



## 64<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Members of Kent Wildlife Trust

Company No: 00633098

Held in person at Tyland Barn, Chatham Road, Sandling ME14 3BD  
and online via Zoom Webinar

on

Saturday 23 July 2022 at 1pm.

### Unconfirmed Minutes

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#### Present:

John Leigh-Pemberton (Honorary President)

Charles Tassell (Vice Chairman)

Evan Bowen-Jones (Chief Executive Officer)

Rachel Hoey (Trustee)

Members attending in person: 17

Staff members: 10

Chris West (Council Chairman)

Nigel Steele (Honorary Treasurer)

Caroline Jessel (Trustee)

Tom Woolgar (Trustee)

Members attending online: 21

#### Apologies received:

Sir Robert Worcester

Mr Andy Laing

#### 1. Welcome from the Honorary President

AGM22.001 The Honorary President welcomed the Members attending the 64<sup>th</sup> Kent Wildlife Trust Annual General Meeting. The following points were noted:

- [a] It was wonderful to be able to welcome back members attending in person after two years of Covid-19 restrictions. Members were encouraged to make the most of their visit by exploring the beautiful nature park at Tyland Barn.
- [b] The meeting was being recorded. Anyone present in person who did not wish to appear on the recording should make themselves known to a member of staff.
- [c] More than 30 persons entitled to vote had joined the meeting. The meeting was therefore quorate.
- [d] Resolutions would be put to a vote by a show of hands for those attending in person, and by a Zoom poll for those attending online. Resolutions would pass by a simple majority.
- [e] Members had been invited to submit questions in advance and would be answered at the end of the formal business. Further questions could be submitted by pen and paper

or via the Zoom Q&A function and would be answered within the published minutes of the meeting.

[f] Technical problems should be made known to staff via the Zoom chat function.

[g] The Honorary President welcomed the Chairman of Council, Dr Chris West who would proceed with the formal items of business.

## **2. Minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> AGM held on Saturday 17 July 2021**

AGM22.002 The minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> AGM held on Saturday 17 July 2021 were put to the Members for confirmation. A vote was held, and the minutes were confirmed.

## **3. Matters arising from the minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> AGM**

AGM22.003 There were no matters arising from the minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> AGM.

## **4. Presentation of the Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.**

AGM22.004 The Members received the Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2021, a copy of which had been published to members on the Trust's website on 28 June 2022. The Chairman provided a summary of the year's activities and the Hon. Treasurer talked through the financial headlines. The following points were noted:

2021 A Challenging Year:

[a] 2021 had begun with a third Covid-19 lockdown from January to March and had inevitably affected the activities of the Trust, including the closure of the visitor centres. The Chairman and trustees wished to express their sincere thanks to the staff for the resilience, dedication and fortitude shown through this time. Further thanks were given to all volunteers whose activities had been impacted, and to members for being consistent in their support during and after the lockdown.

[b] The trustees, together with the senior management had put a lot of effort into risk management to ensure the Trust remained on a stable footing. It was pleasing therefore, that the year ended in a very sound position despite the difficult start.

[c] As indicated by the record temperatures experienced in recent days, the world was living through a climate and nature crisis. Extreme weather events were becoming more common and this, combined with the global pandemic, meant the Trust was being required to work through times of difficult external challenge. The Trust was now well-placed to tackle the interlinked challenges of climate and nature crisis which required an urgency of action. This meant the Trust had to be bold, innovative and take managed risks.

...But Lots of Positive Progress:

[d] Highlights of the year included an extension to the Trust's reserves thanks to a very generous individual who had donated funds for the purchase of Woodlands golf course in the Darent Valley, now named Heather Corrie Vale Reserve. Credit was given to the estates team which had managed to keep the reserves in a good state despite the difficulties of the year.

- [e] 70% of Kent is farmland, and therefore critical to the fabric, economy, and social wellbeing of the county. The farmer cluster networks, which provided a space for farmers to discuss new approaches to conservation whilst making a living from the land, had continued to grow with a fourth cluster established in the Darent Valley. This was hugely encouraging and showed the growing consensus of aligned objectives between local farmers and the Trust.
- [f] The Volunteer Task Force had been established in 2021 and had refreshed ways of working and listening to volunteers, providing a framework for a closer, more constructive, and more engaged relationship. Senior teams and trustees had been pleased to meet with volunteers on the ground acknowledging that the good work volunteers did was critical to the trust.
- [g] Members would not have failed to miss the huge press attention received by the release of the bison in the West Blean and Thornden Woods earlier in the week. 2021 had been a year of preparation for this and huge thanks were given for the enormous team effort that had enabled the project to come to fruition.
- [h] The long-term efforts of the Trust to manage chalkland habitats in the Dover area meant that Chough were shortly to be reintroduced to Kent. A partnership with the Wildwood Trust had led to the establishment of an aviary at Dover Castle and the identification of a suitable release site.
- [i] 2021 had also seen the establishment of a new subsidiary, Wilder Carbon Ltd. This was one of the first organisations of its kind in the UK designed to support natural climate solutions - restoring land to lock up carbon and enhance the biodiversity. Wilder Carbon presented an enormously important and innovative solution to address the climate and nature crisis and was another example of the Trust leading the way with innovative and urgent action.
- [j] The Trust's other subsidiaries had performed well despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic. Kent Wildlife Enterprises Ltd. had been particularly affected by the closing of the visitor centres. Sales had remained online however, and although overall sales were down, the company returned a profit at year-end. Thanks were offered to Nancy Reed, Head of Wilder Commercial Services who led KWE.
- [k] KWT Consultancy Services Ltd. which provided ecological advice and land management services, was also a leader in its field supporting nature-based solutions. KWTCS had also returned a profit and thanks were offered to Vincent Ganley, Managing Director for his team's efforts throughout the year.
- [l] Overall, the Trust was on a strong and stable footing with lots of activity that members could be proud of. The Chairman then welcomed the Trust's Honorary Treasurer, Nigel Steele to present the accounts.

#### Presentation of the Financial Statements

- [m] The accounts had been audited and were included with the Trustees' Annual Report which had been published in advance on the Trust's website.
- [n] The surplus for the year was £710,000 which was down £360,000 on the prior year. Overall income was £8,031m, an increase on the prior year. Contributors to the increase included some very generous donations as mentioned previously by the

Chairman, and a further tranche of income from the Peoples Postcode Lottery Dreamfund to support the Wilder Blean project.

- [o] Expenditure for the year was higher than the previous year at £7.321m compared to £5.377m. There had been a large increase in reserves management expenditure, partly due to returned ability to do more work following the easing of the lockdown restrictions and also due to the reduced availability of grant funding for that work in light of the government's move towards Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS).
- [p] Of the Trust's three subsidiary companies, the two which were actively trading (KWE and KWTCS) contributed £85,000 profit to the charity's £710,000 surplus and which was an increase on 2020.
- [q] Unrealised gains on investment were £184,000. This was similar to the prior year (£192,000). In light of the turmoil in global markets since the start of the pandemic, the trustees were satisfied with this performance.
- [r] A significant proportion of the £710,000 surplus was constituted of the tranche of funds from the Dreamfund as mentioned in [n] above. Charity accounting regulations required the funds to be recognised as income during the year and not deferred until the expenditure was incurred (2022). That surplus would therefore be spent as part of the Wilder Blean project this year. The Hon. Treasurer highlighted this point to clarify that the Trust was not sitting on a cushion of charitable funds.
- [s] Trustees monitored the financial performance of the Trust closely. Management accounts were scrutinised by the Risk and Finance Committee monthly, and by Council when it met quarterly. Cashflow and cashflow forecasts were also scrutinised to ensure robust financial planning.
- [t] Overall, trustees were of the view that the financial position of the Trust was sound, which was good news, however it remained reliant on the generosity of members and donors and thanks were offered to members for their continued support.

## 5. Election of auditors

2022.005 Members received a recommendation from Council that BHP LLP be reappointed as the Trust's auditors for the year ending 31 December 2022. A vote was held, and the resolution passed.

## 6. Report from the Chief Executive Officer

2022.006 The Members received a report from the Chief Executive Officer outlining some of the Trust's future plans. The following points were noted:

- [a] Evan Bowen-Jones again thanked members for attending and explained he would be sharing some of the exciting work of the Trust. Prior to that he would outline some of the internal work which was underway.

### Strategy review

- [b] The Trust's current strategy ran from 2019-2024, however in light of the two disruptive years of Covid, the incredible amount of work that had been achieved despite the disruptions, and the rapidly changing context within which the Trust was operating, it

had been decided to refresh the strategy now. The intention was to look at the Trust's impact and scale up activity given the urgency of action required.

- [c] It was intended the refresh would be completed by late summer 2022 with a working title of 'Wilder Kent 2030: impact and innovation in a nature and climate emergency'.
- [d] Predicted temperature rises meant that Kent's habitats would change enormously unless dynamic natural processes enabled wildlife to adapt. This required a complete shift in conservation mindset and demanded a dynamic response. The Trust was now in a structural and organisational position to 'demonstrate by doing', piloting approaches that other Trusts would be able to follow and scale up.

Impact and innovation for 2022:

Bison

- [e] Major areas of impact and innovation for 2022 included the release of bison into the Blean (with a communications reach in the billions). The next stage was to build this project further into the landscape to ensure as large an area as possible could benefit from the animals' impact, cementing the partnership with RSPB and the Woodland Trust and addressing the challenges posed by the UK road network preventing wildlife connectivity. By piloting this project with a flagship species, it was hoped the Trust would be able to pursue the legal changes required to enable similar projects elsewhere in the country.

Chough

- [f] It was hoped the Choughs would be released into Dover landscape within the next month. This was to a certain degree dependent on the impact of avian flu, which appeared not to affect Corvids to the same extent as sea birds. As well as a cultural and flagship species reintroduction, the project would add (along with the bison) to the tourism economy, thereby demonstrating the multiple benefits of a diverse ecosystem.

Wilder Carbon

- [g] The Woodlands golf course in the Darent Valley had been bought with donor funds. The drone shots shown were an example of how technology was being used for the increasing amount of conservation science going on within the Trust and would be used to monitor landscape change over time.
- [h] Carbon capture would be measured above and below ground on the site and taken to market within the coming months. Together with a project in Somerset which had been facilitated via the Wilder Carbon subsidiary, this would be the first example of high integrity nature-based carbon credits within the UK, and potentially within Europe.
- [i] Wilder Carbon would provide the mechanism for the Trust to take on sites that such as salt marshes that were expected to become available via 'managed retreat' in the future with lower financial risk.

What's Next?

- [j] The Nature Recovery Network for Kent was the geographic target for restoring at least 30% of nature in the county. 30% was the target figure locally, nationally and globally to

effectively sustain comfortable human life on the plant. The Trust was leading the way in mapping that activity in Kent.

- [k] Biodiversity net gain (BNG) was a mechanism to balance the continued development of housing within the county. Although a far from perfect system, it was a way to ensure developers invested properly in the Nature Recovery Network. This therefore provided the Trust with another huge opportunity to restore nature.

#### Managing Risk

- [l] The Trust would continue to work on its reserves in an evermore cost-effective manner, which included moving towards a 'wilding' approach, removing fences, linking land, opening up landscapes and managing areas through natural processes such as grazing. This was not only cheaper but delivered more bioabundance.

- [m] The development of organisational resilience was a key activity, whereby the trust would continue to diversify income streams, strengthening its trading income to protect against the risks facing the Trust's traditional income streams, whilst also strengthening the depth of the Trust's knowledge and expertise across its people-team.

### 7. Retirement and Rotation of Trustees

2022.007 The Chairman outlined changes to the membership of Council. The following points were noted:

- [a] Having served for three consecutive periods of three years, Nigel Steele retired from Council. Having served for two consecutive periods of three years Caroline Jessel retired from Council and did not stand for re-election. Huge thanks were offered for the support and commitment they had given to the Trust.
- [b] Following an open recruitment process, one new trustee had been appointed by Council during the year. In accordance with the Articles of Association, Rachel Hoey was recommended to the members for formal election. A vote was held and Rachel was duly elected. It was noted that Rachel had been appointed by Council to the role of Honorary Treasurer once Nigel Steele retired.

### 8. Questions from members

2022.008 Four questions were submitted by Members in advance, to which the Chief Executive Officer responded:

Q1. Could we reinstate the wildlife garden competition? It engaged lots of people, encouraging them to improve their personal wildlife space and was a great way of trying to combat the 'nature disconnection' we all see in society as illustrated by the massive increase in plastic lawns/hanging plants. (Michael Conrad-Pickles)

- [a] The CEO explained that the wildlife garden competition had been superseded by the Wilder Kent Awards. The wildlife garden competition had been quite expensive to run. Opportunities were still provided for people to open up their gardens through the Open Gardens series and for those interested in wildlife gardening to access information and guidance through the Trust (<https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-gardens>).

Q2. Why is there an additional charge of 20p per transaction paying by phone for car parking? Does this open the Trust to allegations that they're misrepresenting what the charges are, plus

it doesn't seem to be universal to all systems? (Steve Sheath)

Q3. Might car parking charges exclude lower income families from KWT nature reserves? How could we maintain charging whilst avoiding this? Plus, although £2 is good value for a day it isn't so good for those who visit for short periods regularly including dog walkers. Does this explain people parking on roads near car parks? (Andy Laing)

- [b] The CEO took both questions together. It was noted that the Trust was using one of the market-leading systems and it was standard practice for there to be an additional fee for paying by mobile phone. The Trust had been through a tender process when selecting an operator who could run a system from its remote reserves and there were no plans to change system for the time being. The terms of the payment were displayed on the signage, so it was not felt the Trust was being disingenuous in its charges. All funds raised from car parking went back into the reserves management.
- [c] With regards to potential exclusion of lower income families, it was noted that parking charges were only in force at eight out of 60 reserves. These were the flagship reserves which had more capacity for people to visit and also cost the Trust more to manage. The reserves in urban fringe areas would not be subject to car parking charges.
- [d] The Trust was working closely with local authorities and the highways agencies to try and make it difficult for people to park on the roads outside the reserve car parks and seeking to address the instances where people were trying to avoid parking charges.
- [e] In relation to the charge of £2 per day, a poll previously issued to members had shown support for the Trust's view that dog-walking on nature reserves was not necessarily to be encouraged. There was growing evidence that dogs had a significant negative impact on wildlife, and although responsible dog walkers were welcomed, the reserves were not really areas for regular dog exercising. Instances of irresponsible dog-exercising had been a source of stress for reserve staff.
- [f] The Trust would continue to seek to grow direct income from car parking (circa £75,000 was raised in the prior year) which would help to mitigate the diminishing income streams from other areas. For example, circa £200,000 would be lost from agri-environment schemes this year which was money that would otherwise be used to manage reserves for nature.

Q4. I'd like to ask about the proliferation of geese, mainly Canadas, at the Sevenoaks Reserve. Every time I go there, there seem to be more of them – and few other birds on the lakes.

- a) Are KWT monitoring the numbers of these geese and assessing their impact?
- b) Are their numbers creating pressure on the habitat and other species?
- c) And if so, what can be done to control them? (Jane Moore)

- [g] The CEO explained that the question had been put to the Area Manager who had advised that geese populations on the reserve were monitored quite closely. Species of geese on the reserve included Canadas, Greylags and Egyptians, which were a relatively recent addition. The Canadas grazed predominately off the reserve on nearby fields. If it became apparent that there was a competition for space such that numbers were having a negative effect on other birds that might want to nest on the reserve, the Trust would look at the options available for controlling numbers.
- [h] The Chairman thanked members for submitting their questions and noted that subsequent questions would be answered within the minutes. The Chairman thanked

everyone for attending and passed to the Honorary President to close proceedings.

## **Closing remarks**

2022.009 The Honorary President thanked members for attending and reiterated thanks to Caroline Jessel and Nigel Steele for everything they had done for the Trust over their years of service. Trustees were volunteers, the support of which was vital for the Trust's work. John noted there were members present who had been involved with the trust for at least 40 years. The meeting was closed, to be followed by the Wilder Kent Awards.

## **Questions submitted during/after the meeting**

Q1. Do we have to approve the accounts?

A1. No, the Articles of Association require audited accounts to be made available to members on the Trust's website, but they do not need to be put to the members for approval:

*Article 16.4 'At the annual general meeting in every year the Council shall make available to the Trust audited financial statements (framed in accordance with any statutory requirements for the time in force) for the period since the last preceding period of account made up to a date not more than nine months before such meeting. Such audited financial statements shall not less than twenty-one clear days before the date of the annual general meeting be made available on the Trust's website'.*

Q2. What can KWT do to influence developers to use nature-based solutions for storm water?

A2. We are now attending Kent Housing Development Group meetings to promote best practice around all aspects of permitted development. We are doing this whilst explicitly retaining our right, and intent, to oppose those developments we think are inappropriate on biodiversity grounds.

Developers often have to install SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes, aka ponds for storm run-off) which are maintained by the management companies they employ, but they can provide on-site wildlife habitat.

The impact of new housing on water quality in various Kent catchments is a recognised issue, and currently means housing in Ashford and Canterbury can't be built. KWT is working with Natural England to see if we can offer landscape-level solutions through what's known as "nutrient neutrality" – creating wetlands to mitigate the impact of new housing without further damaging our rivers (albeit these will still need a lot more work care of water companies and farmers to be returned to good condition) and provide much more substantial areas for nature. In some cases, we would also look at taking on these new areas of wetland for long-term management.

Our Consultancy Service is providing advice on the redesign of the development sites on the principles of nature-based solutions and nutrient neutrality, to ensure they meet requirements and benefit wildlife.