

Durham Wildlife Trust
2025 Annual General Meeting Minutes
Monday 27th October 2025 (6pm) Online

1. Apologies for absence.

Donald Thompson - member
Gloria and Neville Anderson – members

2 Minutes of the 2024 AGM

Members accepted 2024 AGM minutes as a true and correct record.

3. Adoption of the Annual Report & Consolidated Accounts

Clare Butcher (Acting Treasurer) – report circulated prior to the meeting.

Highlights

Year to 31 March 2025, overview of what took place including:

May 24 – Links with Nature project in the Sunderland Coalfield area which will introduce social prescribing.

June 24 – appeal for £54,000 to purchase land adjacent to Rainton Meadows. Target reached within one week. Land purchased in February 25.

October 24 – Launch of the Great North Fen Brightwater's long-term legacy.

November 24 – Land at Town Kelloe Bank purchased. This is a SSSI.

31st March 25 – 54 sites under its management, covering 1,374 ha (1,334 ha at start of the year).

BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) initiatives introduced, This requires developers to provide post development at least 110% of the pre-development biodiversity value.

Unrestricted Income

Approximately one-third of this comes from Memberships and Donations, one-third from trading at the visitor centres, and the rest from Conservation and Education activities. **Restricted Income**

Majority comes from Conservation activities. Last year a large proportion came from Natural England. Restricted income is usually project driven and is there to support the delivery of that project.

Expenditure

Unrestricted shows a gradual increase year on year. Restricted falls in line with each project so income is received in advance or claimed as expenditure is incurred.

Unrestricted Expenditure

Figures show roughly 50/50 split across Conservation & Education activities and Visitor Centres and other Trading activities.

Restricted Expenditure

this is mainly spent on Conservation & Education Activities.

Results

We receive and spend money in line with our charitable activities. We are not expecting to make a large surplus.

Net Assets Between Funds

	Unrestricted Funds £'000	Designated Funds £'000	Restricted Funds £'000	Total Funds £'000
Fixed Assets – land, vehicles & equipment	102	3,432	5,844	9,378
Current Assets – cash, stock & debtors	888	501	870	2,259
Current Liabilities – creditors	167	298	69	534
Net Current Assets*	721	203	801	1,725
Total Net Assets between funds	823	3,635	6,645	11,103

*£721k covers 8 months of unrestricted expenditure

The Trust is in a strong financial position.

Annual Report and Consolidated Accounts

Proposed by Faye Butler and seconded by the Chair. Vote by members present confirmed the adoption of the annual report and consolidated accounts.

4 Chair's remarks

The Chair is stepping down after 12 years as a Board member.

Highlights and successes over the last 12 months:

- Purchased additional land at Rainton Meadows – member donations of £80k
- Saltley Glebe (10ha) and land next to Town Kelloe (4ha).
- Habitat restoration at Bishop's Fen and Ricknall Carrs.
- Links with Nature.
- Memberships and membership income grew by 1%.
- 28,485 volunteer hours.
- Kittiwake Cam highest viewed webpage.

After her 12 years on the Board, the Chair shared some of the developments which have taken place over those years:

2013/14	2024/25
27 Nature Reserves	54 Nature Reserves
140 volunteers	376 volunteers: 28,485 hours
£1.2m Income	£4.3m Income
New bird hide at Joe's Pond	Further 16ha land acquired at Rainton
Land of Oak and Iron Project developed	Discover Brightwater completed
First successful small pearl bordered fritillary caterpillar reared	145 little terns fledged at Seaton Carew

In 2023 we developed our most ambitious strategy yet it is aligned with the RSWT strategy but links to our local ambitions and our local landscapes. There have been various changes and challenges over the years including Covid which involved us changing our delivery with volunteers and also saw changes to our board meetings. Also during this time, we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Durham Wildlife Trust.

Going Forward – mid-strategy review is being undertaken by RSWT. What this means for Durham wildlife Trust will be assessed. We are living in an uncertain world at a local, national and global level, but having a local focus may be the way forward for us. We welcome new ideas and thoughts from our new Trustees and incoming Chair.

5 Election of members to the Board

All those standing have been proposed and seconded by members and have been through a selection and interview process undertaken by a panel of Trustees. All those standing have been recommended for membership by the Trust Board. All those standing have been proposed by Nigel Bell (Trustee) and seconded by Paul Davidson (Trustee).

Seeking election

Steve Bhowmick
Clare Butcher
Michael Coates
Stephen Willis

There are sufficient places available to elect all candidates. Vote by members confirmed election of the four new Trustees to the Board.

6. Appointment of Auditors

It is proposed that Robson Laidler are confirmed as auditors. Motion proposed by the Chair and seconded by Faye Butler. Live vote by members confirmed the appointment of Robson Laidler as auditors.

Introduction from incoming DWT Chair, Bill Oxbury

I have been a Trustee for a year but have been involved with DWT for about 25 years and supported conservation longer than that. Thank you to Trustees for their confidence and asking me to assume the role. I am keen to continue to raise the ambition of DWT and our connectivity with neighbouring Trusts as well as RSWT. To everyone on this call, members, volunteers and staff, I am looking forward to meeting as many of you as possible. A big thank you on behalf of the Board to Sarah for her leadership and hard work over the last 12 years. She has made a huge difference in helping to shape the board and in supporting Jim Cokill and the Trust staff. We wish Sarah well for the future.

Q&A

Q - Is in-kind income from volunteer hours reckoned in the accounts?

Yes, we put the volunteer hours into our annual report each year.

Q - How is the Trust doing to meet its acquisition of 30 by 30 target. How is our region doing with regard to the 30 by 30 target and can we meet the ambition?

Response from Jim Cokill – on acquisition we were at 1,416ha against 1,500ha by April 2026. We have a target of influencing management on 10,000ha by 2030 with a target of 2,000ha by April 2026 and we are currently on 2,300ha. We are doing fairly well but overall, as a region, it is a little more difficult to get that information, but we are hoping to get this data soon. We are looking to come up with a national methodology and further information will be shared at a future date.

Question came via email asking about the reedbed at Rainton Meadows, and what can members and volunteers do to help?

Response from Emily Routledge - We drilled a number of test holes which suggested it would hold. The reedbed that we created there is in an area that isn't holding water and also due to lack of rain. What can members and volunteers do to help, well we will need funding for our work, and we can ringfence funds for this. It is within our vision to get this sorted and I am also speaking to other wetland organisations. We will share through the magazine once we have more of an update.

Chair – that concludes the formal part of the AGM.

Presentation – Cuthbert's Moor; The Past, Present & Future – Andrew Wadds, Reserve Manager



Cuthberts Moor Past,
present future DWT 3

Historically, prior to our ownership of the site, it was managed as a private grouse moor. The land came up for sale in 2022 and we were notified about it through an anonymous donor via the Charities Aid Foundation. The anonymous donor wanted to preserve the land for wildlife and environmental conservation. We managed to purchase the land and renamed it Cuthbert's Moor. The site is situated within the North Pennines and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. This is a significant area of peatland. Peatlands cover about 3% of the earth's surface and when peatlands are in a poor condition, they do not store carbon they release it. In the UK it is estimated that degraded peatlands make up at least 3.5% of the UK's carbon emissions, so something that could potentially be a massive carbon store is actually releasing 3.5% of the UK's carbon emissions. The main damaged is caused by them drying out, so as the peatlands become drier it allows microbes to break down the peat and eventually it becomes so dry that it blows away. The decomposition causes the carbon release. In 2023 the Managing Moors Project looked at what we had at Cuthbert's Moor. We commissioned Vegetation Surveys which showed that all habitats were in a poor condition mainly due to lack of diversity of species and presence of negative indicator species, also evidence of burning of deep peat. The positive note was that it could only improve. Since then, we have had a number of Invertebrate Surveys done and within that range 200 species were found in total including 8 of significant conservation interest. Part of the improvement work is creating more niches, a mosaic of different habitats. We also had Breeding Bird Surveys carried out by Durham Wildlife Services with a total of 37 bird species found on the moor. Of those confirmed to be breeding on the site, 7 of these were reported to be on the red list, 14 on the amber list and a further 6 on the green list. In 2025 we had another survey carried out and this is following a very similar pattern.

Looking into the future, we have continued the regular volunteering on the moor. Focusing on restoring habitat mosaics, holding more water on site, managing infrastructure, site monitoring and much more. Plans for 2025 and beyond include the north-western part of the site being selected for the A66 Bog compensation scheme. Site Impact - restoration of at least 10ha of blanket bog, dipwell water table monitoring for 10 years; annual whole site monitoring for breeding birds and invertebrates; NVC surveys in years 5 and 10; vegetation surveys completed by drone use. All the changes we are making on site will show the impact we are having on the whole site, particularly in the north-western part of the site. Minimum delivery of at least 10ha, more likely to be 13ha of blanket bog restoration, providing everything goes to plan. In addition to the peat we are forming we will also be

providing a better habitat, and we will be able to monitor improvements. Last month we had some scrape creations funded through National Landscapes, and these will hopefully be well used by species, and we will be able to delve deeper into the impacts we are making, and there is more to come. To view Andy's presentation in full follow this link.

Q – To what extent are invasive species an issue on the moor. What is planned to deal with them if this is a problem?

The only one I can think of is Heath Club Star Moss. This is the only one regarded as invasive, but it does not spread massively. It is formed by the peat drying out but not much can be done about it. In terms of dominant species, the plan is a combination of volunteers targetting the soft rush to create new growth and also to introduce some cattle grazing. It is important to create as many niches and a mosaic as possible. There are not a great deal of invasive species up there as we are at the top of the water table.

Q – How does County Durham compare against the national picture for peat sites?

I would have to look into this further. We could potentially cover this in an upcoming magazine.

Q – Is there active predator control of any kind on Cuthbert's Moor in relation to ground nesting birds?

Not on Cuthbert's Moor, however, there is quite a lot of ground predator trapping in the area. We are not doing any.

Q – Any prospect of adjoining land coming up for sale or permission for us to manage it?

Not that I have heard of. It is definitely something we will keep an eye on.

Q – Please note most volunteer activity is currently volunteer lead. Greater involvement of full-time staff will be welcome.

Noted. We are figuring out what is needed and informing the volunteer programme is something we need to pick up again.

Presentation – Durham Wildlife Trust Update – 'This Year and Beyond'– Jim Cokill, Trust Director

Sunderland Links with Nature project has been running for a year now and is lottery funded supported by Sunderland Council. It covers the coalfield area of Sunderland, and we are working on council run sites, connecting with the people and communities to support their local habitats. This work has inspired Sunderland Council to put a bid into Nature Towns and Cities, another stream of funding from the National Lottery. They are looking to take what we have done across the coalfield area and apply that across the whole city. The bid was successful, and they will be running a project called 'Connecting Through Nature' whereby Sunderland is striving to be a nature-friendly, climate resilient city in which communities work together to benefit both nature and their own wellbeing, creating a greener, sustainable and healthier city for all. The Project Manager at the Council will be in post soon, and we will be appointing two Officers at Durham Wildlife Trust to monitor the work.

Nextdoor Nature – the project continues to support communities in gaining the skills and knowledge needed to bring nature back to their neighbourhood. This concept has proved very successful, and we have been able to apply this across Sunderland. We plan to roll this out across other areas such as Darlington, Gateshead, County Durham and South Tyneside.

Water Voles – some fantastic work was done a few years ago through a project called Naturally Native where we sought to control the American mink. This is a non-native invasive species that is a major predator of water voles. which are a species in danger of going extinct in our patch and we have seen a decline. We are trying to do something about this but to control mink you need to do it on a large scale so we are joining together with other Wildlife Trusts, River Trusts and other organisations across the entire North of England to roll out that approach to control mink. There will be a bid for funding to start to reintroduce water voles which create niches and ranges of habitat along our riverbanks to help other species.

Stronger Shores is a project we are playing a lead role in. Funding has been provided through the Environment Agency and South Tyneside Council. The main concept is to look at how nature can provide solutions for coastal erosion and flooding and how you can get people to participate and care about that process., We have two Officers who are working on some innovative projects, right along the NE coast from Tees to Berwick. They are working with groups who would not normally get out and about on the coastline to engage them to appreciate and care about the coastline. We are also doing some hard and innovative science looking at sea grass habitats and how we can encourage more kelp to grow. Both sea grass and kelp can help to attenuate waves and reduce erosion along our coastline and thereby reduce flooding. We are at the early stages of something that could prove very significant.

Rainton Meadows – after securing funding to buy the land we are now starting to do some work. Viewing screens have been installed, future habitat works are planned, and bids are going in to fund reseeding and planting to begin to turn the land into scrub wetland and species rich grasslands. Things should start to happen in the next 6-12 months.

Low Barns – we need to do some significant work on the roof of the visitor centre. Following extensive bat surveys and funding being put in place, we are starting to plan how we can deliver this over the winter. There may be some slight disruption which we apologise for, but this will allow us to keep the visitor centre open for many years to come.

Chair – if anyone has any questions after the AGM please email them into the Trust and we will endeavour to answer them as quickly as possible.

The Chair thanked Andrew Wadds and Jim Cokill for their presentations and thanked members for their continued support of Durham Wildlife Trust. Thanks also to fellow Board members for the role they play and thanks to all the staff and volunteers for their hard work and dedication. Together we can achieve so much.

Meeting closed 7.24pm

Next AGM

TBC

Minutes prepared by Dawn Tiernan (Administration & Support Officer)