



NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST

Minutes of the Trust's 98th Annual General Meeting Thursday 6th November 2025, 6.00pm Held virtually online via Zoom

Present: Patrick Barkham (President)
Alice Liddle (Chair)
Lyndsay Whiteman (Treasurer)
88 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 98th AGM

FORMAL BUSINESS

Resolution 1

To confirm the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 7 November 2024

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 2025.

The Treasurer presented a summary of the year's results

Resolution 2: Approved

Resolution 3

To re-appoint Lovewell Blake as the Trust's auditors and authorise Council to determine their remuneration.

Resolution 3: Approved

Resolution 4

To re-elect/elect members of Council of Trustees

Results

Re-elected:

Greg Beeton – 854 votes
Scott Pinching – 846 votes

Elected:

Matthew Bradbury – 892 votes
Rob Lucking – 860 votes

Not Elected:

Dr Stephen Bolt – 155 votes

Resolution 5

To approve the nomination of Alice Liddle as Vice-President

Resolution 5: Approved

The President congratulated all those elected to Council and stated that the interest of all applicants was very much appreciated.

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

INFORMAL BUSINESS

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

“The usual remit for the Chair’s address is to look back over the latest financial year 2024 to 2025 but I don’t think I’ll be able to resist mentioning a couple of highlights outside that timeframe. There is so much to celebrate and some of the standout moments were truly innovative.

*The first outcome of the Trust’s strategy is: to achieve **abundant and thriving nature**. One of the most significant moments of the year was the opening of Sweet Briar Marshes in May 2024. I remember when the possibility of buying Sweet Briar Marshes came before the trustees to consider about five years ago: there was reluctance on some people’s part to commit money, time and effort to what might have proved to be the challenge of a large nature reserve in an urban environment but I’m so pleased that the majority view prevailed. Sweet Briar places the communities of Norwich at its heart and has been laid out with accessibility at its core (winning an award for doing so). Only last week, we completed the acquisition of a small piece of neighbouring land and achieved planning permission which will result in increased facilities to assist with access for people with accessibility needs, changing places toilets, and further work for the nature reserve itself. In the words of the Trust’s Director of Engagement, all this will enhance the vision to make Sweet Briar Marshes a truly ‘community-centred, inclusive and accessible nature reserve where wildlife thrives and everyone can experience, connect with and be inspired to care for nature’.*

A similar ‘Do we really want to do that?’ conversation at a trustee Council meeting happened when the idea of buying a pub and surrounding land arose. The answer was a resounding ‘Yes’. So the Pleasure Boat Inn in Hickling opened its doors in August 2024 and has been very successful in welcoming more people to the wildlife wonders in this very special Broadlands landscape.

The Trust has also created more room for nature in more conventional ways. Two purchases of additional land have added 40 hectares to Foxley Wood, the truly ancient heart of Norfolk, increasing it by one third. We have restored wetlands in West Norfolk and created more room for pool frogs and rare aquatic plants at Thompson Common. Spoonbills bred successfully for the second year at Hickling and our fingers are crossed that a breeding colony of these rare birds will get established. And I shouldn’t mention it since it only happened this summer but I can’t resist reminding you of the successful breeding by an osprey pair of at least two chicks at Ranworth – the first ospreys to breed in East Anglia for centuries.

*Just as important is the second outcome of our strategy which is to see **people valuing nature**. Membership numbers increased by 3% during the year – and another stop press moment! In September this year, the number of members topped the 40,000 mark for the first time. Sweet Briar Marshes has proved vital to community engagement hosting some 83 free events, allied with which has been our Nextdoor Nature project bringing local people and organisations together in north-west Norwich. We continue our work with school children and young people – nearly 5,000 children were engaged in nature in classrooms,*

school grounds or on nature reserves and nearly 1,300 young people up to the age of 25 were connected to nature through one of our Wild Youth Action programme activities. We are resolute in our aim to develop a strong youth voice for the future and I am excited to see how the members of our new Youth Forum will help shape the future for Norfolk's wildlife.

The third outcome of the Trust's strategy is to be **leaders for nature**, ensuring that we are an influential, resilient and collaborative organisation. We continue to speak up for nature and strive to lead from the front. Since the proposal for the Norwich Western Link emerged, we – along with other conservation organisations, experts and individuals – consistently campaigned to highlight the damage that the road would cause if the planning application for its construction was successful. The County Council withdrew the application in early 2024 and the hope is that this special area of the Wensum Valley will remain undisturbed – not only for the largest colony of barbastelle bats in Britain but for badgers, owls, yellowhammers and other wildlife. In the run up to the 2024 General Election, we produced a plan for Norfolk's nature, setting out key priorities and actions we wanted to see the new government to take. The message for this and similar initiatives was simple – Restore Nature Now.

We have strengthened our collaboration to work with others to improve the condition of the very special sites for nature that our County Wildlife Sites. We have launched a Species Recovery Framework which relies on a collaborative approach with others and have formed a partnership with the University of East Anglia for research, knowledge exchange and skills development for students and staff.

Being leaders for nature means that the Trust also needs to be resilient. We continued to work through the transformation of our processes, particularly in relation to the implementation of the finance system introduced early in 2024 and are currently focusing on our IT and digital infrastructure. We also need financial resilience and continue to invest in income generation. We are fortunate to have the support of so many members and corporate supporters. We could not do what we do nor achieve the successes we have had without you and without the support of our many donors, grant providers, investors, volunteers and other supporters. Thank you. And thank you too to the whole of the expert, dedicated staff within the Trust. All of you make a difference for Norfolk's wildlife and wild spaces and the people connecting with them.

I am going to end on a personal note. This is the last AGM speech I will make. My time is up! The last nine years (nine years being the maximum tenure for a trustee according to the Trust's constitution) seem to have passed in a flash. Six of those years have been as Chair as well as as a trustee. When I joined board of trustees in late 2016, Brendan Joyce was the Chief Executive and at the forefront of his efforts at the time was the purchase of the northern half of what is now our Hickling nature reserve. I remember it well when Brendan practically locked another trustee and me up in his office with huge piles of legal reports and documents, issuing the directive that we were to go through everything and prepare a report and recommendation to the board of trustees. That was a bit of a baptism by fire. I was chosen by the other trustees to take up the position of Chair in late 2019 and very soon after that, we were faced with the coronavirus pandemic: unforeseen and difficult times followed but the Trust won through. Fortunately, things had settled by autumn 2021 which is when Eliot Lyne joined as Chief Executive and embarked on realising the Trust's mission to create more space for nature to thrive and inspire more people to take action for nature. And it's working - just see where we are now! It has been a privilege to have helped lead the Trust and see it grow from strength to strength and I wish the Trust all the best in its continuing commitment to achieve a Wilder Norfolk for All".

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

"Good evening friends, colleagues, supporters, staff and volunteers. Many thanks for attending our AGM this evening.

Alice has just given you an excellent overview of the things that we achieved in 2024/25. My role is to look forwards.

Outcome 1: Improve

This is about creating 'Abundant and Thriving Nature' and within this we are looking at how we improve, expand and connect nature. We continue to manage our nature reserves and are challenging ourselves about how we are doing this. Some exciting developments for me are:

- Ospreys at Ranworth
- Our monitoring framework is starting to gather pace.
- Hickling vision project

Outcome 1: Expand

As well as improving what we have, we also need to expand the space for nature. Alice has already mentioned the additional land purchased at Foxley. We have also completed the purchase of Sotshole Broad, which adds another 25 hectares of broad, wet woodland and dry woodland to our portfolio and will add interest to a visit to Ranworth. We have exciting plans with around 400 hectares of land acquisition in the pipeline; expect news early in the new year!

Outcome 1: Connect

We know that we cannot turn nature's fortunes around by managing land, we also have to work with others, which is why our connect theme is so critical. I'm delighted that we have started work again the Claylands; our Ponds restoration work is going from strength to strength; and work is continuing to get our Advisory Offer ready for launch. This has taken longer than expected to get off the ground but we are now focused and moving forwards under the leadership of Helen Hebditch, our new Director of Nature Recovery.

Moving on to Outcome 2 'Connecting People to Nature' where I have picked out some of my personal favourites.

Outcome 2: Urban

One of the things I am most proud about is our work on making access to nature more inclusive. I'll mention a couple of examples here and there will be a panel discussion later on how to bring this to life.

As Alice said, we have just completed the purchase of some additional land near Sweet Briar Marshes, and received planning consent. Our focus on wildlife in urban areas is an important departure from our previous strategy. Around half of Norfolk's population live in urban areas, so this is about ensuring that these communities have access to nature. We have our Nature City Norwich project and other plans towards the development of an urban programme.

Another key focus of our Outcome 2 work is around young people

Outcome 2: Young People

Moving on to Outcome 3: building our capacity to be a 'Leader for Nature'.

Outcome 3: Voice and Influence

A critical part of our strategy is to build our influence to ensure that nature is put at the heart of decision making. Moving from nature being a "nice to have" to a "necessary". Our current politics is shifting, and whilst external influence is really important, we are also focusing internally on who we are and how we show up.

Outcome 3: Values

I'm delighted to say that we have just agreed a brand new set of values. These will help us by

- guiding our decision making,
- they will help others understand what we are all about,

- they will shape our culture, and
- bring a shared purpose

Finally, I would like to give you a sneak preview of our centenary plans.

Centenary Programme

We are proud to be the first Wildlife Trust to hit this incredible landmark. We know nature is in trouble, and there is lots of work ahead. The sentiment behind our centenary messaging is purposefully positive and forward-looking.

We aim to engender a feeling of **hope** and **action**, in order to maximise engagement with NWT during this significant year.

100 years of Trust speaks to our past: it reflects the trust people have put in Norfolk Wildlife Trust to care for Norfolk's nature over the past 100 years.

And it recognises the trust that we have earned after 100 years of caring for Norfolk's nature - from how we've changed the fortunes of our county's wildlife to the heroes along the way that have made this possible.

100 years of hope looks to our future: It celebrates the skills, experience and knowledge we have built, and our ambitions to work together to create a 'Wilder Norfolk for All' as we look confidently towards another 100 years of protecting and restoring Norfolk's nature.

We will be looking ahead with hope and doing even more for wildlife during the next century with your support. We are encouraging everyone to join us celebrating 100 years of nature conservation in Norfolk with an invitation to "Do one thing for wildlife" – you could make a home for wildlife in your garden, learn something new about nature or even take part in a fundraising challenge!

And here are some of the highlights from the events, fundraising and engagement plans.

Although our political picture is currently challenging and broader world trends feel like they are overwhelming at times, I take solace from the fact that if enough people act, then politics will follow. And we will be around long after any particular politician or government has gone.

Finally, as ever, we couldn't do any of this without you, our members and supporters. We are hugely thankful though with the support that we currently have. We know that we, together with others, can turn the corner for nature's recovery in Norfolk and create a county where nature is abundant and thriving and valued. Together we can do this, but we need your continued support and that of many others to join us on that journey.

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

"It seems like every AGM I've addressed has been against a backdrop of greater national and international gloom and jeopardy. It is so easy to become depressed by the lack of care we are taking for our unique and precious planet, our only home, and all its amazing residents, including us.

The hope, the antidote, the remedy, and dare I say it – the cure – lies in each one of us taking local action to improve our neighbourhood nature. In local, practical action, however modest, we can see the results of our labours, see that it is worthwhile, see nature respond with great vim and vigour. And through our action, we become part of a community of care, as well as draw in – or even inspire – others to join that community of care as well.

I realise you are all here tonight because you are already taking local action, and you are already part of the community of care that is Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Thank you for all that you do, and I want to thank my fellow volunteers, such as our brilliant chair Alice Liddle, and all NWT employees ably led by our fantastic chief executive Eliot Lyne – everyone is working so

hard and with such passion and integrity for wildlife in Norfolk.

I said this last year, and I really mean it: there has never been a moment in the history of our planet when so many people care for its fate and are now starting to take action to save and restore species other than ourselves.

And here is where it gets really exciting for all of us engaged in local action to restore wildlife here in Norfolk. Next year, as you know, is Norfolk Wildlife Trust's centenary. We are the nation's first wildlife trust. We have been protecting nature in our county for longer than anyone else. We can be rightly proud of this. When we have become custodians of a piece of land and its special wildlife, we have stayed custodians of that land. We have protected it. We have enhanced it. We have made it better for wildlife and, where appropriate, opened it up to public enjoyment and appreciation of nature. So, truly, looking back, we have a history we can be proud of.

But 2026 is an amazing moment to look forward. We will properly celebrate our 100th birthday with some exciting events, and I hope you will all be involved, and enjoy the celebrations. But each one is not just patting ourselves on the back. It has a laser-like aim: how can we engage more people, and more resources in saving and restoring more nature? What can we do to expand our protection of Norfolk's nature – to create a Wilder Norfolk for All – over the next 100 years?

I know that Eliot and his team are working incredibly hard on the most ambitious set of land acquisitions ever, alongside a programme of centenary events which will reach out and seek to involve more Norfolk people than ever, young and old and of all backgrounds. This will hopefully boost our membership to even higher, historic levels. I can't say too much, yet. (Except: it's going to be fantastic!)

What I can reveal is what I've been doing. I mentioned at last year's AGM I had planted some acorns collected from Foxley Wood, our largest ancient woodland, in the hope of growing 100 centenary oaks. I can exclusively reveal that we have hit our target, and I have at least 115 centenary oaks, alive and well. These will be used to raise funds, as gifts for community groups and schools, and many will be planted on our new woodland now being created to expand Foxley. I'm sure you've noticed, this year was an epic mast year, acorns everywhere. I couldn't resist and so returned to Foxley and collected several hundred more acorns. This autumn, I'm involving local schools in helping plant them and we hope to have even more centenary oaks – descendants of the best trees in Foxley – to celebrate 2026.

The other thing I've managed to do this year is obtain a place in the London Marathon. I'm dressing up as a badger and raising money, and hopefully a load more awareness, for NWT. I'm 50, I last ran a marathon 18 years ago, so this will be a tiring challenge.

I'm incredibly excited about next year. I keep bumping into people who have no connection with Norfolk Wildlife Trust and when I mention the centenary, I'm struck by their immediate understanding of, and enthusiasm for our work, and surprised by their offers of help. Everyone wants to help us. It is a challenge for the staff to co-ordinate all that help. But everyone is rising to the occasion. There is so much goodwill out there towards what we do. The centenary is our best ever chance to harness this, and bring more people with us, reviving and restoring more nature in Norfolk for all.

Finally, I want to end on a personal note. My dad, John, died two weeks ago. Some of you may remember him, because he was Chair of NWT back in the late 80s and early 90s. He was among the panel who appointed Brendan Joyce as chief executive. As an ecologist, he played a key role in NWT acquiring Foxley Wood. A week before he died, I told him about NWT's plans at Foxley and some exciting potential actions in the wider region, and he was totally thrilled.

Life is short. Let's do what we can, while we can. We are all here tonight for the same reason: to help nature in Norfolk, and in so doing help every person who lives here. I hope we can all join in next year, and each of us through our small deeds, undertaken collectively,

set in motion more things that will blossom and bear fruit. Together we can make our still-wonderful still wildlife-rich county even more wonderful and even more wildlife-rich in the century to come."

4. A number of questions had been received in advance of the meeting and a selection of these, and their answers, are shown below:

Q: The phrase 'wilder Hickling' seems slightly contradictory in the context of creating a boardwalk in reed marsh and damaging the habitat. Equally significantly increasing the footfall at the reserve will have a deleterious impact on transport movements locally and impact on the wildlife. What action will be taken to reduce these impacts?

A: Hill common is a commercially cut sedgebed so it is subject to annual cutting and a degree of disturbance - this traditional practice maintains the plant assemblages that exist. The proximity of housing, the boathouses and the road mean that no schedule 1 birds nest in this area. The practice of constructing boardwalk is to create paths that cause no damage to a marsh - the path is held up off the substrate by piling so when it is removed in the future, there is no compaction and plant growth persists. Boardwalk

Q: Are there plans to expand 'working with local schools' to secondary schools

A: Our new youth engagement programme is specifically targeted at 11-25 year olds, so we are very keen to expand our offer and increase engagement with secondary schools. We are hoping to pilot our current primary school Wilder Schools programme with secondary schools and are currently in conversations with a couple of schools to explore this further. We will need to build capacity in the Wilder Learning team in order to do this, so we are also exploring opportunities to generate income through the Children and Nature fund and other

Q: I volunteer for NWT and am deeply impressed by the young, dedicated and hardworking staff I meet. I note that some are on 'short term' contracts, which, to me, seems a loss of dedication as well as difficulties for the person. Is there a move away from this?

A: Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback. We are proud of the commitment and dedication of our teams and it is really encouraging to hear your thoughts. As a trust we are keen to provide job security for our employees and work hard to reduce the number of short term contracts we use. I'm not sure if there is a specific team/s in the Trust you are referring to but there are a couple of circumstances that lead to the decision to use fixed term contracts and I hope describing these will answer your question:

The first is the nature of the funding we have available for some projects. Where it is for a fixed term, this influences the type of contract we can offer. However, there are lots of examples where employees join the Trust on a fixed term contract and then, where a project is successful and moves into our core work we are able to offer permanent employment.

The second is the seasonal nature of some aspects of our work, especially at Visitors Centres. We do have a core team of seasonal workers who return to us year after year and in many cases this fits their personal circumstances. However, we do understand that these contracts can be challenging and we are fair and consistent in our approach with these essential workers.

Q: How can the NWT justify buying a toilet block in Hickling Staithe car park from the Prish Council for a reported £15k, whilst at the same time closing the VC and toilet at NWT Weeting Heath reserve, and therefore denying visiting members (especially women) any toilet facilities? and why are camper vans allowed to stay at Hickling Staithe for free?

A: NWT are the long standing owners of the toilet block at Hickling which until recently was under lease to North Norfolk District Council. NWT has recently taken the toilets back in hand as they are part of the overall development plan for the staithe to improve accessibility to the site for all. This will (subject to funding) include installing improved facilities for disabled people in the toilet block.

The presence of camper vans parking in the carpark adjacent to the Pleasure Boat Pub is being reviewed in conjunction with the pub as part of the Wilder Hickling project. As plans for the development of the car park firm up a decision will be taken on whether to prohibit camper vans, allow some managed parking and/or whether to charge.

The decision to close the visitor centre at Weeting Heath was a difficult one for NWT but it was driven by the relatively low number of visitors to the site and the benefit of being able to redeploy the time required of conservation staff to run the visitor centre in to supporting other conservation work. The hides remain open and free to all during the stone curlew breeding season.

A discussion entitled 'The Power of Nature for All' hosted by Nick Acheson took place with NWT EDI Officer Sará Lapinová, Ellie Leech from BTO and Dave Shraga from Inclusive Norwich

The President thanked Nick, Sará, Ellie and Dave for their informative and entertaining discussion and thanked everyone for attending the AGM, wishing them all a good evening.