

**The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire  
& Peterborough**

**Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual General Meeting held at 1215 hours on  
13 October 2007 at The England Hall, Silsoe Campus, Cranfield  
University, Bedfordshire**

- 1. Present:** Lady Young of Old Scone (President), Michael Allen (Chairman of Council), Richard Astle (Hon Treasurer), Professor Richard Chandler, Bob Cornes, Dr Pat Doody, Margaret Goose, Dr Stephen Larkin, and 105 members.

**Apologies for absence** Ioan Thomas (Vice-President), Richard Townley (Hon Secretary), Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey, Dr Richard Chandler, Dr Jeremy Purseglove.

- 2. Minutes of the meeting of 7 October 2006** were signed as a correct record. The President asked if anyone had any comments on the minutes and in response to a request from the floor Nicholas Hammond, the Director, undertook to put the minutes of this meeting on the Trust's website.

- 3. Presentation of the Annual Report**

Printed copies of the report had been distributed in the hall and had been emailed to members who had requested it. In presenting the Annual Report the President said that the first two pages of the report were largely concerned with good governance and the really interesting part began on page 3 with details of significant additions to the Trust's land holdings, most of which had been covered by the morning's speakers. The Trust's land holdings increased by 734 hectares (1813 acres) last year and in the current financial year we had already added Folly Wood and Fancott Meadows in Bedfordshire and on 8<sup>th</sup> October completed the purchase of Southwick Wood (a reserve which had been leased) and the adjoining fields which link it to Short Wood, which we already owned. These purchases added another 100 or more acres to our holdings. We are also negotiating for land that will enlarge our chalk grassland holdings in Bedfordshire, and for the freeholds of two existing reserves in Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. Next year we shall be adding substantially to our holdings in the Great Fen. The five landscape-scale projects demonstrated the importance of the Wildlife Trust's activity in the climate change agenda.

Perhaps this was a good point to mention for the sake of the historic record the partnership's having passed through the first stage of a £8.9 million Heritage Lottery Fund. It had been achieved in the face of stiff competition and apart from the visionary nature of this project the HLF Trustees were deeply impressed by the enthusiasm of everyone involved with it and the way in which the partnership was clearly working very effectively. The successful partnership consists of the Environment Agency, Huntingdonshire District Council, the Middle Level Commissioners, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust.

The involvement of people in the Trust's work had been and continued to be very impressive. With the appointment of a new Head of Education & Community last year we had been reorganising this aspect of our work. Over 20,000 people had high-quality contact with our staff last year and the numbers of pupils with whom we were in contact increased by almost 50% to 9,938. Several of our members' groups were developing quickly as we build our community involvement.

Above all, the numbers of members and their contribution to the Trust's work had grown once again to 32,156 members at the end of the year. We had at least 1000 volunteers working towards the Trust's aims and our mailing to raise funds for purchases in the Great Fen Project had produced an astonishing £92,000. She thanked all the members for their loyal and continuing support.

The President moved the adoption of the report, which was seconded by Peter Pilbeam and accepted *nem. con.* She then invited questions from the floor.

Chris Childs said he had been a member of the Trust for 30 years and agreed that the strength lay in its localness, but he was concerned about the local group situation which he thought was deteriorating. Erin Vos, Head of Education & Community, replied that some groups were struggling but others were increasing in strength. With the addition of a new group in Ely there were now 11 active groups and there had been a successful local groups' conference held in September. Mr Childs said that local groups were not told when there was a recruiter working in their area. Erin said that this had once been the case, but local groups were now told when recruiters were visiting local venues. The President felt that there should be greater coverage of local groups in the annual report.

Jennie Dixon made a plea that members used the plentiful opportunities to influence developments through Local Strategic Partnerships and similar forums. The President suggested that the Trust considered a leaflet on How to Make Your Voice Heard.

Anna Bradnam felt that it was important to make new members aware of the local group as she had been a member for two years before discovering there was a local group in Cambridge. She asked that new members should be told if there was a group in their area. The Director said that in response to her suggesting this at the local groups conference this was now being done. Trevor Gunton commented that before putting effort into local groups the Trust should be very clear about what we expected of them in return for the effort expended.

A member wanted to know whether the Trust's training courses were money spinners and whether they would expand. The Conservation Director, Brian Eversham, replied that the courses did cost the Trust, but that the volunteer recorders that they produced were valuable in providing information for reserves management. There would be more courses if we were able to find more tutors.

Chris Childs felt that it was disheartening that more people were not coming forward to help with conservation work and wondered how new audiences could be attracted. The Director said that he should not be disheartened because there were encouraging signs, such as the BBC Breathing Places Event held in Peterborough in June: about 20 Trust volunteers and staff worked non-stop from 10 o'clock to four o'clock providing an ethnically and socially diverse group of people with activities. Richard Astle added that the event had been attended by over 10,000 people.

#### **4. Presentation and Adoption of the Accounts and Auditors' Report**

The Honorary Treasurer, Richard Astle, presented the Accounts. He was delighted to be able to present a positive review of the Trust's financial position for the second year in a row. The Trust could not hope to achieve its wonderful vision for the future if it did not have the basics in place in terms of sound financial management and above all sound finances. Before starting his review of

the year, therefore, he wanted to pay tribute to all those across the Trust who had contributed to fund-raising efforts and in particular to the Trust's staff across the marketing and fund raising functions and in the finance team, as well as those whose main role is to spend money, but who so often provided the contact that leads to people giving us money. And of course to our members, whose contributions were so important to us.

Last year he set out again the three guiding principles of our financial management: sound business planning (through the development plan process); maintaining a strong risk register; and maintaining current assets that would cover three months' running costs. He also set out our commitment to maintain balanced budgets. In the last financial year, he was delighted to report that we had met all these principles. Overall we delivered an increase on our unrestricted assets of £42,898. With our restricted assets of £701,574 this means we had total assets at the year-end of over £1.1 million. This also meant that we currently exceeded our baseline of three months' unrestricted assets by over £100,000. This was very welcome.

In part this rosy picture had been met by a further increase in our membership base – rising during the year from 29,430 to 32,156 and our work in this area would be greatly assisted by a significant investment in upgrading our database, which would help us to maintain better records of our contacts with individuals. The Marketing team continued to focus on growing the number of members supporting the Trust work. As a result of this the income from membership subscriptions increased by 15% to £676,600. We would like to continue and, if possible accelerate this growth. In addition we have been successful in attracting a wide range of new corporate members, including our first ever educational partner, Cambridge University Press, and the Flitwick company Colpac, who, having got involved with the Trust through our appeal to buy Folly Wood, had decided they would join as corporate members too. We were also able to bring in a considerable amount of income through service level agreements and landfill credits. The fundraising team continued to secure large grants for our priority work, notably including a £150,000 grant from SITA Trust to carry out woodland work across Cambridgeshire for the next three years and a two year project to help restore chalk grassland at Pegsdon Hills funded by Biffaward. The Donor Development Team was flourishing, with over £3 million brought in through major donor fundraising for the Great Fen. This included two donations of £1 million, and three donations of £50,000 from individuals (much greater than gifts previously received from individuals). A donation of £25,000 was secured for Gamlingay Wood from the Hamamelis Trust, with a further £25,000 likely to follow this year. These successes reflected the effort being put into developing closer relationships with donors and major funders. On a less positive note, our income from legacies had dropped away somewhat last year. The Trust had been looking at this income source and was committed to putting additional resource into this area. This really was an important piece of our work and any help members could give would be much appreciated. He added a cautionary note that our restricted income had been somewhat skewed by the receipt of HLF funds for the purchase of the Homewood Estate, the money for which had reached the Trust by the year-end, but not been paid out.

In summary he outlined the Trust's current financial situation as one of an organisation that was on the cusp of moving from being a small business to a medium sized one. Over the last two years we had taken on considerable assets and with those had come liabilities and risks. We handled greater sums of

money than ever before and employed more people. This was a sign of our success, of which we should all be very proud.

But in order to maintain that success, we needed to ensure that we had the right capacity and capability in place to manage those resources effectively and ensure that we could spend in the safe knowledge that we could afford what we aspire to. The auditors' report for 2006-7 raised two issues that we were currently grappling with – whether we had sufficient capacity in house at the moment to manage such an increasingly large and complex organisation and whether given our growth, we should consider whether holding financial reserves of three months was sufficient buffer against economic down-turn. The Trust's Council had already agreed that we need to invest in our management team and we had recently approved the recruitment of a senior director to look after finances and resources. The Council would be increasing our cash reserves. There were clear issues about this that we would want to consider carefully. On the one hand we did not want to constrain our conservation work in order to hold more money in reserve, because that was not what our supporters gave us money for. On the other, our supporters did expect us to manage their money wisely and holding financial reserves was a crucial part of wise management.

Michael Allen, Chairman of Council, asked to be allowed to comment on governance. It was vital that governance issues were taken with care. He was pleased to be able to tell the meeting that our Trustees had served the Trust very well in this respect. The meeting applauded this sentiment.

Jane Hill, from Saffery Champness, the Trust's auditors, backed up this comment, because the auditors look at governance and she could confirm that our Trustees did a phenomenal job in protecting the Trust.

From the floor Frances Maynard said she was glad that the issue of human resources was being given importance and was pleased to see that there pension provision for the staff.

The Honorary Treasurer moved the adoption of the Accounts and Auditors' Report. This was seconded by Peter Pilbeam and approved *nem.com*.

#### **5. Appointment of the Auditors**

The Honorary Treasurer thanked the auditors for their work and proposed the appointment of Saffery Champness as the auditors for 2007/8, subject to the usual commercial considerations. The motion was seconded by Bob Cornes and accepted *nem. con*.

#### **6. Election of Returning Council Members**

Michael Allen, Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey, Dr Richard Chandler, Bob Cornes, Dr Patrick Doody, Margaret Goose, Peter Pilbeam and Dr Jeremy Pursglove were eligible for re-election. The President took the vote *en bloc*. Proposed by John Showers, seconded by Bryan Righton and approved *nem con*.

#### **7. Election of New Council Members**

The president explained that two members had stood down because they had served four consecutive years and the constitution required that they should not stand for re-election for at least a year. They were Stephen Larkin and Bruce Martin, each of whom has brought wisdom and experience that has been important in the continued good governance of the Trust. She said that we were also sorry that Melinda Appleby had decided to resign as she had moved to Suffolk and she thanked Melinda sharing her knowledge of agriculture and

conservation.

Council had proposed one new Council Member – John Yates. His election would bring the number of Trustees to 13. John from Northamptonshire is a retired lecturer in livestock husbandry at Moulton College and has been both a social worker and teacher, which he will be bringing as useful experience to our core activities. Proposed by Council, seconded by Chris Childs and elected *nem. con.*

#### **8. Election of Honorary Secretary**

Richard Townley stood for re- election, proposed by Margaret Goose, seconded by Peter Pilbeam and elected *nem. con.*

#### **9. Election of Honorary Treasurer**

Richard Astle stood for re- election, proposed by Peter Pilbeam, seconded by Pat Doody and elected *nem. con.*

#### **10. Election of Chairman of Conservation & Education Committee**

Rupert Paul stood for re- election, proposed by Bryan Righton, seconded by Margaret Goose and elected *nem. con.*

#### **11. Election of President and Vice-Presidents** (The Chairman of Council took the chair for this item).

Michael Allen said that Council had proposed the re-election of Lady Young as president. He wished to add that it was a great advantage to the Trust to have a President who brought power and influence and good fortune that she brings it with charm, passion and good humour. He hoped that the meeting would endorse Council's proposal by acclamation, which the meeting did. The President accepted the election and said she wished had more time to give to the Trust.

The formal part of the meeting closed at 1300 hours and was followed by the presentation by the President of two awards.

**Presentation of the Richenda Huxley Memorial Award** given in memory of the Trust's long-serving Chairman, Richenda Huxley, to someone who had performed particularly valuable service to the Trust. This year the award was made to two people who had been involved with the Trust since 1965 (two years after the Bedfordshire & Huntingdonshire Naturalists' Trust was founded). Both Terry and Sheila Wells were professional botanists who met at Reading University. Terry was employed by Monks Wood and joined the Trust in 1965, making him one of the longest-subscribing members. He served on Council and for thirty years on the Hunts Conservation Committee, which meant that in one year as a volunteer he attended 24 meetings on behalf of the Trust. His contribution to reserves has been huge and he has been a volunteer warden at Raveley Wood, Lady's Wood, Gamsey Wood, Ramsey Heights Clay Pits and Upwood Meadows. That the Trust owns Ramsey Heights and Upwood Meadows is largely because of Terry's championing of these very important places. Professionally Terry was a leading grassland ecologist. Recently He also found time to publish book illustrated with beautiful photographs about Brampton Wood. Sheila has been a particular support for Terry's voluntary work, but she is also an avid mycologist and produced fungi lists for a number of our reserves and other sites in the three counties, which included six new species for the British Isles.

Terry and Sheila are wonderful examples of volunteers' enthusiasm and generosity of time with which this Wildlife Trust would not have achieved anything.

The books chosen by Terry and Sheila were Humphrey Bowen's *The Flora of Dorset* and *The Isles of Scilly* by Rosemary Parslow (a retired member of the Trust staff).

**Presentation of the Cliff Christie Memorial Award** given in memory of Cliff Christie to someone who had contributed significantly to conservation and the study of natural history in Northamptonshire. It was particularly appropriate that this year's award should go to someone whose involvement with the Trust had been due to Cliff himself. John Showers had been very active in Northamptonshire as a naturalist and conservationist for many years. As a volunteer at Pitsford John Showers had been encouraged by Cliff to broaden his interest beyond birds to other taxa. He became dragonfly recorder for the Pitsford team, the volunteer group that Cliff set up to record all aspects of the natural history of our reserve at Pitsford. John has run training workshops on dragonflies and hoverflies for the Wildlife Trust and is a stalwart of Ecology Groups. Having branched out into hoverflies, last year he founded the Northamptonshire Dipterists' Group. He was also a member of the Titchmarsh Reserve Committee. He was one of those precious volunteers, who is quiet and competent and gets things done.

His choice was the New Naturalist *Galloway and the Borders* by Derek Ratcliffe, Michael Chinery's *Insects of Britain and Western Europe* and Townsend and Waring's *Concise Guide to Moths of Britain and Ireland*.

NH 15.10.06