



**Annual General Meeting 2023 Draft Minutes**

**Saturday 7th October 2023; 12:00-13:00; The Manor Rooms, Drewtons**

The Chair of the Board of Trustees, Jo Webb, led the proceedings and chaired the AGM.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Gurdev Singh and Nick Perks

**2. Minutes of the AGM 2022 – Jo Webb**

The draft minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 7th October 2022 at **Queen Margaret's School for Girls, Escrick, York** received the approval of the Board at a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and have been available on Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's website since 9<sup>th</sup> August 2023 and hard copy by request.

On this matter, members voted 235 for, 1 against and there were 2 abstentions. Therefore, the motion was approved.

**3. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023**

Rachael Bice showcased the highlights from the Annual Report, a summary of which was available to members at the meeting and gave some commentary on the positioning of the environment in current politics referring to the national State of Nature report, climate change and the science verses symbolism of society's interaction with the natural world. She also thanked members, teams and volunteers for their support throughout the year.

Martin Randle reported that The Trust's finances were sound and back on track despite the pressures from the last three years following covid and rising costs. Martin then thanked and introduced Darren Tiffney, Director of Finance and Central Services, who presented key findings from the Accounts and Annual Report to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

Against a challenging backdrop of external pressures, the Trust delivered an ambitious programme whilst investing in the organisation and delivering our ongoing commitments to our reserves land management, gateway sites and extensive volunteering and engagement activities. The Trust has come a long way in the past 6 years, with a 76% increase in income over that time.

The total income for the year was approximately £12.2m (which is a 23% increase on the previous year and 9% higher than originally forecast). Unrestricted Income was £4.1m for the year, a 5% drop on the same figure posted last year, overall, the income figures demonstrate the Trust's continued stability.

Income was made up of donations and legacies sustained at £3.2m, a large increase to £8.3m from £6.1m in charitable activities - our grant funded work. Our trading income has

held consistent from last year at £0.5m and is an important complement to our key reserve sites and shop window for the Trust, such as the Design team and work on Invasive species.

Unsurprisingly, due to the weak backdrop of global investment, our gains on investments fell from a £0.2m gain in 21/22 to a loss of £0.07m or £70k.

However, the Trust saw a rise of 3.5% in membership income and was also incredibly grateful to those supporters who left £330k in legacies to the Trust during the year.

Individual donations and appeals showed £760k in donations, which is exactly comparable to the previous year, with £50k from appeals.

Admissions and retail have modestly grown, and Darren also sees the landscape scale projects and important strategic relationships flourishing.

The Trust finished the year with Net Assets of over £17.32m – made up of General unrestricted funds, restricted funds, designated funds and fixed asset funds. On 31 March 2023 the Trust had Restricted Fund balances of £5.81m – an increase of £0.34m on the previous year. This figure has income and expenditure streams flow in and out during the year, but essentially is the figure of amounts held for future project works.

The General Unrestricted Financial Reserves are £1.45m, £170k up on prior year – these are funds available for the Trust to freely use in accordance with its charitable objectives and also represent a key part of the Trust's financial safety net, supporting cash flow and mitigating against risks and financial pressures. The Trust seeks to hold sufficient reserves to ensure it remains financially robust, proportionate to the scale and mix of its activities at any point in time - a very tricky balance to achieve and is regularly reviewed. The Trust has a reserves policy to hold £1m of unrestricted funds.

In addition, the Trust has a current approved budget that will result in a loss of £329k to see this surplus eroded in the current financial year, and this is still the case, would return the Trust closer to that financial reserves target.

Looking ahead, there are concerns in continued challenges in inflation and government uncertainties are providing an extremely challenging investment picture.

Darren thanked the honorary treasurer Martin Randle, the finance and risk committee, his finance team, supporters and members for all their ongoing support.

The Annual Report and Accounts gained the approval of the Board at the meeting on 20 July 2023 and were made available on our website in September and as hardcopies by request. The motion asking members to approve these documents was originally proposed by Jo Webb and seconded by Martin Randle.

On this matter, our members voted 235 for, 1 against and there was 1 abstention. Therefore, the motion was approved.

#### 4. Appointment of Auditors

Members were asked to vote to support the recommendation to reappoint Saffery Champness as the Trust's auditors for 2023/24. This motion was originally proposed by Martin Randle and seconded by Richard Tripp.

Members voted 231 for 3 against and 3 abstentions. This motion was approved.

#### 5. Appointment of Trustees

Jo Webb outlined the robust recruitment process for new Trustees, including advertising widely in our magazine and website, and the thorough interviewing process, which has produced excellent fields of candidates and appointed trustees.

The following five new Trustees were co-opted on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and approved by members through the following vote results:

Co-opted trustee	Proposed and seconded by	Votes
Nabil Abbas	Gurdev Sing and Nick Perks	232 for, 5 against, 3 abstentions
Dr Ceri Williams	Patrick Hall and Nick Perks	236 for, 2 against and 2 abstentions
Dr Jane Smart OBE	Jo Webb and Nick Perks	237 for, 2 against and 1 abstention
Dr Michael Graham	Mick Armitage and Nick Perks	235 for, 2 against and 2 abstentions
Peter Meadows	Patrick Hall and Martin Randle	234 for, 2 against and 3 abstentions

Jo Webb thanked members for voting.

#### 6. Question and Answer Session

Jo Webb introduced the panel, Martin Randle, Honorary Treasurer, joined by Senior Leadership Team members Rachael Bice, Martin Slater, Amanda Spivack, Darren Tiffney and Sharne McMillan. Questions emailed in and were taken from the floor.

##### 1) Can the Trust do anything about the Sewage releases that are released for no apparent reason?

Martin responded to say sewage discharges to rivers and sea are regulated by the Environment Agency through environmental permits. These water quality discharge consents are written to avoid and minimise environmental impact to water quality and aquatic ecology. There is some evidence (BBC investigation, academic researchers and volunteers) that the permitted releases have occurred in dry periods, and this is the subject of an on-going investigation by the EA which could lead to sanctions and penalties.

YWT have a limited role in this process but of course we are appalled by this pollution whether it is consented or unconsented and we have been talking to YW over the last 18 months about improvements to their systems which can be funded through the next investment cycle – AMP 8. We have been part of a consortium of eNGOs that interviewed and lobbied water company CEOs in 2022 for performance improvements (*Blueprint for Water*) and described how nature-based solutions can be used to minimise storm overflows through natural flood management and landscape scale habitat restoration and creation. We continue to lobby through RSWT and locally for investment to modernise drainage systems and deal with the thousands of CSOs in Yorkshire. Whilst this investment is welcomed, unfortunately, this will take many years to resolve through the delivery of capital projects.

**2) HS2 cancellation release tracks of land, some in very attractive places. What can we do to convince government to give nature a chance at this time.**

Rachael responded to say that in South Wales set a precedent as an example of compulsory purchase when a road building programme was cancelled and is being used across the movement. Challenge is going to come with the land going onto the market at a price, and where it could deliver for nature. Although it's more of an issue for Trusts further south, local trusts collectively are working closely with and having ongoing conversations with contractors to find out more.

**3) Why is the Living Seas Centre not open as it was prior to the Covid Lockdown? I miss visiting with my grandchildren who loved it.**

Amanda thanked the gentleman for his kind comments about the centre. The Trust has worked extremely hard since lockdown restrictions were lifted, to completely renovate and reopen the cafe and public toilets at the Living Seas Centre, which are now run by an external/outsourced business, to reduce our charity staffing costs.

We also reviewed the Discovery Room offering and this space is open currently, but on a tailored, bookable basis by schools, led by one of our Inspiring People Officers.

This decision was taken because we no longer have a full time LSC Manager, and we need time to update all engagement materials and offerings internally. We must make the Discovery room fit for purpose and relevant to our current and future Marine Programme strategy. And there are ongoing cost implications.

This detailed engagement review also includes us ensuring that the LSC is fully *accessible* to all - currently all engagement materials are simply written on the walls, which precludes any members of the public with visual/audio impairments. We want to improve the disabled access route from the car park and completing the contemplation and in-mem area directly outside the building.

**4) What's the Trust's position on solar panels, especially those in greenbelt areas. The member lives near three farms which are proposing converting land to solar panels.**

Rachael responded to say the Trust welcomes them IF well-designed and need to be made as wildlife friendly as possible.

On Greenbelt however, this is a different approach. It's important to look at how the Greenbelt is functioning and doing what it needs to do in current 21<sup>st</sup> century pressures. Much of Greenbelt area is heavily farmed, so solar farms may be better. But it needs to be a case-by-case basis.

Development and planning overall needs to look at the Greenbelt concept alongside a rethink of planning and nature recovery and adaptation to get best decision for the environment. Siting of solar panels is also in line with Council policy and the Trust will comment if they are close to our reserves, or it makes strategic sense. Rachael also advised more investigation about the individual companies carrying out the work because some companies are doing good work for nature.

**5) Is there any way we can protect remaining pockets of 'Wilderness' from building developments along the Humber Estuary south of Brough and Welton?**

Martin responded to say there are huge challenges with the Humber. It is one of our most designated sites, but at the same time has huge amounts of trade and industry and that's not going to change. It's about working with councils and developers, towards agreement on protecting the most sensitive sections, with development happening in the right places.

Our planning and operational teams are actively working with some developers in this area to show how development and nature can work together in appropriate locations. However, it will also be the case that in some areas the very valuable wildlife habitat along the estuary needs protection and the impacts of future climate change will need to be accounted for, and therefore we will stand up for wildlife.

In terms of what others can do, adding to the valuable biological records which inform decisions and management; responding to future consultations on the Local Nature Recovery Strategies (for all areas), and making sure good decisions on management are being made locally too, by parish councils and local landowners.

**6) Asian Hornet – there are more in UK than ever before e.g. in Hull and Yarm, they predate bees and other insects, have a nasty sting and are aggressive. What is the Trust's contingency for staff, volunteers and other insects.**

Martin acknowledged the threat to our fauna and outlined that 30-40 nests have been discovered in Kent, with a significant campaign to remove them. But they are moving north, we do need to be on the ball and prepare for this new threat. We will report back on our progress.

Martin added that the Trust has a strong track record of monitoring and dealing with Invasive Non-Native Species, and what is arriving in terms of new and longer-term threats to our species. INNS is a programme of our work, but we need to look at it and how we tackle these threats, especially in relation to a changing climate.

**7) 'Farmers destroy winter food supplies for wildlife' – an eye-catching headline but sadly true in this village and nationwide. The wonderful supply of hedgerows overflowing with the autumn bounty of fruit and nuts has yet again been savaged by the September hedge hackers. Now splintered branches greet the flocks of hungry birds and all the food destroyed. This is vandalism. Can YWT initiate guidance and a campaign to reverse this madness?**

Martin responded and said hedgerows need to be managed where there are safety issues, but in many cases our hedgerows are subject to over-zealous management of hedgerows in autumn, which is both unnecessary and environmentally destructive. There is a cultural process at work here where landowners and managers and some sections of the public have a tidy mind attitude to the countryside that is rooted in historic perceptions of a managed cultural landscape. Hedgerows provide essential connections forming habitat corridors which allow movement of species across the landscape. This is very significant in arable landscapes and increasingly important in the context of climate change and changing geographical distribution of species.

We need to educate and campaign for restoration of nature at a landscape scale through making space for nature and hedgerows are an essential part of this approach. YWT has recently responded (September 2023) to a Defra consultation on hedgerows

We are also working with North Yorkshire Council for a more nature friendly approach to roadside verge grass management and our ambition is to extend this to better hedgerow management. Nature friendly hedgerow management will be better for wildlife and also reduce fuel usage and costs for the council tax payers and landowners.

We are currently planning our higher profile campaigns for 2025 onwards and are indeed considering how we might incorporate and catalyse hedgerow management into these plans, including developing a 'hedge fund' to encourage landowners to adopt a wilder approach to hedgerow management.

**8) Sir John Lawton identified this morning 24 reserves earmarked for expansion – do you know which ones these will be?**

Rachael responded to say that it's too early stage to say. There is potential for a number to be made bigger. But these decisions also need to come from our work including the Nature Recovery Strategy on where we should focus in the future. Rachael also acknowledged the complexity to what work and habitat we take on in the future. The upcoming State of Nature will also help us unlock some more evidence to help that focus. We hope next year to have more answers and some initial analysis into what we can share more widely.

Jo Webb thanked members for their questions and ongoing support, announced the next AGM will be held on **Saturday 5th October 2024 at Skipton Town Hall** and closed the meeting.