

**Minutes of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Members of  
Kent Wildlife Trust Company No: 00633098  
held at Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone ME14 3BD  
on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at 2pm.**



The Members were welcomed to the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting by Chairman of the Council, Michael Bax. The Chairman noted that the meeting was the Trust's first hybrid AGM, with a small number of Members attending in person at Tyland barn. 47 Members attended via Zoom. He explained that Council had decided to offer electronic attendance in line with Charity Commission guidance to ensure that as many Members as possible could attend despite social distancing measures due to Covid-19. Measures taken at Tyland Barn, besides limiting the number in physical attendance, included social distancing of seating, provision of hand sanitiser and a one-way system for entering and leaving the barn.

The Chairman then announced that this was his last AGM, as after six and a half years chairing Council, he was stepping down as a Trustee. He introduced Dr Chris West who would succeed him as Chairman. Dr West has a DPhil in Ecology from Oxford, was a founder director of Bioscan UK Limited, a respected environmental consultancy. He was senior environment adviser at DFID (Department for International Development) before becoming director of Shell Foundation, where he supported social enterprises deliver clean energy and sustainable transport solutions in Africa and Asia. He is currently a member of DEFRA's "Darwin Expert Committee" which funds biodiversity projects overseas, and a Partner at Sumerian Partners. He brings to the Trust wide ranging management experience, knowledge of the philanthropic sector, and significant links with businesses, investors and governmental agencies seeking to protect and manage the environment. He owns a woodland Local Wildlife Site and has restored a former hay meadow.

The Chairman outlined the format for the meeting including the ways that Members could vote for resolutions. He reminded Members that questions had been requested in advance and those questions received would be answered at the end of the meeting. Those attending via Zoom were encouraged to use the chat function to submit questions, which would either be answered at the end of or outside of the meeting.

Having been duly convened and there being a quorum present, the meeting proceeded to business.

**1. Minutes of the 61<sup>st</sup> AGM held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019**

The minutes of the 61<sup>st</sup> AGM held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019, which were published on the Trust website, were unanimously approved as a true record.

**3. Report on the year by the Chairman, Michael Bax and Chief Executive Officer, Evan Bowen-Jones**

Chief Executive Officer, Evan Bowen-Jones, updated Members one year into the five-year strategy, which recognised the bio-diversity crisis and the need for KWT to step up and achieve higher impact in terms of bio-diversity and bio abundance. A very different approach was required to confront the issue of common species becoming rare, which was arguably more concerning than rare species becoming rarer.

The Trust was increasingly embracing wilding approaches as a different way of managing its nature reserves. Steppingstones were set in 2019 to implement initiatives across reserves, engage people and generate income. Organisational measures of success:

1. Doubling KWT's land holding so that 1.5% of Kent's land area is under KWT's direct control

2. Engaging 25% of Kent's population in actively supporting KWT's vision for a Wilder Kent
3. Generating a £400k surplus per annum by the end of the Plan to reinvest in Wilder Kent

The Chief Executive Officer also talked through the development of the Group structure, which would facilitate delivery of the strategy and £400k surplus. Kent Wildlife Enterprises was focussing on diversity of income generation for the Group. KWT Consultancy Services was working to deliver profit and help drive the Trust Mission through commercial opportunities and activities with corporations, developers, etc. Progress towards achieving these goals was being made despite Covid-19.

The Chairman talked through the achievements in 2019 (see the Chairman's Introduction and Trustees' Report [here](#)). A lot had been achieved including the rollout of the xLedger financial management system, which was both a huge task taken care of ably by the Trust's staff and a great step in improving financial controls and reporting; the structural review enabled the Trust to achieve its charitable aims more effectively; governance had been improved through the introduction of a Voluntary Company Secretary role, which was being undertaken by Emma Taaffe; health and safety and risk management approaches had been revised and a scheme of delegation introduced.

The refocus of conservation, towards maximising bio-abundance on our reserves and the impact of our conservation team across Kent and the South East, meant that KWT was ahead of the game compared to other trusts, though the Chair noted that the Trust was in new territory in the way it was approaching conservation and there was still a long way to go. Pioneering wilding approaches were started, including the return of missing species, such as beaver, to habitats. Farming clusters had been established and encouraged farmers and landowners to come together and share views and become involved in the landscape scale management of the areas in which they live, rather than being solely focussed on their own farms. The Upper Beult Cluster first met in November 2019 and had been met with tremendous enthusiasm.

The Education and Engagement Team had overhauled the education provision and instigated a process for stakeholder engagement, which was developed through the Blean project. Kent Wildlife Enterprises continued to work on income diversification and improving the offer at visitor centres, developing branded product lines and establishing a charity shop business plan. Covid-19 influenced the Company's decision to delay opening its first charity shop and to review that decision in Spring 2021. KWT Consultancy Services was set up in 2019 and contract work began later in the year. The subsidiary has continued to perform well despite Covid-19. The Chairman closed by reminding Members how important legacy income was to the Trust and shared the Trust's gratitude for the legacies it had received, which had contributed to the Trust's achievements in recent years.

Dr West outlined the Trust's vision going forwards highlighting the continuing uncertainty around the impact of Covid-19. Council had established a Crisis Management and Response Task Group that met regularly to consider the financial situation and the health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers. The situation, which would continue to be monitored closely, had forced the Trust to look at how it could work more cost efficiently and at how it could reduce its carbon footprint. The Trust would be looking at how it used its buildings and office space and at opportunities for people to work remotely in ways that allow them to continue to perform in their roles, but are less carbon intensive. As well as improvements introduced by xLedger, Ian Holmes had been appointed as Head of Finance and was guiding the Trust through better financial reporting and the appointment of new auditors. Close review of the financial position would be continued to ensure that the Trust remained financially viable in order to achieve its charitable objects and Mission.

Dr West then talked about some of the exciting projects that were underway. A lot of media attention had been paid to the Trust's exciting Wilder Blean project, which, through the introduction of Bison as nature's bulldozers, would open up diverse habitat. Farmer clusters would continue to be developed, beyond the three current clusters in the Rother Valley, Romney Marsh and Upper Beult, as a valuable reservoir of interest and knowledge. Turning to the Wilder Carbon project, Dr West explained that historically, the Trust had acquired land of nature conservation value predominantly through generous grants and donations and these continued

to provide an important way to fund acquisitions. There were also benefits in managing land to generate revenue. Significantly is the opportunity for the Trust to acquire new land and manage it so that it reduces carbon emissions or locks up more carbon, which lends itself to opportunities for business to offset their carbon footprint. The Trust is consequently exploring ways it can manage land for the twin benefits of conservation and carbon reduction/containment while generating income to facilitate delivery of our Mission.

The Trust would also be looking at the ways it can generate unrestricted income, by building on the commercial activity of the Group. Kent Wildlife Enterprises would focus, through our visitor centres, on attracting more people to our sites in a way that promotes understanding of what we are doing there and also ensures that we are getting information back from site managers. Opportunities were being explored regarding the Sevenoaks Visitor Centre re-build, outsourced coffee outlets and wilder safaris. KWT Consultancy Services was off to a flying start despite the circumstance surrounding Covid-19. The aim is to get the Consultancy to a point where it generates a profit for the Group and is undertaking work that is consistent with and additional to what the Trust itself can do to maintain an enhanced biodiversity value in the County. There are exciting opportunities through initiatives such as Biodiversity Net Gain, which will require developers to set aside money to ensure biodiversity is compensated for in development plans.

Dr West concluded, stating that he looked forward to meeting more Members and talking to them about the Group's projects in the future.

#### **4. Accounts for the year 2018 presented by the Honorary Treasurer, Nigel Steele**

The Members received the Trustees Annual Report and Financial Statements (the Accounts) for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019. A copy is published on the Trust website [here](#).

The Honorary Treasurer, Nigel Steele, presented a summary of the Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019. The financial outturn for the year was good with a surplus of £895k, which compared favourably with the previous year's result of a £96k deficit.

The Honorary Treasurer outlined the measures that the Group had put in place to conserve cash in response to Covid-19, including the decision taken by Kent Wildlife Enterprises to delay the opening of charity shops. The Government's Job Retention Scheme and the Lottery Emergency Fund had helped to improve the financial position and the Trust was grateful for the loyalty of its Members, who continued to support the Trust through this challenging climate. As a result, the Trust should end the year in a much better financial position than had been indicated by a worst-case forecast made at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis.

#### **5. Election of Members of Council**

- a. Members welcomed Dr Chris West as Council's new Chairman with immediate effect.
- b. Members noted that Martin Garwood and Clive Maxwell had resigned from Council during the financial year.
- c. Michael Bax, Victoria Golding and Graham Hill retired from Council and did not offer themselves for re-election.
- d. The following Trustees retired and were re-elected unanimously:  
Andrea Byerly  
Colin Peters  
Charles Tassell
- e. The following new Trustees, who had been appointed by Council during the year in accordance with the Articles of Association, retired and were re-elected unanimously: Katherine Jary and Tamarin Ward.

#### **6. Appointment of Auditors**

It was unanimously RESOLVED

THAT BHP LLP be and hereby are appointed as the Trust's auditors until the next Annual General Meeting.

## 7. Payment of Trustees

The Members noted that there had been no payments to Trustees during the financial year.

## 8. Special Resolution to Approve and Adopt New Memorandum and Articles of Association

It was unanimously RESOLVED

THAT the Revised Memorandum and Articles, published on the Trust website (and attached to these minutes), be and are hereby approved and adopted as the Memorandum and Articles of Association of Kent Wildlife Trust (the Trust) in substitution for and to the exclusion of all previous versions of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust.

## Questions

1. Richard Fitton: *I would like to know if KWT has delivered or is exploring any conservation finance business models to attract private capital into projects that deliver on our conservation objectives? For example, raising finance for habitat creation based on future income streams from selling carbon credits to companies looking to offset their emissions, or biodiversity credits/contributions from developers.*

The Chief Executive Officer referred to the reports earlier in the meeting and noted that it was hoped that Wilder Carbon would go to market by the end of the year. It had already generated interest from various parties, and should be something that the Group could develop productively. The Biodiversity Net Gain strategy was being developed via KWT Consultancy Services to enable more effective working with developers. This was all very much on the agenda and the way of the future and it is hoped that, particularly through Nature Based Solutions, the Group will finally get traction with those who do not see the value of wildlife and that by placing sufficient economic value we can make some really serious progress.

2. Nigel Jennings: *Is the Council satisfied that the Trust has communicated effectively with volunteers and Members since the Covid-19 outbreak?*

Keeley Atkinson, People Engagement Manager, explained that she had taken the opportunity offered by the Covid-19 situation, to review communications with volunteers and look at ways to improve. She was also ensuring that all volunteers were registered so that they would receive communications from the Trust. A new Customer Relationship Management system was being introduced, which volunteers would have access to. The e-newsletter for volunteers was being overhauled with the help of a group of volunteers and going forwards the news items would be from volunteers themselves with support from the Communications Team. In addition, a task force was being established to look at training, recognition and communication, which would be led by volunteers and supported by the People Engagement Manager.

The People Engagement Manager acknowledged that, with hindsight and the lockdown lasting for so long, more could have been done. Staff have, however, been communicating throughout the pandemic with their own volunteer groups, while also carrying out their role plus picking up work from staff who had been furloughed. She apologised to those who had fallen through the cracks adding that the opportunity would be taken to improve the service to volunteers, because the Trust could not do what it does without them.

3. Nigel Jennings: *When will the Trust make effective use of Zoom or other web conference platforms to host webinars and meetings open to volunteers, the wider membership and general public as appropriate?*

The People Engagement Manager explained the technological improvements that had been introduced

by the Group in response to lockdown. She added that the Wild About Gardens team had been offering webinars, training and gardening advice via Zoom and had developed an exciting package of training modules for 2021. Community engagement had also been achieved virtually in connection with the Wilder Blean and Chough projects and with Faversham Town Council. A call would be going out to volunteers who would like to deliver webinars in their area of interest on behalf of the Trust. Finally, the Trust was looking at installing web cams to capture species at our reserves and share online along with specialist talks and information.

4. Hamish Mackay Miller (Kent Action on Climate Change): *When can we meet to discuss how we can best work together for the sake of the natural environment in Kent.*

The Chief Executive Officer assured Mr Mackay Miller that the Group was keen to get the Business Environment Network operating properly and noted that progress had been adversely affected by Covid-19. It was hoped to get it back up and running, including doing more with Zoom, as soon as possible, following the restructuring of the Corporate Team. In the meantime, the Chief Executive Officer would meet with Mr Mackay Miller to explore how BEN can link in with Wilder Carbon and Nature Based Solutions, enabling corporates to reduce their impact on the environment in multiple ways as well as becoming members.

5. Robert Miller: *Living near to the Pegwell Bay nature reserve it is noticeable when visiting, that with in the nature reserve and Pegwell Bay areas, activities such as bait digger, kite surfing and para gliding, are always present, all of which has a detrimental effect on wildlife. Are KWT in a position to act against these activities, and if they are what action is proposed?*

Paul Hadaway, Director of Conservation, acknowledged that at several of the Trust's sites, including Pegwell Bay, and while the Trust had fewer staff able to manage them, there had been an increase in activity, some of which has been potentially quite damaging. There are several landholders and statutory agencies, including Natural England, involved in the management of Pegwell Bay, whom we need the active support of to prosecute against damaging behaviours. The Trust is providing evidence of the damage caused, which is apparent to anyone visiting the site. Action delayed this year, but that would be undertaken next year included replacing existing signage with some that very clearly explains what is prohibited at the site and protected areas will be much more clearly mark out to try and reduce some of the anti-social behaviour with boats and jet skis.

6. Rosemary Pattullo: *What are the plans to reopen/improve the Visitor Centre at Sevenoaks Reserve, particularly as similar venues elsewhere are finding ways to recommence and also because it generated a good source of income? The whole area, including the Centre, is now looking increasingly sadly neglected.*

The Chief Executive Officer explained that the Covid situation had made the Group's visitor centre scenarios quite difficult. They had been losing money for years and the driver ahead of Covid was to make them profit generating. Covid had prevented the Group from moving forward with its plans. It is, however, hoped that the Sevenoaks Visitor centre will reopen on Fridays and Saturdays from the end of October with the caveat that it will only open if this can be done without further loss and that it is contingent on any lock down rules imposed as a result of a second wave of Covid-19. The Group then hopes to return to full seven day opening in summer 2021. Huge uncertainty surrounds the opening of the visitor centres; the Group cannot be in a position of making serious monthly losses.

7. Rosemary Pattullo: *What steps is the Trust taking to increase membership and awareness, not just online, so increasing our regular income? In particular in the local area where very often the Sevenoaks Reserve is confused with Bradbourne Lakes opposite?*

The Chief Executive Officer outlined plans to refurbish the Sevenoaks Visitor Centre with a firm focus on making it pay for itself, including through car parking charges. The visitor centre would also have a better retail and coffee offer all of which was anticipated to make a substantial profit for the Group. Covid and other issues dependant, it was hoped to be able to start the refurbishment in winter 2021.

Michael Bax closed the meeting with his thoughts on the future of the Trust as he stepped down as Chair. There were huge and exciting challenges ahead. Would politicians open the door to let the natural world be nurtured? How long will it be before communities en masse demand this? He concluded by thanking the KWT Group staff for everything that they do, acknowledging the difficult year they have had. He thanked his co-trustees for their support and the volunteers, partners and financial benefactors without whom the Trust would not be able to do the work its does. He also thanked John Bennett and Evan Bowen-Jones, the two chief executive officers during his term of office, both men with exceptional qualities. Trusteeship is an eyes on hands off job, which was very difficult for Mr Bax, as someone who liked to interfere with everything, but made much easier with men like John and Evan in charge.

Presentations were made to Mike Bax, Victoria Golding and Graham Hill.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3.11pm.