



NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST

Minutes of the Trust's 95th Annual General Meeting Thursday 13th October 2022, 6.00pm Held virtually online via Zoom

Present: Patrick Barkham (President)
Alice Liddle (Chair)
Lyndsay Whiteman (Treasurer)
85 Trustees, Members and Staff

In Attendance: Eliot Lyne (Chief Executive Officer)
Marion Riches (Governance Officer)

The President welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the Trust's 95th AGM

FORMAL BUSINESS

Resolution 1

To confirm the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 14th October 2022

Resolution 1: Approved

Resolution 2

To receive the Report of Council and approve the Report and audited Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2022.

The Treasurer presented a summary of the year's results

Resolution 2: Approved

Resolution 3

To re-appoint Larking Gowen LLP as the Trust's auditors and authorise Council to determine their remuneration.

Resolution 3: Approved

Resolutions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10

To re-elect/elect members of Council:

Resolution 4 – Alice Liddle

Proposed by: Christine Barr

Seconded by: Simon Smith

Total number of votes: 624

Resolution 5 – Andy Clarke

Proposed by: Trevor Williams

Seconded by: Richard Porter

Total number of votes: 621

Resolution 6 – Scott Pinching
Proposed by: Alice Liddle
Seconded by: Sue Roe
Total number of votes: 577

Resolution 7 – Greg Beeton
Proposed by: Belinda Clarke
Seconded by: Alice Liddle
Total number of votes: 599

Resolution 8 – Kirstie David
Proposed by: Ben Garrod
Seconded by: Alice Liddle
Total number of votes: 566

Resolution 9 – Ross Jolliffe
Proposed by: William Goff
Seconded by: Julia Burton
Total number of votes: 562

Resolution 10 – Mark Little
Proposed by: W H Edmunds
Seconded by: Tim Cawkwell
Total number of votes: 560

Results

Re-elected:

Alice Liddle
Andy Clarke
Scott Pinching

Elected:

Greg Beeton

Not Elected:

Kirstie David
Ross Jolliffe
Mark Little

The President thanked all those standing for Council and although only 4 of those standing could be elected, the interest of all concerned was very much appreciated.

There being no further business, the President closed the formal part of the AGM.

INFORMAL BUSINESS

1. The Chair gave her address; a condensed transcript is given below:

First of all, I want to pay tribute to Queen Elizabeth for a life well-lived with constancy, devotion and integrity. She was born in 1926, the same year in which what is now Norfolk Wildlife Trust was founded and was our Patron for the seventy years of her reign – we were the only one of the 46 Wildlife Trusts of which she was the patron. It was an honour for Eliot to attend the Queen's funeral last month representing Norfolk Wildlife Trust and all the

Wildlife Trusts. Our Queen cared deeply about Norfolk and Norfolk's wildlife and wild places – we feel her loss keenly.

Thank you for our many donors, funders, investors and supporters – I hope you realise what a positive difference you make to our work and towards realising our vision and aims. We are so grateful for your generosity and support.

And a big shout out to our volunteers. Earlier this month, and as a volunteer myself, I attended a volunteers' away day. There were about 80 people present, representing only some of the 450 or so regular volunteers who are registered with us. And that is not counting the many others who have contributed to our work and mission – whether helping in conservation work on sites, receiving visitors at our centres, running the Local Groups, representing the Trust at events, leading walks, joining in beach cleans, taking photos or engaging in many other activities. Without our volunteers we would not have nearly so much impact as we do. In 2019, pre-pandemic, our volunteers represented about a 30% increase in our workforce. Inevitably, the impact of Covid saw volunteer activity drop but even in 2021, volunteers contributed nearly 33,000 extra hours and we are hoping that this year's figures will show that we are nearly back to pre-pandemic levels.

One of my loudest thank you's is to everyone who works for Norfolk Wildlife Trust – 132 people at the last count, not including 27 seasonal staff. We must not forget the impact that such dedicated and expert people have.

As you will have seen from the annual report, our **Nature Conservation Team** go from strength to strength in striving to make our reserves and the land we manage exemplars of best practice in the conservation world. There are many examples, whether it is the success of the new reedbed habitat at Hickling or the restoration of seven ghost pingos in the Brecks which are already showing recolonisation by water beetles and aquatic plants from neighbouring Thompson Common. But not everything that the reserves team does hits the headlines: all credit to the teams who spent their weekend from Roydon Common to the Broads after February's Storm Eunice battered Norfolk assessing sites for windblown trees and other dangerous infrastructure, repairing fence lines and putting livestock back in the right place – such team work and technical skill!

Our **Nature Recovery Team** works in the wider landscape. The Trust's Claylands project demonstrates the ethos we have about connecting landscapes and people. This project, centred around three hubs in South Norfolk, is focused on providing a connected network of habitats and restoring the "fabric" of nature, be it by way of woods, trees, ponds or hedges. The project has seen 2.2 kilometres of hedges planted, loads of tree planting, 22 ponds restored, over 14 hectares of grassland restored and meadows enhanced, 250 local contacts made, over 100 volunteers involved, 30 training workshops, 15 landowners recruited to the scheme and work on five farms so far. So impressive for an 18 months project that has yet to run its course.

The work of our **Engagement Team** personifies one of the key goals of our new strategy: People valuing Nature. We want to ensure that people across Norfolk are connected to, inspired by and take action for nature. The Trust's PR and Communications team has been very busy: you won't have missed the news of our campaign against the proposed route of Norwich's Western Link nor the fact that only a fortnight ago we initiated a coalition of like-minded Norfolk organisations and people who signed a statement challenging the Government's plans to change nature and climate laws. But Engagement happens on a range of scales from Norfolk-wide, through the community-partnership approach (as Sweet Briar Marshes will demonstrate) to the very personal: last month the New Routes young girl's EmpowerHer group visited NWT's Thorpe Marshes for a walk to collect items for wild art.

The feedback was enthusiastic and a staff member from New Routes commented that one of the girls who is usually very withdrawn and never speaks to new adults came out of her shell, asked so many questions and visibly enjoyed herself.

Last year's public appeal to buy Mere Farm to add to our reserve at Thompson Common and this year's appeal to buy Sweet Briar Marshes may hit the headlines but the **Development and Partnerships Team** do so much more. They nurture you as members, work with corporate supporters (such as Aviva and Greater Anglia) and explore many funding opportunities which result in projects which make a difference for nature. Claylands is one of these as is, the NextDoor Nature scheme (so important in terms of engagement) and the Future Professionals scheme aimed to stimulate employment in the green economy. This saw seven recruits joining NWT to gain valuable experience, from conservation to communications. Two of those recruits are now employed by the Trust.

Underpinning everything I've outlined so far, is the work of the **Finance and Support Services Team** and the work of the **CEO office**. I want to recognise the importance of and the work done to keep our finances and membership records straight, to invest wisely and ethically, to budget for the future, to ensure compliance with Charity Commission and corporate requirements, to ensure compliance with health and safety, to provide IT services which amongst other things made the Trust's headquarters at Bewick House appropriate for hybrid working, to look after our staff through the work of the Human Resources team and to ensure our governance structures are correct and regularly reviewed.

I'd also like to thank our Chief Executive, Eliot Lyne. He says that his first year with the Trust has flown by. It has certainly been an extremely busy time for him getting to grips with what the Trust is about, getting to know people within the Trust, Norfolk and in the wider movement and doing a lot of listening. With his clear sight and leadership skills, we have a clear strategy and know our direction of travel. I'm glad we recruited you, Eliot!

At the risk of upsetting someone by not mentioning them, I've got some very personal thank you's: for the team who make the best cheese scones in Norfolk (available at Cley and Holme), the team who run our visitor centres (Christmas shopping and my reading wouldn't be the same without a regular visit to Cley or Hickling), to the boat operators – a trip on Hickling Broad is one of my favourite things to do ever - and to our Bewick House receptionists who always greet me so warmly.

Last but by no means least, thank you to you, our members. Last month, at over 37,000 members, we had more members than we have ever had in our 96 years so far. We are truly grateful for your continued support and commitment. With your backing we will continue to work towards a wildlife-rich future for Norfolk."

2. The Chair of Trustees handed over to Eliot Lyne, CEO, to give his address, of which a condensed transcript is given below:

"On behalf of myself, the staff, volunteers, members and supporters of the Trust, I'd like to thank you, Alice, for your leadership in this past year. In my first full year at the Trust, you've been incredibly supportive in giving us the space to make the kind of impact for nature which you've just amply acknowledged.

When I stood here last year, I talked about some ambitions and thoughts about the future. I'm delighted that we have been able to bring some of those into fruition in the last 12 months.

Most importantly for the future, we have finalised our new strategy for nature's recovery, entitled: *A Wilder Norfolk*. *A Wilder Norfolk* is based on reflecting on the learnings from our 96 years of experience and on consultation with others too. We have surveyed our staff, our members and undertaken broad discussions with our Trustees, Leadership Team and partner organisations. It is closely aligned to the national strategy of The Wildlife Trusts, as we firmly believe we are stronger together.

Our new **Vision** – of what we want to see in the world – is that: ***Norfolk's nature is abundant, thriving and valued***

This is a future in which everyone's life is enriched by nature and everyone in society feels empowered to act on behalf of nature. Wildlife is abundant everywhere – on farms, in towns and cities, in gardens, along rivers and on nature reserves – and the future of even the rarest species and habitats is secure. It is an unashamedly audacious and bold vision.

To deliver this we must do two things. We must ***create more space for nature to thrive and inspire more people to take action for nature***.

Our first goal is to create **Abundant and Thriving Nature**. We will start by expanding our reserves, delivering Sydney Long's founding mandate for NWT, and we aim to increase our owned or managed land by 30% by 2030.

But we know that this will not be enough, not nearly. So, we must work with and through others to bring our vision to life. This means much more work with farmers, landowners, communities and councils: anyone and everyone who wants to put nature at the heart of their plans for a thriving Norfolk.

We will also increase our capacity to deliver nature-based solutions, such as carbon, natural flood management, biodiversity net gain or nutrient neutrality, developing at least two major projects by 2030. And we will commit greater energy and capacity to the conservation of Norfolk's marine environment.

Our second goal is that **People Value Nature**. Ambitious though it seems, we also aim to see **one in four people taking action for nature in Norfolk**. Much research indicates that one in four is a social tipping point, beyond which societal attitudes change.

To achieve this, we will build on our existing engagement network. Most importantly, we will also investigate, and break down, the barriers preventing more people — and a wider range of people — engaging with nature, the environment and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. We have grown in countless ways since twelve people founded Norfolk Naturalists Trust in 1926, but we recognise that there are still many ways in which we can become more relevant and inclusive.

Our recent acquisition of Sweet Briar Marshes will be fundamental in this respect. You have heard how plans for the reserve will be developed in partnership with local communities, especially those who typically enjoy limited access to green space.

In order to deliver all of this, we must transform ourselves as an organisation to constantly challenge ourselves to be **Leaders for Nature**. Our talented, hardworking staff and volunteers must feel empowered to bring their best to their work. We will therefore invest in our people, processes and technology, listening carefully to what they tell us they need to unleash their full potential for nature.

In June 1931 — when Norfolk Wildlife Trust cared for only three reserves — Sir William Beach Thomas, a celebrated war correspondent and conservationist, wrote of us in *The Spectator*:

‘Characteristic areas – the Cley Marshes, Alderfen fen, the Starch grass marsh – have been acquired by acts of great faith and daring, for they were bought ... before the money for the purchase was in sight. By no means all of it is even yet in sight. These places, we may hope, are only a beginning.’

For almost a century, with the unfailing support of you, our members, donors, volunteers, Trustees and staff, we have taken such acts of great faith and daring. Our new strategy *A Wilder Norfolk* is the next such act, and it will enable countless more. But it is only the next beginning. With your continued support, we can turn the corner for nature’s recovery in Norfolk and create a county where nature is abundant and thriving and valued.

3. The CEO handed over to the President, Patrick Barkham to give his address, of which a condensed transcript is given below:

“I don’t think we can ever have held an NWT AGM against a more troubling backdrop for nature in this county, country and planet.

We are facing an entwined extinction crisis and climate crisis, with a loss of biodiversity that ultimately threatens all life on Earth.

We are now experiencing very directly the impact of climate change and extreme weather here in Norfolk, with this summer’s drought and the rising seas around our fragile coastline. Drastic changes are coming to the Norfolk coast and Broads this century. Some NWT reserves will be changed irrevocably.

Unfortunately, we are now facing a much more immediate environmental crisis caused by our new government, led by South West Norfolk MP Liz Truss. Her government has already pledged to:

- Rip up nature protections
- Remove funding for regenerative and wildlife-friendly farming by scrapping most of the new ELMs scheme
- Create “Investment Zones” with almost no constraints on industrial and housing developments.
- Remove pollution rules and “nutrient neutrality” rules so that rivers become even more polluted and lifeless.
- Start fracking
- Drill for more oil and gas in the North Sea.
- Scrap biodiversity net gain requirements for new housing

These new policies will have very real impacts in Norfolk. An Investment Zone is proposed for the A11 corridor which is likely to damage our unique Breckland habitats. The government has promised more money to help build roads such as the destructive Western Link across the Wensum west of Norwich.

I want to be very clear. When I criticise these measures I am not making a party political point. No government in living memory has been very good at the long-term vision that nature needs. Our political system unfortunately discourages long-term decision-making.

In fact, the best government for nature in recent years was the Conservative one with Michael Gove as Environment Secretary. This government established some laudable goals:

a 25-year plan for nature, commitments to devote 30% of British land and sea to nature by 2030, and a post-Brexit farm subsidy system that supports public money for public goods.

Ironically, it is another Conservative government is now bent on dismantling this new environmental consensus.

What can NWT do about this? What can we do about this?

I'm proud that Norfolk Wildlife Trust, led very much from the front by our chief executive Eliot Lyne, has taking such a strong and leading role in a big coalition of nature charities who have publicly opposed what they are rightly calling this "attack on nature".

Now there may be one or two Norfolk Wildlife Trust members who say we should not be getting all "political". That we should stick to what we do best – protecting nature on our brilliant nature reserves.

I agree with everyone who rightly cherishes our special nature reserves and I want to encourage NWT to acquire more. Nature reserves are the gift that keep on giving. But these special places cover less than 1% of Norfolk's land area. Even if we double our landholdings, that's 2% of Norfolk protected. It's not enough.

So, we have to convince the rest of Norfolk to follow our lead and protect more of Norfolk for nature. Beyond government, there *is* hope. There has been a heartening swing behind nature-friendly farming in recent years – a new generation of farmers are far more switched on the fact that they can't farm successfully without healthy soils and insect life.

We have to work more with farmers and other landowners
We have to help facilitate environmental education for children.
We have to work with other partners from the NHS to house-builders, providing expert advice to help them manage their land in more nature-friendly ways.

I hope and believe that we can constructively engage with groups and still criticise them – for instance we can criticise Norfolk County Council over the Western Link but still help them manage their land in more nature-friendly ways.

What can as individuals we do?

I know most of you are already doing lots of great things, often volunteering or helping at our NWT reserves.

Ultimately, in dark times, we find solace in enjoying our NWT nature reserves – now more so than ever. Making a difference locally is probably the most meaningful thing we can do.

But we have another task now.

All of us have to make the facts about the importance of nature more widely known. Please write to your MP – especially if they are a Norfolk MP. Norfolk Conservative MPs currently have influence in this government!

We have to go out there and explain why we need nature here in Norfolk, and why we need to not just protect it but restore it. We have to explain it to everyone – including bankers and get-rich-quick business people – that we all need nature as much as any other living thing on our wonderful planet."

4. Presentation of the Sydney Long Medal 2022:

A short film was shown where Dr Carl Sayer was awarded the Sydney Long Medal for 2022 for his outstanding contribution to natural history and conservation in Norfolk.

The President added his congratulations to Carl for such a well-deserved award and his huge contribution to natural history and conservation in Norfolk.

5. A number of questions had been received in advance of the meeting and were answered as followed:

Western Link

Q: Whilst I understand entirely the NWT resistance to the Norwich Western Link Road, I am concerned at the lack of apparent understanding of what are the alternatives. For Example - huge protests over the extension of the M3 through lower Winchester Hampshire and all claims of damage to the environment from protesters. In fact, 3 years after the completion of Twyford Gap route pollution levels were less than 60% of pre motorway levels and the ground had recovered. Would same apply here?? Research?

Q: For a lot of people the Norwich Western Link Road does not need to be completed. I agree it has to be done with the least impact as possible but where the completed road will be better for the environment in the long term as long as it is done to cause the least disruption. The 'rat run' through Ringland Hills is not good for anyone or thing

A: Our key message on the Norwich Western Link road is that we cannot support the current proposed route due to the high impact it will have on wildlife. The current route would have a catastrophic impact on what has been identified as Britain's largest colony of a protected and rare bat species - barbastelle bats - and our concerns have been raised. It is the responsibility of Norfolk County Council to look at the evidence and develop alternatives. If other routes are proposed, we would judge them accordingly. The construction of the road at Twyford meant the loss of two SSSIs, one of which was a Hampshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve. There was no mitigation provided so this habitat has not been replaced. The air pollution issue is complex and the Trust are not experts in this subject so cannot comment on this issue.

Q: Would NWT be prepared to be more forthright and up front in matters concerning climate change, planning application, habitat destruction, loss of wildlife corridors, biodiversity, nest sites for swifts/swallows due to conversions and new builds etc? I appreciate the trust has to work closely and maintain positive relationships with Norfolk County Council, local councils, etc but as the 'voice' for the endangered future of our wildlife and green spaces more boldness and strength is required.

A: Norfolk Wildlife Trust are doing more of this now -we need to raise our voice when we see wildlife in danger. The Trust does have to be conscious of the boundaries and not getting party political. We are raising our voice in a constructive and evidence-based way.

Q: Could membership benefits be extended to neighbouring counties or beyond? Or at least offering a 50% rate elsewhere? It would take some initial co-ordination but surely well worthwhile

A: Each Wildlife Trust has its own policy regarding free entry to members of other Wildlife Trusts and there are around 5 Trusts, including Norfolk, that do not give free entry to members of other Trusts to some sites. This is something that we will look at as part of our membership model review.

Q: I confess I get frustrated with shut/closed days at Foxley Wood, and the opening times at Holme albeit I have felt unwelcome on occasion, why? Maintenance carries on at other reserves when they are open.

A: The Visitor Centre at Holme was closed in June for a 16 day period whilst work was being carried out on the track. I hope that regular visitors are welcoming the new surface. The car park and reserve at Holme are open 10am until 5pm and this is based on managing visitor access on what is a very sensitive site for wildlife. In particular, the incredibly rare Natterjack toad. They are active in the evening and often cross the tracks and access road, meaning they would be very vulnerable to being disturbed, injured or even killed by pedestrians or cars.

In regard to Foxley - this reserve is closed every Thursday to enable the scheduling of much of the potentially hazardous management, such as tree cutting. We do advertise this in advance and does minimise any risk to visitors.

Q: What is the Trust doing or going to do to replace Trees which have died of Disease. E.g. Ash

A: Where we can, within our woodland reserves, trees lost to disease are replaced through natural regeneration. Trees grown in this way, ie, from seed rather than from planting are usually stronger and more tolerant of drought and water logging. So, we only plant where we need to. Natural Regeneration also, by its nature, tends to be more genetically diverse than trees raised in nurseries.

We are starting to see Ash trees that are resistant to Ash dieback disease. Although not yet certain it is hoped this resistance will be passed to future generations of trees allowing, once again, a genetically diverse stock of Ash trees to populate the woodlands. Genetic diversity is considered key to resilience against current and future diseases, as well as climate change.

Q: What steps is the Board taking to build Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into its governance and strategy?

A: A Governance Review Group meet regularly comprising of Trustees and staff members. One of the areas that the group is looking at is improving the diversity of the Trustee Board and for 2023 this will be looked at as a priority. We will strive to do more and focus not just on the Board but within the whole Trust. The reason we do this is because we will be more impactful as an organisation if we better reflect the communities within Norfolk. There are many aspects of diversity and we need to understand all views and perspectives so we can better engage with the people of Norfolk.

Q: Why is the AGM online? This should be an opportunity for members to meet one another and staff members

A: The decision was taken to hold this year's AGM online early on this year when there was still some uncertainty over the Covid situation. It was also felt that members could be more engaged in a 'members' day' which is something that is being considered for next year. It is likely to be held at one of our reserves during the summer months. This would hopefully encourage more members to attend, noting that we do not usually get more than 40 members plus staff and Trustees attending the AGM. Twice as many people have attended the AGM this year, and four times as many people have voted.

Sweet Briar Marshes

Q: The site sits alongside Briar Chemicals who are hopefully also key stakeholders in this exciting plan - can you tell us more about the relationship with them as well, please?

A: We don't currently have a relationship with Briar Chemicals but we have put some actions in place to develop relationships with companies and corporates around the site. Clearly their aims may be different to ours but we'll see where that relationship goes.

Q: I'd like to know what precautions are being planned against vandalism at the proposed new centre at Sweet Briar. I'm hugely enthusiastic about Sweet Briar but fear it might be very vulnerable.

A: We plan to work with the local communities, which will give a shared stake in the site. We hope this will minimise the likelihood of anti-social behaviour on the site.

Q: When will the 'A Wild Norfolk Strategy' be available for volunteers and members to read, comment on and add to?

A: We've got limited resources in our PR & Comms team which have delayed a publication - but we hope to get this out by Christmas.

Q: We were at the launch of the Norfolk Dark Skies project - can we work in partnership with them?

A: We already work with the Norfolk Dark Skies Project and we are running a Dark Skies walk on 25th November led by David North and a talk on 11th January. Unfortunately, we had already produced the events guide for the Autumn before organising these events.

Q: How concerned should we be on current challenges on Finances? E.g. how do we pay for all that we want to do?

A: Norfolk Wildlife Trust has very good financial reserves. There is no denying that there has been uncertainty around income streams, especially in relation to agri-environment income with political changes, so one of the key elements of the strategy is the long-term funding plan which we are pulling together. That will tie in finances to what we want to achieve and that impact we need to have.

A talk entitled: 'The importance of collaboration between farming and conservation for nature's recovery in Norfolk' was given by Jake Fiennes.

The President thanked Jake for his informative and entertaining talk and thanked everyone for attending the AGM, wishing them all a good evening.