

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
Minutes of the 69th Annual General Meeting
held at Loughborough Trinity Methodist Church,
Royland Road, Loughborough on 22nd November 2025 at 12.15 p.m.

Present Trustees present were Ann Tomlinson (Chair), Andy Thorpe (Hon Treasurer), Peter Williams (Hon Sec), Andy Abbott, John Atherton, Anthony Biddle, Gemma Harper, Emily Hunter, Andrew Moffat (Co Vice-chair) and Helen Nott. There were 112 members in total in the Hall (a figure that included the Trustees) and 3 households having voted ahead of the meeting by proxy.

In Attendance Mat Carter (Chief Executive), Jo Taylor, Roxsan Keilty, Ben Devine, Joe Davis, Julie Burnside, Helen Ball, Suzanne Ap-Thomas, Robin Smith, Andy Neilson, Tim Sexton, Hannah Sellers, Megan Shersby, Paige Ferrier.

1. Welcome The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked the members of the Loughborough Trinity Methodist Church for hosting our event and commented on the beauty of the venue and its excellent technological facilities. She commented that volunteers from the congregation were with us today to help and she extended her thanks to all of them. She then explained the procedures for the meeting for those in the Hall and the voting arrangements.

2. Notice of the Meeting. The legal requirements for circulating papers in advance of the meeting have been met by notification of Members of the AGM in September this year and the detailed agenda was sent out on 22nd October.

3. Apologies. Apologies had been received from Taras Bains, Abigail Wilkins and Bob Bearne.

4. Minutes of the 68th Annual General Meeting held at St Martin's Conference Centre, Leicester on 23rd November 2024

No queries were raised on the minutes and no matters arising were noted.

The resolution to approve the minutes was proposed by Linda Biddle, seconded by Andy Thorpe, and passed with 99 votes for, (96 in the hall plus 3 proxy votes), 0 against and 16 Abstentions.

5. Report of the Council for the year ended 31st March 2025

a) The Chair expanded on the Annual Report of Council, summarised in the Annual Review that had been sent to all members. Here she gave a shout-out to our Comms Team for the huge steps forward in how we communicate, both by traditional means and by social media.

Our profile in the public eye contributes hugely to how the public give us their support and so increasing that profile goes hand in hand with increasing the resources we have to do our work for nature. She highlighted:

i) Nature Recovery across our counties

Right at the end of 2024/25 we concluded an important agreement with Harborough District Council to lead their Rewilding Harborough Project (which was to be the subject of a presentation after the AGM). This is an extremely significant project for the Trust, as this working relationship with a local authority to restore wildlife to a nature-depleted area in our countryside is really quite unique. It required enormous hard work and persistence from Mat, Ben, Joe and the rest of the team in building relationships with partners and stakeholders to get to the point where this huge project became a reality. And it is hugely significant for this area of the county where local people have little access to nature on their doorstep, despite being in the middle of what many people would call “countryside”.

The Greener Golf Initiative and the Lost Railways project would also be subject to presentations after the AGM.

The Restore, Reclaim and Renew appeal generated over £37,000 and as well as helping restore damage on some of our reserves it has allowed us to build our networks for nature recovery across the two counties.

ii) Nature Recovery - Our Reserves

In 2024/25 we concluded the transfer of the James Adler Reserve which meant that at last there is a nature reserve in South Leicestershire. Thanks to the generosity of the Adler family who donated the land to us in memory of their son, we have a significant landholding next to Great Bowden village which will in due course provide easy access to green space and wildlife for local residents. It has also effectively been the starting point for all our work in South Leicestershire mentioned earlier, and the plans we have for what will happen at the James Adler reserve would be part of the presentations in the afternoon.

We also received a donation of land from David Wilson Homes in Syston close to our existing reserves, adding a lake and woodland in that area.

All our reserve teams and fantastic volunteers have been working as hard as ever in maintaining and improving our nature reserves to ensure they are at their best to support local wildlife. The Wild about Our Reserves appeal which raised money in the previous year was used in 2024/25 in various places including at Ketton Quarry, at Cossington Meadows, and for the purchase of new equipment. In the current year this work will extend to Kelham Bridge, Altar Stones and further work at Ketton Quarry.

iii) Nature Recovery – Championing Spaces.

The Chair noted the many amazing species that had been recorded during the year. This monitoring work was led by the team but supported hugely by volunteer expertise. These discoveries would also be the subject of a presentation after the AGM.

The Ospreys in and around Rutland Water produced 25 fledged chicks bringing the total fledged since the start of the project to 278.

iv) People in Nature – Taking Action for Wildlife.

To really make nature recovery happen we needed to engage with everyone, so everyone has a stake in its future. Our walks, talks and other events help introduce people to nature and increase awareness of wild spaces on our doorsteps, building a commitment to wildlife. A prime example of this is Ash Tree Farm near Lutterworth, and we are delighted to be able to celebrate our strong relationship with the owners, the Coates family. This amazing haven for wildlife has been lovingly created over decades by the family, showing so clearly how space for nature can be rewarded with wildlife recovery. This is the model we want to see rolling out across our counties, where we are able to work with local landowners, in areas of any size, to create an environment where the management regime is sympathetic to nature and promotes biodiversity recovery.

Lyndon Visitor Centre was once again a popular destination, with almost 23,000 people visiting during the year and 1,300 people enjoying our sold-out Osprey cruises.

We continue our work with Leicester communities via the extension to our Next Door Nature project which is now kindly being funded by City Fibre, and our new project “Restore the Soar”, in partnership with Leicester City Council and the Canal and River Trust.

v) Our Wonderful Volunteers.

Research shows that volunteering is great for physical and mental health but it is also a crucial part of the effort that we can bring to our work in restoring nature. We have a community of over 700 volunteers working with the staff team, and those volunteers have given over 24,000 hours across all the Trust’s work.

Our volunteers are amazingly committed. During the year we saw the 50th anniversary of the Holwell Reserve Conservation Volunteers. We also celebrated a star volunteer’s 50 years as a volunteer at Rutland Water and the eastern reserves – Dave Needham, you are an inspiration!

vi) The Chair briefly looked at the current year and highlighted that we will be celebrating three anniversaries in 2026 – 30 years of the Osprey Project, 50 years of Rutland Water and the reserve there, and 70 years since the Trust was formed. There would be plenty of ways to celebrate those birthdays in 2026.

vii) In conclusion, the Chair wished to thank the wonderful support the Trust receives from:

- corporate partners, agencies and grant givers whose funding helps our work;
- the kind people who are prepared to leave the Trust a legacy in their wills;

- the volunteers who are key to our activities and the Local Groups who connect with local communities; and
- the membership, who support us with their enthusiasm, their personal commitment to speaking up for nature, and their kind support through annual subscriptions, responses to appeals and other individual gifts. Our membership is the heart of our organisation.

The Chair then asked if the attendees had any questions on the Annual Report, noting that further details on current work would be given later in the day, at which point there would be further opportunities for questions. There were no questions from the audience.

b) The resolution to approve the Annual Report of Council for 2024/25 was proposed by Maggie Morland, seconded by John Spencer and passed with 114 votes for, (111 in the hall plus 3 proxy votes), 0 against and 1 abstention.

6. The Trust Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2024

The Hon Treasurer (Andy Thorpe) introduced his report by commenting that after two tough financial years, he could report on the very positive financial year of 2024/25.

a) Income. Our total income in 2024/25 was up by 47% on the previous year. This figure was a little artificial as it includes the figure of £534,000 being the valuation of three gifts of land to add to our nature reserves. Excluding those gifts total cash income was up by 20%, so still very positive. Our single largest source of cash funding continues to be membership income which rose by 7% in the year as we recruited more members, and some members increased their regular giving over and above the minimum membership fee. On top of this most of our donations, whether general or to specific appeals, also largely comes from our members. He gave a huge thank you to all our members for the money they so generously give to the organisation without which the Trust simply could not do the work that we do.

b) Expenditure. The Trust's normal on-going costs were close to the level of 2023/24. The largest part is spent on our nature reserves managing these wonderful sites for the wildlife and nature within them.

c) Balance Sheet. This showed our tangible assets increasing largely as a result of the land valuation mentioned earlier. Our receivables are higher, principally because of money awaited from a large legacy. Our cash and investment balances are high, but we will always need a sizeable balance here as we need a sensible level of reserve to manage the ups and downs of cashflow when we have an annual expenditure in excess of £2 Million. We also have £400,000 in restricted funds where often income is received in one year but spent in the next.

d) In summary, the Honorary Treasurer commented that, ignoring the gifted land, we made a surplus of £291,000. Given that forecasts for the current year are showing a further small surplus, he commented that he was in the fortunate position, as an Honorary Treasurer, of being able to say to management that we could increase what we are doing and spend more in a sensible, controlled manner. However, we would continue to push to increase our income

where we can, and manage our expenditure responsibly, to be able to continue, and improve on, the good works protecting and enhancing nature and wildlife across our two counties.

e) Question. From Toby Manning, who asked whether the £287,000 spent on fundraising is larger than the funding actually received? The Honorary Treasurer commented that a big chunk of that is on membership recruitment, and we have reviewed this closely and regularly. The money spent on recruitment typically takes two years to break even. After a further 2.5 years we will have doubled the investment. So we are comfortable with what we spend in this area. The amount spent this year was less than 2023/24.

The resolution to approve the Honorary Treasurer's report was proposed by Graham Fisher, seconded by John Atherton and passed with 115 votes for (112 in the hall plus 3 proxy votes), 0 against and 0 Abstentions.

7. Re-election of Trustees to Council to serve a three-year term.

Before moving to the re-election of Trustees, the Chair highlighted that Bob Bearne was stepping down as a Trustee from the AGM. She commented that Bob had been a Trustee for around 12 years and latterly had been one of our Vice-chairs. His wise advice, professional experience and practical approach had assisted the Trust tremendously over that time, and we thanked him very much for his service.

Also departing were our patrons Sir Lawrence Howard and Lady Gretton, and our dear colleague and friend Vice President Peter Ward. We thank them for their years of unfailing support for the Trust, and the Chair was delighted to say that all three are remaining as Honorary Members.

The following members of Council had completed their three-year term of office:

- Andrew Moffat
- Peter Williams

and had expressed their wish to stand for re-election.

There were no questions from the attendees.

The resolution to approve their re-election, taken *en bloc*, was proposed by David Duckett, seconded by Gemma Harper and passed with 114 members in favour (111 in the hall and 3 by proxy), 0 against and 1 abstention.

Before leaving this item, the Chair commented that we would shortly be carrying out a further Trustee recruitment exercise starting in the New Year and encouraged members to consider applying.

8. Re-appointment of PKF Smith Cooper Audit Limited as Auditors to the Trust

There were no questions from attendees

The resolution for the auditors' reappointment was proposed by Andrew Abbott, seconded by Bruce White, and was passed with 113 in favour (110 in the hall and 3 by proxy), 0 against and 2 abstentions.

9. Questions from members – There were no further questions.

10. In Memoriam – Jenny Harris

The Chair said that so many of us were absolutely dumbfounded last month to learn that we had lost the wonderful Jenny Harris after a very short illness, and many of us, friends and colleagues, were still reeling from this loss. We had said our formal goodbyes at her funeral the previous day. Jenny was a remarkable woman and an extraordinary champion for wildlife. She invited Trustee colleague Anthony Biddle to pay a further tribute.

Anthony Biddle said that “Jenny was a stalwart member of the Wildlife Trust, both through her many years of employment until her retirement and afterwards as a volunteer on the reserves that she loved. Jenny was an active committee member of the Rutland Natural History Society and the Trust's Rutland Members Group. We all know that Jenny was much more than just a member. She was a lovely person and was always willing to share her vast knowledge of the natural world, in particular, her floral expertise she had learned over her many years as a reserves officer and, since retirement, as a working Trust volunteer. Of course, we all knew of her indefatigable work in bat recording, bat conservation and of the hours spent rescuing and nursing bats back to health. One of her great pleasures was returning fully recovered bats to the wild that she had nursed back to full health. We all miss Jenny a great deal and have lost a great friend and expert. Not to mention the bats which have lost their fairy godmother. She was indeed a local conservation hero, and we should all acknowledge her devotion to wildlife with a large round of applause.” The meeting gave their heartfelt applause.

The Chair closed the meeting at 12.52.

Peter Williams

Honorary Secretary 26th November 2025