

Durham Wildlife Trust

Annual General Meeting Minutes

5pm, Monday 23 November 2020 online meeting

DWT Chair Sarah Lister thanked everyone for attending and supporting the Trust. She explained the format of the meeting and thanked Zoe Hull and Emily Routledge for managing the meeting and the presentation. Sarah reflected that it has been a difficult year due to coronavirus requiring a lot of changes to ways of working. The pandemic did not affect the Trust's finances for 2019/20 but will have an impact in the current financial year.

1 Apologies for Absence

Georgina Hand

2 Minutes of the 2019 Annual General Meeting

Minutes of 2019 AGM were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3 Adoption of Annual Report and Consolidated Accounts

The Trustees' report was circulated before the meeting.

Sarah explained that the accounts showed a £22k deficit, which was a fall from the previous year.

This was due to a lot more spending on charitable activities, lower income and spending on improvements to visitor centres.

The biggest increase in income was in conservation, largely the Bright Water project. Reserves income was down due to the ending of two projects – Hedleyhope Fell and Shibdon Meadow.

Trading income was also reduced, as there was no timber income in the year. Also, the closure of Low Barns for refurbishment reduced income there.

Expenditure increased by more than £450k from the previous year – again mainly on Bright Water.

Some spending from designated funds was budgeted through the year.

Reserves spending was down due to the ending of projects already mentioned.

Spending on visitor centres was up due to the Low Barns refurbishment and a serious water leak there.

The Trustees' report was accepted by the meeting. Proposed Sarah Lister, seconded Tony Pensom

4 Chair's Remarks

Sarah noted that we have 37 nature reserves and are working towards a target of 50. Work on some sites is done to support higher level stewardship agreements. Some of the work was not done, leading to a reclaim of some payments and we are now renegotiating agreements.

The Trust has been successful in winning funding for the Naturally Native project. Kirsty Pollard has been appointed to take the project forward and will be working with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Tees Valley Wildlife Trust.

Bright Water has increased project delivery with habitat work, river restoration, archaeology and community engagement, though some of this has been hampered by Covid19 restrictions.

Numbers of new members are slightly lower than the previous year, largely due to the lack of face-to-face recruitment opportunities. Retention of members has been good. Sarah thanked staff for their work on membership.

She also thanked Low Barns staff for their support during refurbishment work.

DWT has seen growth in our online presence and Sarah thanked the communications officer for this.

Three Trustees, Alan Holden, Bob Kirton-Darling and Chris Smith have stepped down this year. Sarah thanked them for their contribution to the Trust over the years.

Trust Director Jim Cokill said that DWT has weathered coronavirus very well and stayed open operationally. A lot of work has been needed in reserves management without large volunteer teams. We have received support from the National Lottery Heritage fund, some of which has enabled us to employ extra staff to work with smaller groups of volunteers when restrictions allowed.

We have kept projects going, particularly the new Naturally Native and Seascapes projects – the latter in collaboration with other organisations such as Durham County Council and the National Trust.

The first lockdown led to anti-social behaviour on some sites with vandalism and fly-tipping. On the positive side, it also saw extra visitors as people valued the natural environment more.

There will be a financial impact as visitor centre income will be down and schools engagement has not happened. This will be offset by a generous legacy so we should stay in reasonable financial shape.

Membership has remained at about the same level but income from membership has increased. Jim thanked members for their continued support.

Looking ahead, 2021 will be DWT's 50th anniversary and we are looking to increase the number of our nature reserves to our target of 50.

We are already taking on three reserves to move from 37 to 40 and have raised £250k to support this.

Acquisition of three or four more sites is underway. We aim to raise £500k to secure the future of our sites.

Nationally, the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts is supporting the '30 by 30' campaign to restore 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. Our project will contribute to this but we also need to influence others to join in.

Jim thanked members, volunteers and staff.

Sarah responded to a question about the opening of hides on reserves. Our sites are open and visitor centres have reopened for toilet facilities and takeaways from the cafes. A decision on reopening hides will be taken when lockdown restrictions are lifted and we have more information on what is permitted.

5 Approval of Members of the Trust's Board

Sarah thanked Trustees standing for re-election and new Trustees joining the Board. In line with the rigorous new governance process, all candidates have been interviewed, background checks carried out and, for new Trustees, references obtained.

Trustees standing for re-election were:

- Peter Bell, proposed by Paul Davidson, seconded by Peter Collins
- Michael Coates, proposed by Joseph Finlay, seconded by Carol Spencer
- Chris Gorman, proposed by Vivien Kent, seconded by Peter Bell
- Ian Thomas, proposed by Michael Coates, seconded by Vivien Kent

New Trustees were:

- Paul Davidson, proposed by Peter Bell, seconded by Keith Robson
- Tony Pensom, proposed by Michael Coates, seconded by Vivien Kent

Election of new and returning Trustees was approved.

6 Approval of Auditors for the ensuing year

Sarah explained that the Trust put the audit work out to tender as the current auditors, Ribchesters, have performed the role for a number of years. A panel of the DWT Chair, Treasurer and Director shortlisted firms and then conducted interviews. They recommended Haines Watts as offering the best service and value. Sarah thanked Ribchesters for their service in recent years.

Haines Watts were proposed by Tony Pensom, seconded by Sarah Lister and approved by the meeting.

Sarah thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.

The meeting ended at 5:35pm.
Ian Thomas, Honorary Secretary