

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

59th Annual General Meeting

11:00am, Monday 7 December 2020 virtually, via Zoom.

Minutes

The Chair of Trustees Mrs Jo Davies took the chair and welcomed those present to the 59th annual meeting of Dorset Wildlife Trust held virtually under the special provisions enacted by the Government to safeguard our members during the current Covid-19 restrictions.

- 1. Apologies:** Hilly Chittenden sent her apologies for absence.
- 2. Declarations of Interest:** There were no declarations of interest.
- 3. Approval of the Minutes of the last AGM**

The minutes were approved for 58th AGM held on 2 December 2019.

Proposed by Brian Bleese, seconded by Giles Pugh and accepted nem. con.

4. Commentary on the Financial Statement

The Director of Finance and Resources presented the consolidated results and balance sheet of Dorset Wildlife Trust and its trading subsidiary for the year ended 31 March 2020 which had been approved by Trustees at the September Council meeting.

Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) have made an overall surplus of £18,000 for the year reflecting net deficits of £86,000 and £52,000 on unrestricted and endowment funds respectively and a surplus of £156,000 on restricted funds.

DWT budgets to break-even on unrestricted funds, but this includes drawing down on previously designated funds. The budget for 2019/20 included a drawdown of £136,000 from unrestricted designated funds but only £90,000 was drawn down.

The surplus on the restricted funds was due to the receipt of restricted funds and donations for future work on specific projects. The deficit on the endowment fund was due to investment losses of £60,000.

Incoming resources totalled £3,217,000; the majority of DWT's income comes from Membership subscriptions £1,110,000 (35%) which are all unrestricted, restricted grant income of £915,000 (28%) and donations and legacies of £463,000 (21%).

Expenditure totalled £3,173,000 of which 73% was spent on our charitable aims. 15% (£481,000) was spent on membership servicing and recruitment. This generated membership income of £1,110,000, giving a return of £629,000 (131%). A further 12%, (£388,000) of total expenditure was spent on raising donations, legacies, and trading/investment costs generating donations of £401,000 and legacies of £260,000 and investment income of £47,000.

The balance sheet shows total net assets of £10.57 million of which £9 million are fixed assets including heritage assets of £4.6 million and investments of £2 million. The charity has positive net current assets of £1.5 million representing its working capital. Of these net assets, £5.6 million are held as restricted funds, £3.8 million as unrestricted funds and £1.1 million as endowment funds

DWT's free reserves at 31 March 2020 represented approximately 5 months of budgeted unrestricted costs which is in line with DWT's current policy which states that free reserves held by the charity should not normally fall below six months of total unrestricted costs.

5. Resolutions

The chair took the meeting through the following resolutions.

Special Resolution

1. THAT the annual audited accounts and reports for the financial year ended 31 March 2020 be received.
Proposed by Anne Wheatcroft, seconded by Giles Pugh and accepted nem. con.

Special Resolution

2. THAT the auditors Nexia Smith & Williamson be appointed for the coming year.
Proposed by Jim White, seconded by Tony Bates and accepted nem. con.

Ordinary Resolution

3. To authorise the remuneration of the auditors.
Proposed by Roger Cole, Seconded by Alick Simmons and accepted nem. con.

Ordinary Resolution

4. THAT those persons standing for election as trustees are duly elected and appointed, to take effect from the end of this AGM.
Anne Wheatcroft: Proposed by Cynthia Whyte, Seconded by TDV Gale. Accepted nem com.
Nigel Webb: Proposed by Anna Harris, Seconded by Tony Bates. Accepted nem com.
Giles Pugh: Proposed by Jo Davies, Seconded by Mark Kibblewhite. Accepted nem com.
Roger Cole: Proposed by Jo Davies, Seconded by Mark Kibblewhite. Accepted nem com.

5. Chair's review of the past year

Jo Davies reported that this AGM, year ending March 2020, saw the very start of a global coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic caused great change to all and has forced the Trust to rethink its work and strategies.

The year 2019/20 also saw internal uncertainty and change; Chief Executive (CE) Simon Cripps requested a sabbatical at the end of the summer. Brian Bleese was asked by trustees to be acting CE. Subsequently Simon resigned and Brian was unanimously appointed by Trustees into the CE role. Brian has done an outstanding job of steering the Trust through the huge difficulties which coronavirus befell on the Trust. The Trustees thank him whole heartedly for his fantastic leadership.

Sara Thompson is welcomed into DWT as the Director of Fundraising and Marketing, taking over from Alastair Cook who retired in February 2020. Sara has already transformed the department to operate very effectively in these difficult times.

Highlights from 2019/20 include obtaining a major grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Wild Brownsea Project - work has already started on a new boardwalk although this work has suffered delays, due to the pandemic too. Other highlights include securing a licence for a beaver reintroduction trial; the fenced enclosure is now secure, and ready to be used. We are waiting until spring to relocate the beavers. The enclosure was a huge job, greatly helped by volunteers.

DWT has many active volunteers in all areas of our work and we are so grateful for the help they give. Sadly, we are unable to harness this help during the pandemic.

The year saw the start of aligning our strategy to address the two biggest crises facing Dorset and the Planet: climate change and further ecological degradation. Partnerships are already being formed to embark on nature-based solutions locally. DWT is working in partnership with the South- West Wildlife Trusts on the launch of the 'Action for Insect Campaign' and the conclusion of the Get Dorset Buzzing campaign, saw 4,000 individuals, signing up to do something positive for pollinators in their gardens. The government has announced 6 new marine protection zones for Dorset.

This year DWT reviewed its governance procedures and after assessing the effectiveness of the Board, restructured its committees enabling a more efficient and streamlined governance structure and reporting process.

Alongside these highlights, sits the vital and continuous upkeep of all 3,000 acres of Nature Reserves and monitoring of planning applications (67 planning application were reviewed this year), continued with liaison with SNCI owners.

During the current year, since the pandemic has hit, many staff have been furloughed where they have been unable to carry out their work due to restrictions. Face to face membership recruitment had to cease and as membership recruitment and retention are so important to us, the marketing team were not furloughed; with new expertise brought in from Sara, we have managed to maintain membership levels. We were also successful in obtaining grants to support visitor centres that had to close.

All the management team have worked tirelessly to keep DWT progressing in a constantly changing environment and most critically, have kept everyone safe during the pandemic.

A considerable amount of expenditure has had to be saved in the current year, which has unfortunately, forced more redundancies, some long standing members of staff. All these staff had made a huge contribution to Dorset Wildlife Trust, for which we thank them whole heartedly.

The future could be exciting, it looks as though life could return to post lockdown normalcy in 2021 and we can start to roll out our very interesting projects that are lined up.

6. Chief Executive's look at the coming year

Brian Bleese thanked the Board of Trustees for their support through a turbulent year. The year has been challenging for everybody and he thanked all DWT staff for rising to the challenges of this difficult year, helping DWT to emerge stronger and more determined to address the environmental challenges that we are facing. With a significant hit on our resources and income we will continue to rebuild. The support of our members continues to be fantastic.

There are even larger challenges than coronavirus going forward and they are inextricably linked: Climate emergency, Ecological crisis and disconnect of people from nature. We face a climate and ecological crisis on a massive scale. Climate change and environmental degradation are driving a major ecological crisis that is seeing huge declines in species diversity and abundance. This is exacerbated by the 3rd challenge; man's disconnect from nature. Fewer people are connected to the natural environment. The environment is becoming an abstract concept to many. There has been a growing movement and awareness, globally, regarding climate change in the last year. Now is the opportunity to act against these massive crises that we are facing.

The loss of habitats over last 100 years is known; this is now being accompanied by accelerated loss of biodiversity and species abundance loss with 1 in 40 of all species previously recorded in Dorset no longer present.

These three main challenges need to be addressed by bringing back nature on an ambitious scale.

Dorset Wildlife Trust has set 3 strategic goals going forward:

- 1) To restore, reconnect and recreate wildlife habitats, making a significant contribution to the establishment of Nature Recovery Networks in Dorset.
- 2) Champion the natural environment and deliver an increase in wildlife abundance and diversity through nature-based solutions to climate change and environmental degradation.
- 3) To inspire people and communities to learn about, value and take action for wildlife and the natural environment.

There is a great opportunity to build nature recovery networks; connecting and expanding habitat in the landscape, allowing nature to prosper. Over the next year, we will be looking at how to connect nature reserves with local, surrounding areas. We want to enable natural processes, to help deliver nature-based solutions, i.e., Looking after existing sites, allowing natural regeneration of woodlands and maintaining carbon capture by heathland.

We want to create opportunities for people to play an active role in addressing these issues, such as volunteering and campaigning.

Over the next year, we will be developing new initiatives and projects to help achieve these goals. The aim for The Wildlife Trusts nationally is to create a Nature Recovery Network, covering 30% of UK land and seas by 2030.

The valued support of our volunteers and members has helped us come through the Coronavirus pandemic; their ongoing support is now more vital than ever. Brian looks forward to working with our members, volunteers, supporters, trustees, and staff over the coming year to make this target happen. To make Dorset Wildlife Trust the organisation that can enable the people, that are thinking about global action, to act locally and be part of the solution.

7. Any Other Business

Penny Quilter asked 2 questions; 1) what are the first steps to try and engage the wider population, particularly those who are stressed in their day to day living, short of time and funds? 2) How can we work with our local elected bodies, to encourage them to implement the measures that we need, into planning processes; that are currently taking inadequate account of the climate crisis?

BB answered Penny's first question. He noted that our great challenge is engaging people from all parts of society, if we do not do this effectively it will be at great detriment to the environment. We must identify and build on society's links to the natural environment and ensure that there are accessible opportunities to all. For example, volunteering engaging entire families and enabling people to learn about and enjoy their natural environment. We will be looking at new volunteering opportunities in the coming year, to enable greater access from more places across Dorset.

We want to help identify what individuals can also do from home, or on their doorsteps, such as wildlife gardening. Gardens make up a large proportion of our undeveloped land, and function as great highways/corridors for our wildlife. Our project 'Urban Green' is looking at developing local housing development in disadvantaged areas to develop their green spaces for fantastic spaces for wildlife and people. We want to develop more opportunities like this.

Sara Thompson discussed how DWT has utilised social media to engage with a younger audience. Due to the Covid-19 lockdown, a huge increase was seen in the number of people engaging in DWT social media as we were able to provide content, information and activities to do from home or out on their daily walk. This helped people engage with nature without breaking any pandemic rules or having to go further than their garden. This early increase in engagement has continued and represents a new group of people looking to make a change. We have diversified our digital engagement this year, it has reached a young audience.

Imogen Davenport responded to Penny's second question. DWT work closely with Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council (BCP) and Dorset Council on planning issues. DWT have been working with Dorset Council to develop the next local plan, encouraging concern for nature recovery and climate change within it.

There has been recent debate on the government's proposed reform to the planning system – and DWT has been involved locally and nationally. Some of the proposals do not account for the importance of the environment to everyone's life. We have seen the importance of green spaces and nature reserves with a large increase in visitors during lockdown – the value of nature to people has been emphasised and is well understood by the Councils. Transitioning this into policy is another matter. Both Councils have recently declared climate and ecological emergencies. Working out how these impact on the planning system is critical. The willingness of the Councils is there, but alongside DWT's involvement, we need local people's input too. The Dorset Council Environment portfolio holder has noted that they do not have the level of responses to Dorset's Climate and Ecological emergency document that they would like. We need more members of the public to respond to this consultation to demonstrate that it is an important issue to residents.

Anthony Vickery asked if there were any plans for any virtual events or seminars this year?

Sara Thompson responded that there are scheduled virtual events for members that will include online talks and member walks. The walks will be subject to Covid-19 restrictions. DWT would like to develop the virtual events area for non-members too, to engage a larger audience and improve accessibility for people.

The meeting closed at 11:56.

Annex 1: Attendees

Anthony Vickery
Alick Simmons
Tony Bates
Jeremy Thomas
Susan Patterson
Anne Wheatcroft
Jo Davies
Sally Welbourn
Sara Thompson
Jeremy Powne
Sue Frazer
Laura McLellan
Deborah Elton
Roger Cole
Penny Quilter

Andrew Pollard
Mark Kibblewhite
Steve Davis
Brian Bleese
John Gaye
Kelvyn Derrick
Colleen Smith-Moore
Nigel Webb
Imogen Davenport
Peter Scupholme
Jim White
Nancy Taylor
Les Bunce
Isla Reynolds