

# Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2024

**Saturday 5th October 2024; 12:00-13:00; Skipton Town Hall**

The Chair of the Board of Trustees, Jo Webb, led the proceedings and chaired the AGM.

*Please note: All voting on the reported in the Minutes was undertaken by post prior to the meeting.*

## **1. Apologies for Absence**

Jo Webb noted apologies had been received from Trustee, Alastair Fitter.

## **2. Minutes of the AGM 2023**

It was reported to Members that the draft minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 7th October 2023 at Manor Rooms, Drewtons received the approval of the Board at a meeting on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and confirmed for inclusion for voting at the AGM on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024. The document was available on Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's website from 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2024 and hard copies available by request.

On this matter, members voted 334 for, 0 against and there were 16 abstentions. Therefore, the motion was approved.

## **3. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024**

Jo Webb reported the Annual Report and Accounts gained the approval of the Board at the meeting on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024, were made available on the website from 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2024 with hardcopies by request. The motion asking Members to approve these documents was originally proposed by Jo Webb and seconded by Martin Randle.

Mick Armitage, the Trust's Honorary Treasurer commended the Annual Report and Accounts to Members and provided an outline of the Finance and Risk Committee's work, risks for the Trust and mitigation plans.

Rachael Bice, CEO provided a short overview on the Trust's work in 23/24, emphasising the breadth of work undertaken by the Trust, the collaboration required to achieve our outcomes and the work being done to both grow and modernise the organisation.

Darren Tiffney, Director of Finance and Central Services, reported on the financial performance of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust during the year to 31 March 2024, highlighting:

- The past 12 months saw the Trust steward and deliver ambitious and challenging landscape scale programmes, prepare for an operational shift in the management of our nature discovery centres, continued investment in the infrastructure of our nature reserves (including the costly care that surrounds ash die back) and the blossoming of volunteer and engagement activities.

- The outward facing work was coupled with a drive to modernise the organisation from within and drive efficiencies and a programme of continuous improvement.
- The Trust has continued to grow, total income for the year was approximately £14m (which is a 15% increase on the previous year and 9% higher than originally forecast). Unrestricted Income was £3.8m for the year, a 7% drop on the same figure posted last year, primarily due to a reduction in legacies, overall, the income figures demonstrate the Trust's continued stability.
- A large increase to £9.5m from £8.3m in charitable activities; largely from grant funded work with significant sums from Nature for Climate and Landscape Recovery amongst others.
- Trading income has held consistent from last year at £0.5m. Admissions and retail have modestly grown from 22/23.
- Investments rebounded from last year's small loss to a £342k gain, via ethical asset funds CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities) and Eden Tree fund managers.
- There has been a rise of 7% in our membership income, £1.5m in donations, (double the figure from last year) but also £80k in appeals.
- The Trust gratitude to those supporters who left £580k in legacies to the Trust during the year.
- Expenditure on nature recovery activity has increased relative to the activity required by the income raised, with comparable spending in fundraising and membership, our advocacy and policies department (strategy) marine, with increased investment in reserves and public engagement.
- Investment in business partnering functions increased to ensure administrative teams could provide appropriate financial management, H&S, Facilities, HR, IT, the offices we work from and the vehicles we drive.
- The end of year debtor sum for the Accounts stood at £5.35m an unusually large sum, due to claims process for the large Nature for Climate programme being undertaken in the Dales, North Pennines and Humberhead levels. This debtor sum has improved by £4.60m.
- Working at scale represents a challenge that requires a professional and forensic approach project management and accounting.
- The Trust finished the year with Net Assets of over £17.77m – made up of General unrestricted funds, restricted funds, designated funds and fixed asset funds. The Trust's reserves are largely made up of Fixed Assets - land and property.
- At 31 March 2024 the Trust had Restricted Fund balances of £6.56m – an increase of £0.75m on the previous year. These funds are restricted for specific purposes, to be spent in the current year or support activities in future periods as set out in each restriction.
- The General Unrestricted Financial Reserves are £1.31m, £140k down on prior year. General Unrestricted Financial Reserves are funds available for the Trust to freely use in accordance with its charitable objectives although also represent a key part of the Trust's financial safety net, supporting cash flow and mitigating against risks and financial pressures.
- Holding sufficient reserves to ensure the Trust remains financially robust, proportionate to the scale and mix of its activities at any point in time is governed by the Reserves Policy. The Trust holds £1.2m of unrestricted funds in accordance with the policy.
- For 24/25 the Trust has approved budget a budget that will result in a reduction of £288k to reserves.

Darren thanked the Trust's Honorary Treasurer, Mick Armitage, and the finance and risk committee for their support during the year, his team in finance for their incredible dedication to the Trust, and all members, supporters and organisations who have funded the Trust during the year for their ongoing support.

Jo Webb thanked the speakers for their presentations and reported that members voted 338 for, 0 against and there were 9 abstentions. Therefore, the Annual Report and Accounts were approved.

#### **4. Appointment of Auditors**

Members were asked to vote to support the recommendation to appoint Armstrong Watson as the Trust's auditors for 2024/25. This motion was originally proposed by Martin Randle and seconded by Michael Graham

Members voted 340 for 1 against and 7 abstentions. This motion was approved.

#### **5. Appointment of Vice-President**

A proposal to appoint Prof Alastair Fitter CBE FRS as a Vice-President had been made to Members. Members voted 341 for, 2 against and 2 abstentions resulting in his appointed as Vice-President. Alastair was unable to attend the meeting, so sent a warm and inspiring video message in response, thanking members and praising the work of the Trust.

Prior to closing formal proceeding before taking questions, Jo highlighted it was her last AGM as Chair and she was stepping down as a Trustee having come to the end of her term. Jo reflected she had been inspired by her time at the Trust, and being Chair had been a privilege and a fascinating role. Looking ahead she reported the Trust has good governance, with a strong cohort of Trustees and using the Board robust process, Vice Chair Nick Perks will be taking on the Chair for the Trust full Board support from 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

#### **6. Next meeting**

It was announced the Trusts next Members Day and AGM will be held on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

#### **7. Question and Answer Session**

Jo Webb thanked members for voting and handed over to Nick Perks to chair the Q&A session. Nick introduced the panel; Rachael Bice, Martin Slater, Mick Armitage (Hon treasurer), Amanda Spivack, Darren Tiffney and Jo webb. Questions were taken from the floor.

- **Do you carry out ethical screening of corporate members? This includes Syngenta, as Europe's largest manufactures for pesticides and chemicals, many of which are banned across Europe. I'm concerned to see them listed as a corporate member and about the risk to the Trust of being named, the potential for greenwashing.**

Amanda Spivack (AS) responded, explaining an Ethical Fundraising Policy has been introduced to the Trust which screen new relationships and will be used to assess existing relationships to assess their ongoing suitability. Therefore, the Syngenta relationship will be reviewed using this process. We are aware that historically in the course of our operations we have used products made by Syngenta and therefore, will be reviewing our relevant operational activities as well as the relationship with the company.

- **I want to express my thanks to Jo Webb, and for today's event. Living graveyards project – can this be reinstated? Churchyards are good for connectivity and for people, and could be designated as Local Wildlife Sites, as part of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.**

AS reported on activity undertaken with Leeds Diocese as a part of Team Wilder where we are exploring opportunities to work more closely together, including the reinvigoration of living churchyard partnerships as these were very successful. Although noting capacity will be resource dependant, AS said contact from potential partners was welcomed.

- **As someone who has made donations eg for peatfix, referring to Darren's slides; there was a decrease in unrestricted funds. How much of an impact does that make on YWT performance?**

Darren Tiffney replied, noting how important unrestricted funds are for the Trust, also explaining that restricted funding when providing for full cost recovery is equally beneficial. DT reflected in 23/24 individual contributions have increased, while legacy income has decreased, however, legacies in the previous year were unusually high.

- **What plans does the Trust have for species reintroductions?**

Martin Slater (MS) answered reflecting on the Trusts existing activities to reintroduce species such as the water germander noted in an earlier presentation. He highlighted the ambition of the Wildlife Trusts to see the new Government to approve the wild release of beavers, therefore the Trust is preparing for this. MS also shared that the Trust has a species translocation/ reintroduction policy which will govern focus for the next 10 years, which could have exciting implications for other mammal reintroductions and recovery.

- **Blanket bog maps often reflect where wind turbines could also go – do we have a sense of where these could compete in the future?**

MS answered, reflecting on this challenging issue for the Trust as there may be conflicts between renewable proposals and for upland blanket bog restoration. MS highlighted while supporting the need for renewable energy and the move to net zero, infrastructure needs to be in the right place, at the right time and circumstances. The Trust seeks to influence this through the work of the peatland restoration and planning teams, by monitoring applications and will respond as needed.

- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – what's the Trust's position is YWT position particularly for marine restoration?**

MS commented BNG is a great opportunity for wildlife recovery highlighting the recent recruitment of a new BNG specialist to help realise this potential and ensure any delivery by the Trust is robust and ethically sound. The new staff member will consider opportunities to deliver credits on our reserves and other people's land. In the marine environment seagrass restoration is the significant opportunity which is being developed.