

CHESHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST
56th Annual General Meeting
Ness Botanic Gardens
Saturday 16th November 2019, at 10.00am

Present: Felicity Goodey (President)
10 Trustees (names recorded)
56 Trust Members (names recorded)
6 Volunteers/friends/relatives of Trust Members (names recorded)
14 Staff Members

Apologies for absence:

Apologies for absence were received from 1 member and Trustees Bill Stothart and Sarah Williams

WELCOME BY HONORARY SECRETARY HELEN CAREY

Helen welcomed all the members to the AGM and after a brief introduction to Ness Botanic Gardens by Nick Lightfoot, Head Gardener, Helen handed over to Felicity.

INTRODUCTION BY FELICITY GOODEY, PRESIDENT

Felicity Goodey welcomed all the members present and thanked everyone for coming. She then officially opened the AGM at 10:15 am.

Felicity began by making note that the world seems to be waking up to the environmental emergency, Felicity noted that Sir David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg seem to be getting the message across. Felicity explained that she was excited to see that so many people are taking action but often finds herself wondering if we have indeed left things too late to make a change.

Felicity spoke of how the work of Cheshire Wildlife Trust is helping to reverse the damaged environment through peatland restoration, she went on to talk about her trip to the Pennine fringe to look at the work Cheshire Wildlife Trust is doing with landowners to restore wetlands and work with both the trust and each other to make more space for wildlife but also to establish wildlife corridors.

Felicity spoke of the importance of a nature recovery network that will be a win for wildlife and a win for future generations.

1. MEMBERS PRESENT AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The President asked that Members ensure they signed the attendance sheet. Apologies for absence which had been received prior to the meeting were already recorded and any apologies on the day were added to the sheet.

Felicity confirmed that apologies had been received from 1 member and 2 Trustees... Bill Stothart and Sarah Williams

2. MINUTES OF THE 55th AGM (20TH October 2018)

The President asked those members present if there were any factual corrections to the minutes of the 55th AGM; there were none.

She then proposed that the minutes made available on the day and in advance on the CWT website were a correct record of the proceedings, and signed a copy for the records.

The President reminded the audience that only members could cast a vote then asked the members to approve the minutes as a true and accurate record

Proposed: Helen Carey

Seconded: Rob Marrs

The proposal was carried unanimously by the vote.

3. 2017-18 HIGHLIGHTS

The President handed over to Charlotte Harris, CEO, to give an overview of the Trusts achievements during the last 12 months and an insight into the year ahead.

Last year, I talked about our plans to further grow the work of the Trust, expand our landholding and develop our campaigns work. I am pleased to report that CWT has achieved this and remained financially stable.

Turning first to our finances, which Peter will expand on later:

Despite setting a deficit budget, we ended 2018-19 with a surplus on both unrestricted and restricted funds we were also able to further grow our financial reserves- although we still have a little way to go to achieve the '4-month' target set by Council.

I have previously reported the ongoing challenge in maintaining grant income in a very competitive environment and our long term aim has been to increase other income streams to reduce the Trusts reliance on grants. I am delighted to report that this is now coming to fruition with both our income from membership and service provision growing in 2018-19 balancing out a fall in the value of grants secured. Overall unrestricted funding grew from £1.16 m to £1.26m. Income from donations and legacies (including membership) rose from £593k to £683k.

Looking now at how CWT changed during the year....

In October 2018 Chris Koral, stood down as Chairman after 10 years' service as a Trustee. Bill Stothart took over the role and is supporting the next phase of the Trust's development. Three new Trustees elected at last year's AGM settled in well and a further Trustee, Claire, who stands for election today was co-opted during the year. Recruitment of new Trustees is an ongoing process as a number of existing Council members will come to the end of their tenure next year and we are keen to ensure that the skills mix is maintained. We will be advertising again in the spring if you are interested yourself or know someone who might be.

We continued to focus on growing membership and maintaining good relationships with existing members. Membership grew to 13,152 and retention remained stable at 87%. Our member-only events programme continued, with 199 members taking part in 10 events ranging from guided walks and talks to family days.

Our communications team continued to further our reach and build our reputation. During the year we built our social media following to over 10,000 Twitter followers and 6,000 Facebook followers, and we launched our Instagram account. Over 7,000 supporters subscribe to our weekly e-newsletter and we launched a new website in June. The Trust made 2 appearances on BBC's

'Countryfile', featuring our Create for Nature wood recycling project and our position on HS2. Engagement in 30 Days Wild more than tripled from 575 in 2017 to 1,726 participants in 2018.

And we continued to work closely with the wider Wildlife Trust movement. Trustees and staff at all levels took part in knowledge exchange events and we helped campaign on national issues by contributing to policy consultations and task and finish groups.

Moving on to our conservation work...

In 2018–19 our Delamere's Lost Mosses project entered a new phase, focusing on working with the Forestry Commission and local communities to ensure that the restored mosses remained well managed. During the year we restored a further 4 ha of mossland habitat, bringing the total since the start of the project to 139 ha, and we secured a further £150,000 to continue restoration and management of peatland sites over the next 2 years. In January 2019 we took over the management of the first 15 ha of Crown Farm Quarry to manage land restored by Tarmac following the cessation of sand quarrying. This nature reserve will expand over the coming years and the quarry is further worked out.

Our work in the Peak District fringe continued to expand. This year we restored river channels in the Upper Dane catchment, improving their value for biodiversity and helping to reduce the risk of flooding down-stream through the use of natural flood management interventions which store 7,000m³ of water in peak flood events.

We created a further 7 ha of wildflower meadow through our Pollinating Cheshire Project and 7 ha of new woodland by working with farmers and in partnership with Cheshire East Council, the Environment Agency and United Utilities.

With support from the Tidal Dee Catchment Partnership, we secured the first phase of National Lottery funding for our landscape-scale Dee Coastliners project, which will see us work with partner organisations and communities on both the English and Welsh sides of the Estuary to preserve and enhance this special landscape.

We continued to manage and restore habitats within our nature reserves and make further improvements to access and interpretation. A number of firsts were recorded at Gowy Meadows, including wall butterfly and breeding tufted duck. We created 2,500m² of shallow pool habitat for wading birds at Bickley Hall Farm and continued to manage the hay meadows, species-rich margins, pools and hedgerows for wildlife through the Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship Agreement.

We secured a management agreement for a further 12 ha of land in the Swettenham Valley, which links our two existing nature reserves to form one continuous site.

Natterjack toads had their third consecutive successful breeding year as a result of our ongoing management of the dune pools at Red Rocks Marsh.

We provided input to a further 6 neighbourhood plans, bringing the total to 35 plans influenced. This year's work secured protection for a 750 ha wildlife corridor.

Our surveying efforts led to the designation of 19 new and the extension of 4 existing local wildlife sites, protecting an area of more than 218 ha. We petitioned HS2 Ltd twice during the year and presented evidence to the Select Committee. Our evidence secured further funding for compensatory habitat and additional provisions to protect an important water vole population.

We worked closely with Natural England to design and launch a new Strategic Licensing Scheme for Great Crested Newts, which is now being rolled out across England.

We supported the national Wildlife Trust Living Seas campaign which saw the designation of a further 41 Marine Conservation Zones, adding to the creation of a protected blue belt around the UK.

We also played our part in influencing the future of agricultural policy by securing funding for a Defra pilot of farm-based natural capital plans.

Overall, we made progress towards our 2030 goal of 10% of Cheshire being wildlife rich by influencing the management of over 6,000 ha of land and creating 36 ha of new habitat.

Our community engagement has continued to expand....

In 2018-19 we engaged over 6,500 children through our education programme aided by funding from the People's Postcode Lottery and corporate support. This included offering monthly Family Forest School days at Swettenham Valley and Moore Nature Reserves, 4 Nature Tots sessions every week at 3 locations and WildPlay at 2 venues in the school holidays, as well working with 200 schools. We also continued to work with the Eaton Estate and Royal Horticultural Society to deliver the Teaching Trees programme to school children in the Chester area.

Natural Futures entered its final year of a 4-year programme to increase and improve our volunteer engagement. We invested in a new permanent position of 'Volunteering Development Officer' so that potential and existing volunteers continue to have a good experience with CWT after the project ends. To date we have over 1,400 registered volunteers and those that are active have donated the equivalent of 23 years' worth of officer time since the start of the project. This year, 240 volunteers benefitted from 33 training courses and 10 young adults completed traineeships and work placements. We launched our Go Wild, Get Fit programme with £142,000 support from Sports England, a 3-year initiative which uses conservation volunteering and outdoor activities to improve participants' health and wellbeing.

We continued to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, the general public and decision makers. Over 10,000 people took part in our events and we engaged with all 24 Cheshire MPs as part of our Wilder Future campaign, including taking part in a parliamentary reception and 10 face to face meetings at constituency offices and site visits.

So 2018-19 was another very busy and successful year and I'm sure the staff in the audience could list many more projects and achievements that I haven't had time to mention here.

I'll now give you a little flavour of what is happening this year and our plans for the future...

Last year I mentioned to you our ambitions to grow CWT to achieve our 2030 goals for nature's recovery. In April 2019, the staff team was restructured to enable this growth. We merged our conservation and community engagement teams into multifunctional operations teams.

We now have 3 operations teams East, West and North covering different parts of the county. Within these teams we increased our community engagement capacity. New contracts from the Environment Agency and Natural England have also allowed us to invest in several new land management positions.

To complement the work of the teams and ensure that the organisation continues to run effectively as we grow, a 'Support Services' team was established leading on office management, volunteer support, event planning and customer service.

With support from the National Heritage Lottery Fund we've created a new post of Director of Trading to lead the expansion of our subsidiary business, Cheshire Ecological Services and develop other income streams. And finally at a time when society's interest in the environment is at an all-time high and there is significant opportunity to influence the political agenda, we have invested in our first Campaigns Officer. Overall CWT has already grown significantly this year and now has 50 paid staff, supported by a further 20 regular workers including membership recruiters, freelance educators and ecological sub-contractors.

So far this year we have acquired two new nature reserves- Kerridge Hill near Rainow and Forge Mill in Congleton and we are currently acquiring an extension to our Hunter's Wood reserve near Frodsham.

I mentioned new contracts earlier, one of which requires us to create or restore 124 ponds in the East of Cheshire this year for Natural England- a significant undertaking that will boost the Great Crested Newt population. We also have a number of contracts with the Environment Agency which focus on advising landowners to improve water quality and using natural flood management to reduce downstream flooding and enhance biodiversity.

The year we have started a bog bush cricket captive breeding project to enable the species to be reintroduced to Holcroft Moss. We have also reintroduced a rare plant, Lesser Bladderwort, to Black Lake and we have plans to boost the population of white clawed crayfish in the county in the near future.

I am delighted to announce that we have appointed a new Patron. Richard Walker, the managing director of Iceland Supermarkets has agreed to take up the position. Richard and his wife are already members of CWT and are both passionate about the natural world. Richard has a particular interest in wildflower meadow restoration, rewilding and connecting children with nature. Richard is also very politically active, campaigning for stronger legislation to protect nature. So I hope you will agree that this is a very significant and welcome appointment.

Perhaps one of our biggest changes this year is the increase in our campaigning activity. I mentioned our investment in a Campaigns Officer and this is already starting to pay dividends. The latest state of nature report released last month continues to paint a picture of nature in decline. Our government declared a climate and ecological emergency in the summer and many of the laws that protect our environment currently come from Europe.

In March 2019 we launched our Wilder Future campaign using the Wind in the Willows characters to tell the story. The film featured in cinemas up and down the country and was viewed over 1 million times on social media in the first few days. We took part in the Chester climate strike and last night hosted an environmental question time event at Chester University enabling young voters to put their questions directly to politicians. We are also contacting and meeting regularly with MPs from all parties to lobby for a strong Environment Act that secures nature's recovery, an Agricultural Bill that rewards farmers for helping nature and for a network of Highly Protected Marine Areas. 2,340 people took part in 30 days wild this summer and almost 1,000 people have already signed up to our Wilder Future campaign, but we've only just begun. We will be

campaigning hard in the months ahead, alongside other Wildlife Trusts to ensure we have strong laws that enable our environment to recover.

You'll hear later this morning how we are using science and evidence to inform our work but for now, I'd like to leave you with our Wind in the Willows hero film which sets out what we are here to do, far better than I ever could.

Charlotte then played the Wildlife Trusts 'Wind in the willows' film.

4. REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018

The President handed over to Peter Rushton, Deputy Treasurer, to go through the accounts for the 12-month period ending 31 March 2018.

Report by Peter Rushton, Deputy Treasurer:

2018/19 was a successful year for the Trust. This was the third financial year in succession that the Trust achieved an overall surplus and the second year in the last three years in which – despite setting initial deficit budgets- we achieved a surplus on both unrestricted and restricted funds.

Income;

Total income in 2018/19 was £1.945m – a slight decrease on the previous two years which reported total income of just over £2m surplus a year.

The main sources of income for the past three years were grants, individual giving and trading income.

In 2019 grant income made up 35% of the Trusts total income, down from 47% in 2018.

As previously reported there is an ongoing challenge in maintaining grant income as funders have cut back in a very competitive environment. This decline was anticipated by the Trust in 2017. In response, as part of our planning, we deliberately looked to increase other income streams thereby reducing the Trust reliance on grants.

In 2019 this approach resulted in an increase in trading income which grew to 23.4% of total income in 2019 compared with just 15.8% in 2017.

Membership income has grown in value and as a proportion is 27% of total income against 25% in 2018. While donations and legacies are broadly similar at 10% of total income compared 2017.

Expenditure;

Turning to expenditure, total expenditure was £1.916m, a slight increase since 2017 when it was £1.901m but down on 2018 by £99,000.

48% of expenditure was making space for nature, this includes nature reserve management, conservation projects and land management.

30% of our expenditure was on engagement, communications and campaigns including education, events, volunteering, community projects, RSWT contribution and communications.

22% was spent on delivering a sustainable and effective organisation, costs cover fundraising, central support, overheads and governance.

In terms of net assets, the charity has grown in size from £1.085m in 2017 to £1.165m in 2019 the Trusts highest ever level. The trusts liquidity continues to be high with cash at bank having increased from £656,000 in 2017 to £822,000 in 2019 reflecting the increase in cash restricted funds. This cash will be used to deliver designated work in future years.

Finally cash financial reserves which are unrestricted funds available to support Trust activity stand at just over £300,000 or three months worth of expenditure moving towards our target of 4 months worth of reserves.

Peter thanked members for their continued support.

The President asked whether there were any questions relating to the accounts; there were no questions.

The President asked the members to formally accept the accounts.

Proposed: Peter Rushton

Seconded: Steve Judd

25 proxy votes for received in advance, all in favour.

Vote: The proposal was carried unanimously by the vote.

5. ELECTION AND REMUNERATION OF AUDITORS

The President asked that the members officially re-appoint Mitchell Charlesworth as the Trust's Auditors for a further year, with their remuneration to be decided upon by Council.

Proposed: Peter Rushton

Seconded: Gerald Coates

25 proxy votes for received in advance, all in favour.

Vote: The proposal was carried unanimously by the vote

The President confirmed that Mitchell Charlesworth had been reappointed proxy and their remuneration will be decided upon by Council.

6. ELECTION AND RE-ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Council member Claire Swarbrick co-opted during the year is standing for election for the first time. Claire was present in the room and her biography was available to read.

Felicity asked Claire to make herself known.

The resolution is as follows:

1. That Claire Swarbrick be elected under Article 30.

Proposed: Charles Neame

Seconded: Rob Marrs

Vote: All in favour

Proxy: 24

The AGM is asked to note that Neil Friswell is resigning as a Trustee after 11 years of service.

Felicity read out a resume of Neil's contribution to CWT:

Neil joined the Conservation Committee as an external advisor, later becoming a Trustee in 2008. Neil has served on Conservation Committee throughout his tenure, including being Chair for several years. During his time on the Board, Neil has also played a major role in making Bickley Hall Farm wildlife rich and financially

viable, serving first on the Farm Working Group and more recently, on the Premises Group. Neil has also been a huge support to the conservation team, outside of meetings, providing a listening ear, words of wisdom and a relentless enthusiasm. Neil has also committed many, many hours to surveying wildlife on our nature reserves, in particular monitoring birds at the farm and helped 100's of people learn more about wildlife and our work by leading and supporting guided walks. The Trust has gone through a huge period of change during Neil's time on Council and his support has helped grow our conservation work from being mainly nature reserve focused to being confident working at a landscape scale. The staff and Trustees wish to thank Neil for his time and contribution and wish him the very best for the future.

Felicity thanked Neil for his time served as a Trustee and presented him with a thank you gift.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No questions were received in advance

No further questions were raised.

The President formally declared the meeting closed at 10:55am and handed over to Charlotte Harris to conduct the remainder of the business.

PRESENTATION OF ERIC THURSTON AWARDS

Charlotte Harris introduced John Thurston, Eric's son. This year marks the 20th anniversary of Eric's passing. Charlotte handed over to John to say a few words about his father's passion for wildlife and his involvement with Cheshire Wildlife Trust before presenting this year's two awards:

Eric Thurston was an eminent Cheshire naturalist and also an experienced and skilful photographer. He was one of the founder members of the Cheshire Conservation Trust (now called the Cheshire Wildlife Trust) and chairman of the former Mid-Cheshire Group for many years, sharing his passion for wildlife and the countryside with old and young throughout Cheshire.

Over the autumn and winter months he entertained many local organisations and clubs with his wonderful slides and informative and amusing commentary, giving both time and money, from his talks, generously to the Trust. In the spring and summer months he would be seen actively working in the reserves, recording wildlife and leading nature walks – with time off for photography, fungus forays and dawn walks. He liked nothing better than pointing out the intricacies of a butterfly's wing to a small child or pond dipping with primary school children. He was a true friend of both people and wildlife.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust's annual awards are given in Eric's name.

There are two award winners this year:

The first award went to Jack Swan
nominated by Rachel Giles and seconded by Joe Pimblett.

Before presenting Jack with the award Charlotte read out the nomination:

Jack is one of Cheshire's pre-eminent naturalists. His expertise is widely recognised amongst local naturalists and ecologists, particularly in botany, but also entomology and ornithology.

Jack has provided fantastic support over the years to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust particularly as a surveyor of Local Wildlife sites which he has done for several decades, putting in hundreds of hours of time to ensure the county's most important wildlife is monitored and protected. One year he single-handedly surveyed hundreds of hectares of land along several kilometres of the Dane Valley river corridor, which was an incredible feat. In the past few years he has volunteered for CWT on the Glorious Grassland project (a partnership project co-ordinated by the Peak District National Park) to identify, assess and help restore species-rich grasslands in the Peak District. He also regularly helps our operations teams by undertaking free-of-charge botanical surveys to inform our work, particularly in the East of the county.

Jack has mentored several budding botanists and he has run numerous training courses for CWT and other organisations, helping to train the next generation of naturalists. He regularly gives Natural History talks to a wide range of organisations including the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. He was a committee member for the Macclesfield and Congleton Local Group for many years helping to run events as well as regularly giving fascinating talks to local members.

Jack was invited to the stage to accept his award

The second award goes to Tim Gannicliffe
Nominated by Paul Loughnane, seconded by Hilary Ash

Before presenting Tim with the award, Charlotte read out the nomination:

Tim has been working locally in Wirral with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust for 27 years, including management of reserves, recording ponds throughout Wirral, and encouraging participation in pond dipping at New Ferry Butterfly Park. This includes our very busy opening days (circa 1000 visitors), regular Sunday opening and on group visits. He shares his expertise, enthusiasm and knowledge of the pond's denizens. Tim has been tenacious in his removal of Himalayan balsam in the Dibbin catchment. Tim is involved in a broad array of conservation networks within Wirral. Tim has recently taken on a new role on the steering committee of the Dee Coastliners project.

Tim was invited to the stage to accept his award

ERIC THRUSTOM MEMORIAL SCIENCE FORUM

Attendees were invited to hear a range of presentations focusing on CWT's work, focused particularly on those projects with a strong science and evidence based approach. Lunch was available for those attending the whole event.

Alternatively, members were free to leave or the Botanic Gardens at their leisure.