

# **The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough**

**Minutes of the fourteenth Annual General Meeting at 1215 hours on 10 October 2009 at The Marshall Aerospace Conference Rooms, The Airport, Cambridge, CB5 8RX**

**Present:** Lady Young of Old Scone (President), Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey (Chairman of Council), Richard Astle (Hon Treasurer), Richard Townley (Hon Secretary), Ioan Thomas, Michael Allen, Fiona Chesterton, Bob Cornes, Dr Pat Doody, Derek Langslow, Peter Pilbeam, Sir John Robinson, John Yates, Tony Juniper, Colin Lang, Anthea Maybury, Nicholas Nodes, Jake Ward and 92 other members.

**1. Apologies for absence:** Margaret Goose (Vice-chairman of Council), Rupert Paul (Chair of the Conservation & Education Committee), Richard Chandler, Sheila Pankhurst, Mary Shirville, Pam Abraham, Shirley Groome

## **2. Minutes of the meeting on 11 October 2008**

Minutes were approved with the alteration of the date of the meeting from "12<sup>th</sup>" to "11<sup>th</sup> October 2008". Proposed by Bob Cornes, seconded by Peter Pilbeam.

## **3. Presentation of Annual Report**

The President presented the Annual Report, copies of which had been distributed. A shorter more readable of the Report would appear in the next issue of *Wildlife Action*, but the report that accompanied the accounts had to follow a lay-out recommended by the Charity Commission. The first page should reassure members that the Trust was a well-run organisation. On page 2 there was a reference to the Trust's membership of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, in which it took a very active role.

The Trust's real business was acquiring and managing nature reserves, gathering and using information to influence other land owners and users, and very importantly influencing people to take action. Land holdings of 5,600 acres (2,287 hectares) across 129 nature reserves made the Trust a substantial local landowner with substantial experience of land management. Our 22-strong reserve management staff were ably helped by a couple of hundred volunteer wardens, who between them brought more than several thousand years of experience to our work. Our complement of reserves workers also included about 500 sheep, 11 cattle and two Border collies.

The Trust had eleven Living Landscapes schemes that were part of a nationwide Wildlife Trust initiative. Bigger, better and more joined-up landscape-scale conservation schemes was where conservation would be heading in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the Trust is leading in this.

Earlier members had heard about the wide-ranging work of the conservation staff in Cambridgeshire. This work was reflected in each of the other counties. It was very encouraging that the Trust was strengthening its engagement with local authorities among members and officers at senior level. The pressures on land throughout the three counties made this ever more important. Staff had screened 14,468 planning applications in the previous year and were in contact with 156 owners of county wildlife sites for whom they had supplied detailed management statements.

Involving people and getting them to act on behalf of wildlife was vital. There could be no better example than the Ecology Groups, in which an impressive 300 volunteers were actively in the practical application of natural history.

The Trust tried to catch people early and the continued development of our education and community work was a demonstration of this. Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund the Trust has been able to appoint three education and community staff in the Great Fen Project area. There were 9,486 Watch members and we had 100 Watch leaders which is more than any other Trust.

Active involvement of people locally was a particular strength of the Trust. Without this support the Trust would be nothing. On page 7 of the report were some impressive figures demonstrating people's involvement – contact with 26,000 people of all ages through our education and community work; 13 active local members' groups; 19 active Watch and Greenwatch groups; 611 people attended 51 wildlife training workshops; and 34,580 members at the end of the year and although the total was only 2% up on the previous year the income increased by 7%.

Our members were wonderful in their loyalty and everyone involved in its running should pay tribute to their unstinting support.

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

The Honorary Treasurer presented the Accounts. Everyone had discovered over the last year that finance was a complicated and sometimes very opaque science. Members would be delighted to know that the Trust had a very clear understanding of just how much money was coming in and how much money was being spent. The information was regularly and carefully reviewed to ensure that it was more than balancing the books. He reminded members of the guiding principles of the Trust's financial management - sound business planning, through the development of a robust development plan; strong risk management; following the decision of Council a commitment to work towards the maintenance of current assets that would cover six months running costs; and finally, a commitment to maintaining balanced budgets.

It was his strong view that if these principles mattered during the good times, they were absolutely vital when times get tough.

He could not help remarking on how difficult it was to understand from the document what the actual position of the Trust was. On page 14, the Trust would appear to have made a surplus of £5million. The plain fact was that it had not made an actual £5m surplus last year. It had been a very difficult year in which it became increasingly hard to raise money, particularly in the case of major grants which have been a key source of income in the past.

Nevertheless, the headline figures for the year are reasonably encouraging with a 4.4% increase in membership and gift aid subscriptions, and investment income rising sharply too (partly as a result of the farm rentals on the Great Fen). A net unrestricted surplus of £110K was real money that accrued to our bank and was not committed to any other project. It compared to an unrestricted surplus in 2007/8 of £223K, but was still a very positive figure and improved our overall financial health, giving unrestricted current assets of £872K, which was over four month's free reserves. Fixed assets had increased dramatically from £10m to £15.4m, as a result of our land acquisitions, principally the Holme Farm Estate on the Great Fen.

Throughout the year the Trust continued to invest in its long-term development plan, designed to significantly increase unrestricted income and reduce dependency on

grants and restricted income. This represented a significant investment in marketing and fund-raising capacity and capability. The outline plan, if successfully implemented, would result in an increase in net unrestricted income of nearly £400K. Despite the tough operating conditions the Trust had continued to invest in this plan by recruiting a legacy officer and purchasing a new and more efficient finance platform.

Overall it had been a good year for the Trust financially, which enabled it to have a good year in terms of fundamental work: reserve acquisitions; reserves management; community and schools engagement; educational work, surveys, members' groups wildlife and ecology training session. Last year for instance £1.5m had been spent on nature reserve management and £469K on education.

The Trust did struggle in some areas. Whilst membership figures were up, the targets were not met and income from legacies also failed to meet budget. There was a significant decline in the contribution to our core costs from grants, which had been a key part of our income generation.

He then moved to the topic of what was happening currently. It would not surprise members that the current year was proving tough with individual and corporate subscriptions down slightly and consequently Gift Aid was also down. Income from grants to cover core costs was down by over £100K. This left the Trust facing the prospect of a budget deficit this year unless things changed materially.

If it were to happen it would be the first deficit for some time. Fortunately the recent policy of building up financial reserves would stand us in good stead. While such reserves were there to be used at times like these, the Trust did face the prospect of eating up a large chunk this year. Budgets were being managed very tightly and any unnecessary expenditure would be avoided while still investing in the future.

He concluded his presentation by acknowledging that times were tough, that the Trust had been impacted by the economic downturn and would have to ask supporters for additional help during the year, but the reserves and good governance were in place to move through the downturn and to continue to look to the future positively. He thanked Nick Hammond and Terry Hazeldine and all the management team for their hard work and congratulated Brian Eversham on his appointment as Chief Executive and Chris Gerrard on his as Director of Living Landscapes. Most of all he wanted to thank all those in the finance, fundraising and marketing teams for their dedication and effort. Without them, their innovative ideas and relentless enthusiasm for the cause the Trust would get nowhere.

The Honorary Treasurer moved the Adoption of the Financial Statements, which was seconded by Pat Doody.

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

Saffery Champness were proposed by Council as auditors and seconded by Nicholas Nodes.

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

Fiona Chesterton, Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey, Dr Patrick Doody, Margaret Goose, Professor David Gowing, Dr Derek Langslow and John Yates being eligible for re-election were elected *en bloc*, having been proposed by Council for re-election and seconded by Anthea Maybury.

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

The President thanked the four members who were retiring under the rule that required Trustees to stand down after serving four years. Richard Chandler, Bob Cornes, Peter Pilbeam and Jeremy Purseglove had all been wise, enthusiastic and supportive Trustees for whose service the Trust was very grateful

Council had proposed three new Council Members – Tony Juniper, Dr Sheila Pankhurst and Sir John Robinson. Tony had been chief executive of Friends of the Earth and was currently a busy environmental consultant. Sheila was a biologist who lectured at Anglia Ruskin University. John was a farmer and landowner who lived in Northamptonshire. Each would bring skills and experience that the Trust will find very helpful. This was seconded by Colin Lang. Elected *nem.con*.

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

Council proposed Richard Townley for re- election, seconded by Nicholas Nodes. Elected *nem.con*.

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

Council proposed Richard Astle for re- election, seconded by Richard Townley. Elected *nem.con*.

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

Council proposed Rupert Paul for re- election, seconded by Ioan Thomas. Elected *nem.con*.

## **11. Election of President and Vice-Presidents**

Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey took the chair for this item and proposed the re-election as President for a further four years of Lady Young. She had already contributed greatly to the Trust in the last eight years and he was delighted that she had agreed to stand again. Lady Young was elected by acclamation.

The President then resumed the chair and proposed Michael Allen as an additional Vice-President. Michael had been a member of the Trust for many years, first joining Council as a Trustee in 1997. He had then been prevailed on to become Honorary Treasurer and then to become Chairman of Council, where his wit, wisdom and deft chairmanship greatly contributed to the health of the Trust. At the same time as he was doing this he was becoming increasingly involved with the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, for whom he followed a somewhat similar route – Trustee, Hon Secretary and then Chairman, in which role he was still serving with great distinction and helped to make RSWT a power in the land.

## **12. Presentation of Awards**

The Richenda Huxley Award was in memory of our long-standing Chairman, Richenda Huxley and it was presented to someone who had done signal service for the Trust. This year it would be presented to Anne Costello, a voluntary warden, Watch leader, education volunteer in Peterborough and a key Ecology Group volunteer. Unfortunately for us, Anne could not be, because her son was being married. However, another suitable occasion at which to make this presentation would be found.

The Cliff Christie Award was a memorial to Cliff Christie, a long-standing volunteer and employee of the Trust. Cliff had been warden of our nature reserve at Pitsford Water and a leading Northamptonshire naturalist, which was the reason for the award being reserved for someone who had made a contribution to natural history or conservation in the county. This year's winner was a man whose passion was birds.

He had watched birds across the world, but the heart of his birdwatching world was Summer Leys. Since the reserve had first been created in 1992 Jake Ward had been watching and watching over the birds there. He was one of a band of dedicated birders who made sure no bird visits the reserve without it being noted. This together with the management that the Trust had undertaken since it bought the reserve two years before had made Summer Leys one of the leading birding destinations in Northamptonshire and given it a fame beyond the county. Jake always shared his great birding skills with visitors in a way that was not intimidating. Indeed, despite the great seriousness with which he took his birding, Jake always managed to infuse a sense of fun and tried to make sure visitors enjoyed themselves. Cliff Christie, who was a friend of Jake's, would have approved of this year's recipient.

In accepting the award Jake Ward thanked the Trust and said that he could imagine what Cliff would be saying if he were present, but he would not go into detail.

### **13. Any other business**

The President took the opportunity to thank Nick Hammond for his eleven years as Director of the Trust, during which time it had gone from being a "basket case" to one of the leading Wildlife Trusts.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1315 hours.

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