

SURREY WILDLIFE TRUST

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

**Held on Saturday 12 November 2016, 10am
At University of Surrey Management School**

Present

83 Trust Members

In attendance

Chris Wilkinson, Chairman
Trustees
Trust staff

1 Welcome and apologies for absence

Chris Wilkinson opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and providing an overview of the agenda. The Trustees who were present, and the three new prospective Trustees, introduced themselves.

Apologies had been received from:
Ron Pritchard
Heather Hawker

2 Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the last AGM on 14 November 2015 had been available to view on the website and were included in the AGM pack. These were agreed as an accurate record with no questions and were thereby proposed, seconded and unanimously approved.

3 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4 To Elect/Re-elect Trustees as Members of Council

Chris Wilkinson advised that, due to the 3 x 3 year maximum terms, three long serving Trustees were resigning: Alan Oakley, Gillie Muir and Heather Hawker. They had collectively served over 44 years and Chris Wilkinson thanked them all for their outstanding contributions. No Trustees were standing for re-election. Three new Trustees had been co-opted to the Council and were now seeking approval: Mark Slater, Peter Smith and Meryl Wingfield. Their appointments were proposed and seconded and they were duly appointed.

5 To reappoint the auditors and authorise the Council to agree their remuneration

Chris Wilkinson asked members to re-elect the Auditors for the coming year and authorise the Council to agree their remuneration. The motion was proposed and seconded from the floor and carried unanimously.

6 To receive and consider the Trustees' Report, Financial Statements and Auditors Report

Chris Wilkinson introduced Sue Rooke, Treasurer and Roger Wild, Finance Director.

Sue Rooke referred members to the summary financial statement in the AGM pack and advised that the full Trustees' Report and Accounts were available on the SWT website. The Report and Accounts had been audited by Menzies LLP who had met with the Finance Committee to provide detailed feedback. No significant points had been raised and a clean Audit Report was given. The Trustees' Report and Accounts had been taken to a full Council meeting on 10 October where they were approved.

Roger Wild provided a brief summary of the Trust's financial position to members for the year ended 31 March 2016. The key points were:

- The impact of austerity on Local and Central Government finances and household income had continued in 2016/17. In addition, the Trust was concerned about the impact of Brexit on the agri-environmental grants it received which supported its conservation work. The Trust recognised this was likely to be a continuing trend and had been executing plans to diversify income so that the Trust became more financially sustainable for the long-term. These new sources of income included expanding trading and fundraising activities.
- Income for the year totalled £6.1m and comprised:
 - Unrestricted income totalled £4.6m and a small net income surplus of £50k was generated which would be available to spend on charitable activities in the future;
 - Restricted income totalled £1.4m, mainly as a result of fundraising for Nower Wood (including £0.4m from the Heritage Lottery Fund) and a developer grant for the Priest Hill Nature reserve. A surplus of £1.1m arose on Restricted fund activities which will be used to support those Restricted projects including the building of Nower Wood.
- Expenditure totalled £5.0m and included:
 - The bulk of the Trust's expenditure was spent on managing the 5% of Surrey for which it was responsible – including direct conservation work such as heathland restoration and woodland management supported by agri-environmental schemes;
 - Conservation activities including improving water quality and habitat through the Mole and Wey Catchment Partnerships, providing ecological advice to organisations and local authorities;
 - Education to people of all ages ranging from primary school children through to A Level students and adults and also through forest school training, community projects and wildlife gardening work and awards. It was expected that provision would be expanded in 2017 when Nower Wood reopened;
 - Costs related to raising funds such as recruiting/retaining members and appeals.
- Surrey County Council Countryside Estate: Income earned on the SCC Estate was £1.9m. It included SCC's contribution, agri-environment grants, property management, the Norbury Park sawmill and various trading activities. The SCC estate was self-funding for the year. SWT continued to work with SCC to generate income from other sources with the aim of enabling SCC to reduce its contribution to the management of its estate.
- Volunteers continued to provide vital support to the Trust contributing 8,378 days of their time to aid the achievement of the Trust's mission.
- Reserves Policy: In accordance with the Reserves Policy, the Trustees had assessed the risks facing the organisation and calculated a level of free reserves required to ensure the Trust could continue its mission should a selection of those risks crystallise. The required level of free reserves was £700,000 and the actual level of free reserves held was slightly higher than this at £733,000.

General Questions from the Floor

What percentage of income was being used for staff costs and overheads?

- Approximately two thirds was used for staff, including on salaries, direct charitable work, surveying, rangers and the education team. Overheads were approx. £600,000, i.e. about 10% of total income. The Trust has been benchmarked against similar organisations for which overheads were typically around 13%-15% of income.

SWT had agreed with SCC to reduce its contribution to £0 by 2021. If parking charges did not go ahead following public objections, what were the Trust's plans to generate income. Also, if the charges and playsites did proceed, what plans were there for the loss of income due to disaffected members leaving?

- SCC has had to find significant budget cuts and focus on statutory responsibilities such as social care and education. The SCC countryside estate was not a statutory responsibility for the Council and therefore SCC were looking to reduce their management costs. The Trust believed it was the right organisation to manage the estate for the conservation of wildlife and had agreed to work with SCC with the objective of reducing their contribution to the cost of managing its estate to zero by 2021. New ways of generating income had been considered and SCC had decided that it was appropriate to bring in car parking charges which could support the wider countryside estate. Nigel Davenport stated there were clear choices and working with SCC to find new income was the right decision.

How much did it cost SWT to manage SCC land? It was shown as £1.9m.

- The SCC contribution, grants and other income was put back into the estate which made it self-financing at a cost of £1.9m.

What was the current status of the Sawmill? Was it losing money?

- Plans for the sawmill were working well. It had made a small loss of about £3,000 in the year ended 31 March 2016 but would make a profit in 2017. Investments had been made in a new kiln and routing machine which would improve production and broaden the product base.

Now halfway through the current financial year, what was the progress report?

- SWT was achieving the budget set for the year, spending was under control and income activities were on target.

Were specific details available for land management this year?

- No specific figures were available but income and costs were on target, largely funded from environmental grants. Woodland income and events/filming were all progressing well and a wood fuel business was being considered. Spending was governed by 10 year grant schemes which enabled SWT to deliver habitat improvements, eg Ash and Barossa were achieving favourable status, but there was concern that Brexit could affect future single farm payments. The conservation grazing activity was being extended and SWT had signed an agreement with the Surrey University vet school.

Did SWT speak to business sponsors about ethics/climate change?

- The sponsors who worked with SWT were those with whom the organisation felt comfortable but would be questioned if there was a sensitive issue. It was not believed

that such a situation had ever arisen.

7 To award Honorary Members

Nigel Davenport advised that 3 Honorary Members had been previously approved by the Council and Sarah Jane Chimbwandira read a short statement on each nominee's contributions to the Trust. The new Honorary Members were:

Nicky Timperley

Roger Hawkins (who was absent)

Pam Whyman (who was absent)

8 Close of formal meeting