



Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

Minutes of the 61st Annual General Meeting held online via Zoom at 6.30pm on Wednesday 6th November 2024

Attendance

47 attended online (41 members and 6 panellists).

Paul Wilkinson (PW), the Trust's CEO, welcomed members and guests to the 61st AGM. PW expressed his delight that 64 people had signed up to attend the AGM, which is a fantastic representation across our membership. Nick Parsons (NP), chair of Trustees introduced himself and Colin Gibson (CG), the treasurer, who were presenting together with PW from the Old Ragged School office in Sneinton market.

PW welcomed the civic guests - Councillor Richard Butler, Councillor Jean Hall and Councillor Andy Brown, Exec Vice President Valerie Holt and Vice Presidents John Holmes, Dr. Rob Lambert and Sir Martyn Poliakoff and thanked them for attending.

PW explained the meeting would follow the agenda shared online, with opportunities to vote. PW demonstrated how the polling function would work and members were then given a trial run of voting.

PW clarified that we would seek to answer as many questions as possible posed in the Q&A function. All questions would be captured and we will endeavour to answer any unanswered afterwards the meeting.

For formal votes a proposer and seconder would be sought. Members can action this via the 'Raise Hand' function and PW will provide a prompt for this.

1. Appointment of Chair

PW proposed that in accordance with Article 6.3 of the Trust's Articles of Association, Nick Parsons (NP) the Trust's Chair, be appointed Chair of the meeting. This was proposed by Nicola Holmes and seconded by Valerie Holt.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the Lord Mayor of Nottingham, the Mayor of Broxtowe, the Mayor of Gedling, Professor Edward Peck, Vice Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University and Tom Huggon, Exec Vice President, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust.

3. Approval of minutes of the 60th AGM

The minutes of the 60th AGM held on Thursday 2nd November 2023 were proposed by Alex Flint and seconded by Mike Spencer. By poll vote majority the meeting AGREED the minutes as a true and accurate record.

NP asked if there were any questions from the minutes. There were none.

4. Annual Trustees' Report for the year ended 31st March 2024

The Annual Trustees' Report had been shared on the website for people to review prior to the meeting. A presentation with highlights of the year was given by the Chair. These points are in addition to the presentation slides.

The Trust's 60th anniversary event, provided an opportunity to celebrate and to look forward, to strengthen the connections with local authorities, other organisations and individuals to prepare for the challenges ahead, particularly over the next 5 years.

The successful campaign to prevent fracking next to Mission Carr Nature Reserve, is an example of our partnership working with the community. The local campaign group, who NWT worked closely with, subsequently donated funds to us, for which we are very grateful.

The success of the Wilder Nottinghamshire Network (WNN), Nextdoor Nature project, and the first round of Award presentations are to be celebrated and are central to the 1 in 4 goal. These provide an opportunity to acknowledge and meet local activists. NP said we need the community's support and felt encouraged that people really want to take action and are responding.

The Attenborough for All project has two aims, for Attenborough Nature Reserve (ANR) to act as a haven for wildlife and to be a focal point to inspire action for nature. The 800 survey responses, feedback and interview sessions have created a really powerful piece of work, which will be integral in shaping the future development of ANR.

Extreme weather events continue. Last winter many of our sites were impacted by severe flooding, with staff working hard to rescue cattle and sheep, fortunately we got everything to safety. The flooding however led to the closures, cancelled events and were a setback for our Trading subsidiary.

Another challenge has been Ash dieback where the team has worked hard to develop robust policies and procedures to manage this.

An important success of this year was the opening of the "green heart" as part of the Broadmarsh redevelopment, with input from the Trust and EMEC ecology, following our hugely popular nature first vision promoted in September 2021. The green heart is now the starting point of Nottingham City Council's £4 billion redevelopment scheme, to strive for urban nature in the heart of the city.

The Trust objected to a mineral application to extract Pulverised Fly Ash (PFA) next to Idle Valley Nature Reserve. The application was approved but with safeguards and mitigation. We are working with the Environment Agency to ensure problems are kept to a minimum. The Trust is also fighting another application at Barton-in Fabis, just across the river from Attenborough Nature Reserve for sand and gravel extraction, which we don't feel is an appropriate development.

The Restore Nature Now march took place in London in June, with over 60,000 people from many charities, including NWT, coming together to call for more action for nature. The march was very uplifting and positive. NP feels sure more marches will follow and they remain very important.

It's been a tough couple of years financially, and we've working very hard between the 3 parts of our charity to eliminate our structural financial deficit, to ensure we are a resilient organisation for future working.

We're thankful to some generous donors following the success of the relationships developed at donor walks and events.

As part of the Midland Nature partnership we're working with other environmental charities and groups to drive investment into nature recovery across the region. This year RSWT obtained £38 million from AVIVA, who want to achieve net zero, for West Coast Atlantic rainforests. So there are opportunities for investment out there, which we hope to secure for future projects in our region.

Another important connection, following the new combined authority mayoral elections and the subsequent appointment of Mayor Claire Ward is the establishment of a Nature & Biodiversity Task Force to help influence key policies and to help our work on the ground.

The Works bridge at Attenborough has been closed since 2023, due to being found unsafe following an inspection. We have an appeal running to assist with the repair costs of £375,000, to raise £30,000 (as of today we're at 19% of that target). If this target isn't met we'll need to dip into our financial reserves.

Attenborough Nature Centre is in need of refurbishment and preferably some redevelopment. We're working with the University, in partnership with the East Midlands Development Corporation and the East Midlands Combined Authority to try to achieve funds for this work.

Members who visited Vicar Water Country Park, at the event on Saturday, will have seen the major river enhancements that are taking place, as part of the 3 Rivers Restoration Project, which is funded by Severn Trent, with support from EMEC. A new eel pass is also being installed at Rainworth water too as part of the project.

A Natural Flood Management Scheme with Nottinghamshire County Council and the Environment Agency is to be submitted soon. As part of this we are looking at ways to slow water from entering the rivers, such as tree planting, new wetland habitat, leaky dams, everything designed to hold water that will protect businesses and homes further downstream. If funding is successful, then we can deliver a project good for nature, that will help reduce the carbon footprint of the county as well, because we won't be using concrete and engineering to achieve flood defences.

NP concluded by saying it had been a challenging year financially but a successful one too. NP thanked the staff at the Trust, EMEC and Trading for their professionalism, our trustees and volunteers for their energy and enthusiasm and our members, donors, and business partners for their generosity and support.

NP asked if members had any questions. PW confirmed there were none in the chat.

PW read a question that was previously submitted by Nick Mills, a member and volunteer at Skylarks: "What have the Head of Nature Recovery (North and South) been focused on this year and what do they consider to be their biggest achievement?".

PW said hopefully the presentation has highlighted a few examples, including the Water Vole Project and the Species Survival Fund. PW went on to say our reputation as a trust,

and our expertise means that we're increasingly seen as a trusted partner in the county to deliver large scale projects like the Broadmarsh Green Heart and the 3 Rivers project. As well as working to influence others and decisions to achieve impact on the ground. Our nature recovery teams are working tirelessly week by week, standing up for wildlife within the planning system, providing advice and support to landowners and community partners.

A few examples of our achievements are:

- Renewed Services Level Agreements with Rushcliffe Borough Council (marking 20 years of partnership)
- The delivery our highest level of habitat creation on farms, supporting farmers to move to a more regenerative form of agriculture.
- Maintenance and enhancements work, supported by our volunteers with further reedbed creation, an island clearance for ground nesting birds at ANR and new habitats at the Idle Valley nature reserve to benefit the threatened Turtle Dove.
- Peatland restoration work at Mission Car nature reserve.
- Woodland management including work for Dormouse at Treswell, Eaton and Gamston Woods.
- The mobilisation of our cattle and sheep across our land holding and the introduction of cattle at Rainworth.

The Annual Trustees' Report was proposed by Shilpa Shah and seconded John Holmes. The meeting AGREED the report by a vote poll majority.

5. Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2024 (inc appointment of auditors)

The Honorary Treasurer, Colin Gibson (CG) presented the accounts. These points are in addition to his presentation slides.

The accounts for the combined Trust report a deficit, for the second year running. The deficit of £481,000, is an improvement on last year. CG said he has spoken before about issues with the sustainability gap and how we struggle to deliver all we want to do with the income we have. In the current environment generating income is difficult and most of our issues are cost related. We're working very hard to improve this without having to make drastic cutbacks to our delivery. Outside project work, most expenditure is on salaries and other employment costs. So the changes in recent budget were not what we needed at this time. CG acknowledged that breaking even would have meant that a lot of good work could not have been done however said we can't and won't continue to operate at a loss.

Income is moving in the right direction approaching £6 million, mainly down to EMEC turnover increasing well above £1 million to £2.6 million, enabling a fivefold increase in contribution to the Trust of £268,000.

In 2023/2024 legacies were lower than previously. We cannot budget for legacies but we are so grateful when these contributions arrive.

CG thanked the members for their contributions, as membership remains our largest source of sustainable income. We have a good record of retaining members and our memberships are increasing thanks to work with external agency owned by other Wildlife

Trusts - with face to face recruitment at various locations across the country. CG said if any members were able and willing to increase their monthly donations we'd be delighted but recognises this isn't always possible. Many members also kindly donate to our separate fundraising initiatives as well.

CG outlined the main reason for the difference between the budget figure and the outcome. The minuses were due to a timing difference with money from one of our big projects coming in later, into the next financial year and a lower than hoped Profit with Purpose (PwP) from the Trading subsidiary, for many reasons including the flooding issues. The pluses came from EMEC PwP at £268,000 compared to budget of £175,000 and the increase in membership income previously mentioned.

Looking ahead, CG said overall we're on track to break even in 2024-2025. Although we never know what's round the corner. EMEC's accounts continue to strengthen and to perform above expectation, providing a critical boost until we can maintain overall sustainability of the Trust. EMEC have just obtained ISO45001 recognition for H&S which helps them to obtain increasingly large tenders.

In the current climate we can't spend resources on Reserves owned by third parties, who don't recognise our input. This is a legacy issue. We are working with owners to find a satisfactory solution but if this isn't possible we may have to consider removing support for some of these reserves.

CG concluded that we are moving in the right direction, perhaps slower than hoped but he remains optimistic that we will be able to deliver a surplus.

CG paid tribute to the Finance team and other staff members and volunteers supporting in IT and HR. Thanks are also given to our auditors at Haines Watts.

CG asked for any questions. PW confirmed there were no questions.

The Treasurer's report was proposed by Valerie Holt and seconded by Alex Flint. The meeting AGREED the accounts with a poll vote majority.

A slide was shown to members confirming Haines Watts willingness to be reappointed as auditors. The re-appointment was proposed by Valerie Holt and seconded by Katherine Wilson. The meeting AGREED the appointment of Haines Watts as auditors with a poll vote majority.

6. Election of President, Vice-Presidents and Members of the Council

NP explained that President Sir Andrew Buchanan had stepped down, as highlighted at last year's AGM and thanked him for his service over many years. NP extended condolences to Sir Andrew on the sad loss of his wife, Lady Belinda recently and said our thoughts are with him.

NP explained that Sir Andrew was a hard act to follow and a new Presidential candidate will be brought forward next year. Erin McDaid is currently working with the PAN Committee, Trustees and SLT to identify a potential replacement. With the goal to strengthen our cohort of ambassadors and champions to help further our objectives to reach out to new audiences.

NP presented the slide with the nominations for Vice-Presidents and asked the meeting to re-elect the current Vice-Presidents. The nominations were proposed by Nicola Holmes

and seconded by Shilpa Shah. The meeting AGREED the appointments of Vice-Presidents with a poll vote majority.

NP thanked Kat Hart who's term of office has come to an end, as our one of our youth trustees.

There were two nominations for trustees to be re-elected onto Council, Katherine Wilson for her third and final term and Ellie Brodie for a second, three-year term. There was also a nomination for a new trustee, Andy Wilkinson to be elected.

The Trustee nominations were proposed by Valerie Holt and seconded by Ruben Borsje.

The meeting AGREED the re-appointment and appointment of the trustees with a poll vote majority.

7. Any other competent business

There were no notifications of other competent business.

NP thanked everyone for their attendance and support over the year.

The meeting concluded with a short video highlighting the Water Vole Recovery project and the release of water voles at Idle Valley Nature Reserve.

PW apologised for the delay in some people accessing the meeting room at the start and said a recording would be sent out to all attendees to make sure people can listen to any parts they missed.

Meeting closed at approximately 7.35pm.