



## **Minutes of the 70<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust**

**WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre**

**Thursday 5 October 2017 at 10:30am**

**The following members of the Council were present, together with more than 70 WWT members and staff:**

Peter Day (Chairman), Martin Birch (Hon Treasurer), Pamela Castle OBE, Prof. Alastair Driver, Barnaby Briggs, Simon Tonge, Anna Carragher, Simon Henzell-Thomas and Andrew Beer.

In attendance: Martin Spray (Chief Executive).

The Chairman, Peter Day, welcomed all to the 70th Annual General Meeting of WWT and thanked everyone for attending.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from HRH The Prince of Wales, KG, KT, GCB, OM, AK, CD, QSO, PC and Vice President Dr Dafila Scott.

### **2. Minutes of the 69th Annual General Meeting held Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

Comments were invited on the minutes of the 69th Annual General Meeting held Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016. No comments were received. The minutes were proposed by Peter Wallis, seconded by Sue Alexander and signed by the Chairman.

### **3. Matters arising from the Minutes**

There were no matters arising.

### **4. Elections to Council**

The Chairman was delighted to announce, under Article 50 of the Trust's Articles of Association (the Articles), the appointment of Simon Tonge as Vice Chairman, and following the retirement of Sir Graham Fry from Council, under Article 43 of the Articles, the election of two new Trustees, Andrew Beer, Director of the Midlands region for the National Trust, and Simon Henzell-Thomas, Head of Global Public Affairs at IKEA Group.

The Chairman was also pleased to announce that, under article 49 of the Articles, Stanley Johnson would join WWT as a new Vice President.

**5. To receive and consider the Report and Accounts of the Council for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 and the Report of the Auditors thereon**

**1 Chairman's Comments on the Report**

The Chairman presented the Report of Trustees for 2016-17. He emphasised that, as with any report of this nature, it could only include key highlights and achievements for the year, and he encouraged everyone to read it in order to understand the extensive work of WWT.

After six decades of support for the organisation as Patron, HM The Queen had stepped down from a number of her charities, including WWT. HRH the Prince of Wales had stepped up to take over her role as Patron, therefore continuing a strong historical link with the Royal Family. WWT had been extremely pleased to welcome HRH to Slimbridge in November 2016, to help celebrate the Trust's 70th anniversary, and WWT was grateful for the time he spent with staff, volunteers and supporters. The change in role of Patron left the Trust with the task of seeking a new President, and this was underway.

The Chairman commented that it was of the greatest importance to him to highlight the highly skilled and committed staff and volunteers at the Trust, who take huge credit for the success of WWT, ensuring the organisation's continued progress. As Chairman of Council, he felt extremely fortunate also to be supported by such a great team of Trustees, who provide a wealth of experience and expertise to the organisation.

The Trust's anniversary year was also marked by the start of phase one of an exciting new project, Slimbridge 2020, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project will open Sir Peter Scott's house to the public for the first time, and the outcome of a further funding bid is awaited.

In 2016-17, centres continued to boost visitor engagement by providing great experiences with wetlands and their wildlife, and reaching out to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities was an extremely important direction for the Trust.

The Trust has always been a conservation organisation, and would continue to be so; but another priority for the Trust was to establish wetlands that provide benefits to people and communities, as well as wildlife. In addition, international conservation work was of fundamental importance. The Flight of the Swans was an exciting initiative and more would be heard about that later in the meeting.

Fundraising continued to go from strength to strength, and the Trust remained extremely grateful to supporters for their continued confidence, and especially for legacies which make a massive impact on what can be achieved. The Chairman expressed his thanks for the continued support from members, which enables the Trust to continue passing on the extraordinary legacy of Sir Peter Scott's work to future generations.

**2 Hon Treasurer's comments on the Accounts**

The Chairman introduced Martin Birch, Hon Treasurer, to present the financial highlights from the accounts for 2016-17.

The year was another of considerable success for WWT and it remained the Hon

Treasurer's absolute pleasure to be part of Council to help provide the right balance of support and challenge.

Total income had dipped slightly to £22.4 million, but expenditure had risen and legacies had returned to more normal levels. A key component of the Trusts income to support conservation programmes came from membership, and this had risen by 1.6%. Membership income had also risen by 6% to £7.1m. Income from the shops and restaurants was just short of £5m, and £1.7m was received in legacies. Grants and financial support were received from governments and other organisations like the People's Postcode Lottery and the European Union, and from corporates, like Eversheds.

Visitors to Centres reached approximately one million for the second year running. Investment in infrastructure and campaigns had helped encourage people to visit. Creation of the Thames Water H2O facility in London provided a multi-functional space, including state of the art facilities for school groups and events; and the Lego and Dusty Duck trails were positively received.

The Hon Treasurer commented that members were the bedrock of WWT, giving volume to its campaigning voice, and it could not achieve what it does without them. 2016-17 saw an increase in member numbers, facilitated by providing additional training, promoting memberships through the website, developing a communications journey and rolling out Wi-Fi at all centres. Existing members were encouraged to sign up for gift aid and investment was made in digital platforms, but it was not easy to recruit new members and existing members were ever more important to the Trust.

Positive feedback was received following the refurbishment of the restaurant at Slimbridge, and a continued focus on training ensured all staff have the skills to fill the highest standards of customer service.

WWT Consulting Ltd continued to provide innovative wetland advice to governments and other significant institutes across the world, including Ras Al Khor in Dubai, the first Ramsar site in one of the world's busiest cities.

In terms of reserves, the majority was invested with UBS and a decision had been made to realise some gains in order to invest in a wider range of improvements at centres and support a wider spread of conservation programmes. The Trust was tendering for a new fund manager, and appointed its first sustainability manager in 2016-17.

The Hon Treasurer thanked his Council colleagues, WWT Management Board, staff, volunteers and the members for their generous support, making it possible for all to be custodians to thriving wetlands and wildlife. He also expressed his thanks to the Finance team, and particularly to Nicola Spencer, Director of Finance and Support Services.

The Hon Treasurer invited questions, which are set out below along with their responses.

- **Many organisations are having some difficulties with pension funds. Where does WWT stand in relation to staff pensions?**

The Hon Treasurer commented that it was true, many organisations were facing the

challenge of defined pension schemes in an environment of low interest rates, but WWT was in a very strong position. The full cost would only be known in time, but a recovery plan was in place, and he believed that Council shared his view that the Trust was in a strong position.

- **Whilst visitor numbers are on a par with similar visitor attractions, there have been some significant swings up and down, and are there any particular reasons for why this would be?**

Ruth Seymour, Director of Marketing & Supporter Development, responded that it mostly depended on what promotions were taking place in the year. A lot came down to visitor marketing promotions with families, and the 'Lego effect' had a significant impact. Differences in marketing success and local press noise could also influence visitor numbers. It was planned to put more emphasis on things that weren't just aimed at families, and numbers would balance out over time.

**The receipt of the Report and Accounts was proposed by Peter Wallis and seconded by Roger Schofield. Members voted to accept receipt.**

6. **To re-appoint Messrs. Mazars of 90 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6DP, as auditors and to authorise Council to agree their remuneration**

a) **Auditor's comments**

Apologies were sent for auditor absence and no comments were received.

b) **Re-appointment of auditors**

Re-appointment of the auditors was proposed by Peter Wallis, seconded by David Wilkins and the vote was carried.

7. **Questions (raised with the Chairman prior to the meeting)**

No questions were raised prior to the meeting. The Chairman invited questions from the floor. The questions and their responses are set out as follows.

- **Annual membership is remarkably good value for money, but single admission can be off putting. Has any thought been given to a discounted awareness day to encourage people to join?**

Ruth Seymour, Director of Marketing & Supporter Development, responded that the Trust offers a variety of promotions and that a discounted admission rate is available online. Prices are being considered at every centre and feedback is welcomed.

- **Why do restaurant costs vary between centres?**

Ian Wilson, Director of Operations, explained that costs are balanced across the Centres, but a degree of flexibility is needed to account for variations in local economies to remain competitive and offer a range of options.

## **8. Long Service Award**

It was The Chairman's pleasure to announce that a long service award had been given to Baz Hughes, Head of Conservation Action at WWT Slimbridge. Baz has been instrumental in saving the Madagascar pochard and in the black-tailed godwit breeding programme. Arrangements were being made for him to be presented with a gift by the Chief Executive.

## **9. Chief Executive's address**

The Chief Executive welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated how wonderful it was to see everyone in attendance. He reiterated the Chairman's opening remarks that the report could only provide highlights of the year, but it gave a great deal of insight into the breadth of work going on at the Trust. It was a good time to reflect on the year gone by and on the future direction of the organisation.

There were a few things that had made an enormous impact, but specifically, he recalled the time Kevin Peberdy, Chief Operating Officer, had first come to see him about a potential project to mitigate against 'coastal squeeze' and the effect of rising sea levels in the Steart peninsula. It represented a complete departure from what the organisation had been doing up until that point and was a big commitment, but incredibly exciting and something that would shift the organisation to a new level.

Everyone could see the potential and the go ahead was received to design a major achievement, now known as Steart Marshes. The work put in by the project manager to liaise with local people was exemplary and led to a strong support group in the community. This went right back to Sir Peter Scott's notion of relating nature to people's lives, and launched the Trust's thinking into a new space that is now referred to as 'working wetlands'.

Steart Marshes is now a place that people really enjoy visiting and has been successful in multiple functions. Localised flooding issues have been mitigated, the environment has been improved and children now have an understanding of how a natural system can solve flood problems.

The project has given the Trust more influence than expected, and in August 2017, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove MP, chose to visit Steart Marshes with the Chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Howard Boyd, and the Chair of the Parliamentary Select Committee, Neil Parish MP. Mr Gove stayed for three hours and has since made various references to his visit. The project has also had international influence. Delegates who attended a conference in Panjin, China, want to know more about the UK's experience and the Director General of the State Forestry Commission plans to visit the site in 2018.

The Chief Executive went on to highlight the continuing importance of species work, a more traditional aspect of the Trust's work. The Flight of the Swan's project took the organisation to a completely different place and reached people that the Trust had not had contact with before. The spoon-billed sandpiper project was another fascinating project and the head starting work done in the Russian Tundra had brought a completely new approach to the work back in England. Species conservation could open the door to bigger things, and the project at Lake Sofia in Madagascar was typical of the change in thinking needed to connect and engage with people and set the standard for future working.

The Chief Executive expressed how very proud he is of the skills base in the organisation and of the passionate, committed people, destined to make a real impact around the world. He thanked the members for their support and assured them they were going to see the organisation make a huge difference in the future.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his address and invited questions. The questions and their responses are set out below.

- **How does WWT choose which projects to progress and how is that co-ordinated with other organisations working in similar areas?**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Trust keeps a close watching brief and works very strongly with other organisations such as The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The Chief Executive is part of the Management Committee for the East Asian-Australasian Flyways Partnership (EAAFP), and numerous other non-governmental organisations are also involved in that.

- **It was pleasing to hear about the global success of WWT, but were UK based projects being considered in order to raise the profile of the Trust and generate more interest in membership?**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Trust had recently approved a five year conservation strategy with an emphasis on UK orientated projects. The Chairman added that the membership had seen the first element of this with the black-tailed godwit work being carried out at Welney on the Ouse Washes.

The Chief Executive confirmed there was also an increased focus on urban areas in the strategy, and there was a massive opportunity to address flooding in urban areas with sustainable drainage systems. The Chairman concurred, and added that the Salt Hill Stream project in Slough was a perfect example of how localised surface water flooding issues could be solved whilst enhancing the environment for biodiversity and for people.

#### **10. Marsh Award for Wetland Conservation 2017**

The Chief Executive introduced Fenland farmer Andrew Green, and congratulated him on his extraordinary achievements at Kingfishers Bridge, Cambridgeshire. Mr Green had transformed 250 acres of intensively farmed fields into meadows, reedbeds and a lake.

Mr Green expressed his thanks to Brian Marsh of the Marsh Christian Trust, Martin Spray and Dr Dafila Scott, and highlighted some of the site's achievements. It was 23 years since Sir Peter Scott and Dr Dafila Scott encouraged him to develop the site, and since then, 225 different bird species and 420 different plant taxa have been recorded. It was the first place where Bitterns had bred successfully in Cambridgeshire, and 98% of available resources are used for habitat management and creation. The sward is managed by grazing animals, water buffalo, highland cattle and ponies and the site hosts 400 lapwing from March to July. The project continues to learn and show outcomes to receive support. Visitors are welcomed and more information can be found on the project's website.

The Chief Executive then presented Mr Green with the Marsh Award for Wetland

Conservation. The award, run in partnership by the Marsh Christian Trust and WWT, honours exceptional individual achievement in local wetland conservation.

**11. Staff presentations**

Staff gave presentations as follows:

- Lorna Fox, Learning Advisor, on formal learning work
- Sacha Dench, Creative Consultant, on Flight of the Swans
- Geoff Hilton, Head of Conservation Science, on the black-tailed godwit programme

**12. Chairman closes the meeting**

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their excellent talks and officially closed the meeting at 14:55.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Dench', is written across the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'P' and a distinct 'D'.

