

Minutes of the 60th Annual General Meeting of North Wales Wildlife Trust

Saturday 11 November 2023

Geoff Radford, Vice-President welcomed everyone to the Trust's 60th AGM

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Mark Sheridan, Gill Tattershall, Simon Mills, Penny Radford, Rob Grieg and Gina Mills.

2. Minutes of the 59th Annual General Meeting held 22 October 2022

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed *nem con* to be a true and accurate record of events.

Proposer: Ian Wright

Seconder: Alasdair Forman

3. Report of Council for the year ended 31 March 2023

Howard Davies opened by briefly remarking on the purchase of Bryn Ifan which, although more associated with the current financial year, is of such importance that it warrants mentioning here, if only to thank members for their generous support and encouragement enabling its purchase. He then observed that a traditional 'report of the year' would add little to that already provided in the Trust's impact report and Annual Report and Accounts. Instead, he focussed on our new strategy as a framework to deliver our three strategic goals; the wider UK and international context for nature conservation; and the need for the Trust to do things differently. Brief notes relating to his presentation are below:

"The Trust has three strategic goals, which chime with those of the wider Wildlife Trust movement:

- Nature is in recovery,
- People are taking action for nature and the climate,
- Nature is playing a central, valued role in helping to address local and global problems

As well as not being isolated as an individual Trust (because of our role within the UK network), we contribute to a global network of Protected Areas and delivering on a global Convention on Biological Diversity.

Signed by 150 government leaders at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity is dedicated to promoting sustainable development. The Convention recognizes that biological diversity is about more than plants, animals and micro-organisms and their ecosystems – it is about people and our need for food security, medicines, fresh air and water, shelter, and a clean and healthy environment in which to live. It is actually about sustaining life on earth.

The Convention establishes three main goals:

- the conservation of biological diversity,
- the sustainable use of its components, and
- the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources.

Protected Areas around the world are recognised as significantly contributing to its goals – but cannot be separated from the people that live and work around them.

The management of nature reserves is core to nature recovery in the UK, not least because the bits in between are now so depleted of nature. They are critical for species survival; critical at an individual level; and critical as part of a network that must allow species to move in response to changing conditions.

We cannot afford to get it wrong. To place our work again in a wider context:

- The latest State of Nature Report came out a month ago and reported that 1 in 6 of Britain's species are at risk of extinction

- A report from the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, stated that half of all flowering plants globally are at risk of extinction – and 90% of our medicines are derived from flowering plants
- The WWF has summed it up nicely. COP 15 in Canada last December stated that we have “just seven years left to halt and reverse the loss of our natural world”

Our strategy reflects the global 30x30 ambition, and is looking to bring 30% of North Wales into effective management – 30% of North Wales’ terrestrial area is 200,000 ha, its marine 230,000 ha. Yet our nature reserves cover just 1000 ha – and we therefore need to act very differently.

What does this look like? It means:

- Doing more of the same but at a scale and pace we have never experienced – but also ...
- ... working with new partners and working in a different way where we can.
- Developing an effective Land Management Advisory Service to support not just farmers, but other organisations who themselves can support farmers to do more for nature – many of whom want to do just this.
- Engaging positively in the process to develop a new National Park in north Wales, and influencing in the way we need to – these opportunities don’t come along very often
- Posturing less – taking a stance in response to the decisions of others, and shaping policy more effectively.
- Challenging ourselves and others. Do we recognise success and failure appropriately? Do we count, measure, and report on the right things? Where will the support come from to get it right?

Finally, Frances, wider staff, volunteers, members, and supporters do amazing work to make amazing things happen. We simply need to not lose sight of the fact that we are one Trust, working as part of a UK-wide network, that is working as part of a huge global network doing what it can to sustain life on earth ... there can be nothing more important, surely?”

4. Adoption of the Report and Accounts, together with the Treasurer’s and Auditor’s Report for the year ended 31 March 2023

Ian Dunsire identified 2022-23 as an exceptional year for the Trust, not least because of its £6m+ turnover. He also flagged that the figures in the Trust’s impact report had needed significant revision since it had been published, and explained why.

In brief, the Trust produces its monthly figures using the Sage accounting system, which are subsequently reviewed by the Treasurer and Trustees. At year-end, the accounts have to be produced in their fixed (SORP) format. Although we used our auditor’s specialist software this year, this didn’t pick up figures from the entire Group (i.e. including our two trading subsidiary companies): only in September 2023 were the consolidated figures finally compiled and only a fortnight ago (in October 2023) were the final accounts agreed.

In July, however, there had been a print deadline for the Trust’s impact report. The only figures available were those from Sage that had been passed to the auditors in May – and which, critically, did not include consolidated group figures, including a c.£48k profit from Enfys Ecology Ltd and associated expenditure by both subsidiary trading companies.

[A sheet was distributed summarising the main changes between impact report and final accounts, with the addition of the trading subsidiary companies being the most important.]

Ian further highlighted the continuing importance of grants to the Trust (as well as membership, legacies and other voluntary income), and observed that a £6m+ turnover was highly unlikely to be seen in 2023-24’s figures – a figure of between £3m and £4m is more likely. A particularly substantial outlier in 2022-23 was a c.£1.5m grant towards the purchase of Bryn Ifan, which arrived barely weeks before the year end – with the related expenditure not subsequently incurred until 2023-24. This same transaction also accounts for the £3m+ ‘cash in bank and in hand’ figure in the Trust’s balance sheet. In fact, out of that £3m+ figure, £1.5m was actually sitting in our solicitor’s (Gamlins) clients’ account at year end, ready to complete the purchase of the new reserve some 4 days later. Ian observed that the cash reserves figure, at the point of the present meeting, amounted to around £1.2m.

The above-mentioned Reports and Accounts, together with the Trustees' and Auditor's Report, were adopted *nem con*.

Proposer: Alex Lord
Secunder: Simon Mills

5. Election of Council Members and Honorary Officers

Howard Davies thanked Ian Dunsire both for his service as Trust Treasurer and for continuing to remain a Trustee, as well as Company secretary for the Trust, the Trading Company and Enfys ecology. Alex Lord will serve as Treasurer from this meeting onwards.

Howard further thanked Bethan Beech, standing down as a trustee at the end of her term.

Since the original meeting papers were sent out to members, two applications had been received from people who stood for election. Both Chris Brown and Bridget Osborne were duly elected *nem con*, after briefly introducing themselves to the meeting.

Chris Brown

Proposer: Ian Dunsire
Secunder: James Robertson

Bridget Osborne

Proposer: Alasdair Forman
Secunder: Joanna Robertson

Two members had been co-opted as trustees during the past twelve months, and stood for election. Both Ffion Mitchell-Langford and Daniel Bos were duly elected *nem con*, also after briefly introducing themselves to the meeting.

Ffion Mitchell-Langford

Proposer: Gina Mills
Secunder: Alex Lord

Daniel Bos

Proposer: Howard Davies
Secunder: Alex Lord

The following current trustees had previously agreed to continue in their roles: Gillian Coates, David Davies, Howard Davies, Ian Dunsire, Alasdair Forman, Frankie Hobro, Alex Lord, Gina Mills

6. To re-appoint Williams Denton of Bangor as auditors to the Trust and to authorise Council to fix their remuneration

Williams Denton of Bangor were re-appointed as auditors to the Trust, and Council were authorised to fix their remuneration; both *nem con*.

Proposer: Ian Dunsire
Secunder: Ian Wright

7. Volunteer Awards

The following awards were presented, with the full citations provided as an appendix to these minutes.

- Young Volunteer of the Year 2022-23: Zak Spaul
- Volunteer of the Year 2022-23: Max Vaughan
- Volunteer Group of the Year 2022-23: the Ocean Rescue Champion Mentors

- Gold Badge 2022-23: Bryn Jones
- Gold Badge 2022-23: Graham Platt

8. Questions for CEO and Trustees

Two questions were put to the CEO and Trustees, who gave the summarised responses as follows:

Question 1

Sally Clifton raised the point that North Wales has a high proportion of Welsh-speakers, and that the Trust (and others) need to give Welsh-speaking people a greater sense of ownership over their own wildlife. She was disappointed that the Trust's trustee recruitment pack failed to sufficiently acknowledge the importance of Welsh language and culture, and requested that trustees gave this further consideration.

Answers:

- Howard Davies stated that the Trust treat equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) very highly, both for its own sake and because we recognise the need to break down barriers between people and wildlife; and that we do everything we can to work with everyone who steps forward to lead (including volunteer trustees). He acknowledged that there was more that every charity could do in this space, and that the Trust was open to suggestions. He further highlighted that we didn't have a trustee recruitment pack at all this time last year.
- Frances Cattanach emphasised that links to the Welsh language in the Trust's work included embracing the links with culture, language and art, as well as simply ensuring the availability of high-quality translation. She reminded the meeting that the Trust have tried to invest in training for staff and improve engagement with Welsh-language-first events; and felt that the Trust was definitely heading in the right general direction.

Further responses from the floor:

- Ffion Mitchell-Langford raised her extensive experience of working with lots of different voluntary groups; and that she was pleased to report that NWWT have been very inclusive and welcoming to her as a native Welsh-speaker. She highlighted that she would not have volunteered for her new trustee role had that not been a core part of the Trust's practice.
- Rhiannon Mon Jones flagged that the Trust has grown significantly over its 60-year history, and commended the Trust for having become, in recent years, an organisation which truly encompasses linguistic and other minority groups. She offered to contribute to further improvements that the Trust felt it should be making.

Question 2

Kipper Davies stated that he had recently attended a meeting of the Pollinators Taskforce for Wales. During this, a speaker had highlighted a particular funding stream through which funding was being channelled to meadow-related work in north-west Wales. He wondered whether there was equivalent funding for work in the north-east.

Answer:

- Frances Cattanach stated that she was not aware whether this funding was available, but agreed to find out and respond to Kipper directly.