Forest
- Living Landscapes projects working with landowners, farmers, organisations and partners to deliver landscape-scale conservation to enable both people and wildlife to flourish
- meeting and working with the many volunteers and local groups who support the Trust's work
- the development of our Education team and the many ways they engage young people and families in our work with nature
- supporting wildlife recording and monitoring across the two counties

He thanked all members, staff and supporters of LRWT without whom none of this could have been achieved and said he felt fortunate to have worked for LRWT during this period of significant growth and development.

John Clarkson, LRWT's new Head of Conservation, gave a presentation looking forward to the next 20 years. He said there were many challenges and opportunities ahead. Building on the result of the imminent General Election there would be a new Environment Bill and an increasing campaigning role for the Trust. He noted the need to fight for a Nature Recovery Network, together with changes in agricultural practices, more tree planting, connecting woodlands and carbon offsetting. In view of the clear healing properties that involvement with nature brings, the Trust needs to build its work with health and well-being organisations.

Countries will be meeting again in 2020 to decide on new targets for meeting the dangers of climate change, protecting the biosphere and improving biodiversity. There will be severe pressure on the environment, but also opportunities for the Trust to benefit from requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain, as well as working with landowners and farmers to create a climate resilient landscape which is more beneficial to biodiversity.

This is a time of exciting science, challenging our work on reserves and in the wider countryside, and also prompting us all to make changes in the way we live our lives.

5. The Trust accounts for the year ending 31st March 2018

Ann Tomlinson (Hon. Treasurer) gave her report. The full version of the financial statements is available from The Old Mill on request. The main points of the report were:

- Trust ended the year in a stable financial position with total charitable funds of £4.8 million;
- Overall income was £2.6 million, as against £2.5 million in 2018;
- Unrestricted income had plateaued, and it was essential to develop this to support further conservation work and also necessary infrastructure. Development of public engagement work was key in this task;
- The balance sheet was fairly similar to the previous year, with strong levels of financial reserves;

- However the "free reserves" requirement was being revised to ensure we use our net assets efficiently in delivering the Trust charitable objects.

Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Anthony Biddle, seconded by Linda Jones and carried by the meeting.

6. Election of members to Council to serve for a three year term

There were four existing members of Council standing for re-election, John Bleby, Andrew Moffat, Ian Selmes and Peter Williams who have all indicated their willingness to stand. Their election was dealt with en bloc and was proposed by Linda Jones, seconded by Ann Tomlinson and carried by the meeting.

7. The appointment of RSM UK Audit LLP as Auditors to the Trust

This was proposed by Ray Morris, seconded by Tony Clarke and carried by the meeting.

8. Comments from the floor

- Roger Snowdon suggested that the tree planting planned for the new extension to Holwell reserve could be partly funded by an appeal to members to sponsor a tree. John Clarkson replied that this was a possibility.
- Dr Susan Hitchins commented that green prescriptions are only part of the answer to mental health issues and the Chairman replied that the role of LRWT is to ~~will~~ demonstrate how the outdoors can complement health sector interventions, aid recovery and change lives for many.
- Debbie Sawday asked if the idea of 'rewilding' was of interest to the Trust and John Clarkson replied that we are already working with natural processes of regeneration and habitat change on many of our reserves.

Finally, the Chairman and Honorary Treasurer paid tribute to Mr Bentley at this, his final, AGM. Ann Tomlinson (Hon Treasurer) thanked Mr Bentley on behalf of all at LRWT for his hard work and dedication over the last 19 years, especially on recruitment and finance, saying that it was down to the Director's sound leadership, vision, imagination and prudent financial management that LRWT has achieved so much and is now in a strong position, enabling us to do more to protect wildlife and wild places into the future at a time when there are both threats and exciting challenges. She concluded by saying that Mr Bentley is a man of sound principles, and said it had been a pleasure to work with him.

The Chairman also thanked Mr Bentley, saying that the Trust's achievements over the past 19 years have not "just happened", but were the product of a great deal of effort and thought, and Mr Bentley was at the forefront in this. He noted that Mr Bentley's calm exterior often belies his very hard work behind the scenes.

Mr Bentley responded, saying that he had greatly enjoyed his time at Trust, and was proud of its achievements. In particular he thanked all who volunteer for the Trust in any capacity, including Trustees, adding that their contribution in many areas of work is vital to the Trust.

It was noted that Mr Bentley leaves in two days' time and our new CEO Tim Graham, takes up his post on Monday 25th November.

There was a refreshment break during which members were encouraged to look through the guest speaker's publications on sale in the Hall.

Guest Speaker

The Director introduced Professor Ian Rotherham of Sheffield Hallam University, who gave a fascinating and informative talk on 'Shadow Woods and Scrub – Lost Landscapes and the Cinderellas of Conservation'. He showed how landscapes can reveal the past if viewed in different ways and their lost flora and fauna restored through appropriate management. Using evidence of ecological evolution, indicator species, environmental histories and map/archive-based materials, he has developed the concept of shadow woods, medieval commons, wood pastures and biodiversity time capsules. These ideas provide opportunities to enmesh nature conservation and landscape history into future rewilding.

A vote of thanks was given by the Director, and after he had thanked everyone at LRWT for their work over the last 19 years, the meeting closed at 9.45pm.