

Annual General Meeting 2024 Draft Minutes

Saturday 4th October, 10am – 12pm online via Zoom

Agenda

The Chair of the Board of Trustees, Nick Perks, led the proceedings and chaired the AGM.

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

Sharne McMillan, Director of Nature Recovery, shared an update on a new report: *Bringing Yorkshires Nature Back: A blueprint for implementing nature's recovery in Yorkshire.*

Craig Bennett, the Wildlife Trust CEO, brought the meeting to a close with his keynote address in which he shared the importance of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to the wider Wildlife Trust movement.

1. Apologies for Absence

Nick Perks noted apologies had been received from our former Chair, Professor Mike Cooke and current Trustee, Neil Bramley.

2. Minutes of the AGM 2024

It was reported to Members that the draft minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 5th October 2024 at Skipton Town Hall, received the approval of the Board at a meeting on Thursday 24th July 2025 and were confirmed for inclusion for voting at the 2025 AGM. Proposed by Nick Perks and seconded by Ceri Williams. The document was available on Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's website from the start of August and hard copies were available by request.

On this matter, members voted 225 for, 0 against and there were 16 abstentions. Therefore, the motion was approved.

3. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025

a. Highlights of the Year 24/25

Nick Perks handed over to Rachael Bice, CEO of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, who provided a short overview on the Trust's work in 24/25, highlighting, among other things, the importance of the publication of the State of Yorkshires Nature Report; the Wild Ingleborough campaign; successful community engagement around #TeamWilder and Wildlife Gardening and looked to the future highlighting the Woodlands for the Future campaign. Rachael concluded by thanking Members for their attendance at the AGM and their vital and ongoing support.

Nick thanked Rachael and invited Mick Armitage, the Trust's Honorary Treasurer to comment on the Annual Report and Accounts.

b. Annual Report and Accounts

Mick Armitage noted that it was an honour to have spent another year as Honorary Treasurer to the Trust. Income has grown on the previous year, an 18% increase. Funds have been targeted on larger scale work. Mick introduced Darren Tiffney, Director of Finance and Central Services, to report on the financial performance of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust during the year to 31 March 2025.

4. Presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts

Darren Tiffney, provided an overview of the financial performance of the Trust, highlighting:

- Acquisition of Park Gill and Dryham Farm at North Cave. Expansion of Brockadale.
- Continued investment in existing nature reserves, river restoration, marine programme and species reintroductions.
- Over 1,400 registered volunteers giving 48,000 hours of their time to the Trust last year.
- A 51% increase in income over the last 5 years.
- The total income for the year 2024/5 was approximately £16.6m (which is a 18% increase on the previous year and 25% higher than originally forecast). Unrestricted Income was £4.4m for the year, a 15% increase on the same figure posted last year, primarily due to an increase in legacies, charitable work and agricultural subsidies.
- Income came from a large increase in grant funded work, demonstrating the Trust working at scale in programmes such as Nature for Climate and Landscape Recovery.
- Trading income has held constant from last year at £0.5m.
- The investment portfolio suffered a small loss in 24/25, entirely down to world economic uncertainty in the Jan-Mar 25 period. The loss was reversed in the first quarter of this year, but investment performance is still very volatile.
- There was a rise of 4.5% in membership income and £750k in legacies.
- Increase in project income with corresponding increase in project spending, in landscapes and marine.
- Our overall debtor amounts last year stood at £5.35m. This is a considerable sum, so we have been pleased to see this reduced to £3.72m in the 24/25 year. As of last week, we have banked £3.55m of the £3.72m
- The Trust finished the year with Net Assets of over £18.2m.
- General Unrestricted Financial Reserves are £1.33m, £24k up on prior year. The Trust has a reserves policy to hold £1.2m of unrestricted funds.
- The Trust has a current approved budget that will result in a loss of £188k to see this surplus eroded in the current financial year, and this is still the case. We anticipate that it will return the Trust to below that financial reserves target.
- Our programme of moving to agreeing break even budgets, a challenge for any charity, is progressing at exactly the pace we hoped and intended for, and we should be at that stage in the next 2 years.
- Further information is available within the full Annual Report & Accounts which is available on the Trust website or via the Charity Commission website or on Companies House.

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 our finance volunteer, Warren Meads, for his invaluable input every year in the production of the accounts. Darren also thanked the Members, supporters and organisations who have funded the Trust during the year and for their ongoing support.

Mick Armitage thanked Darren before noting that he has no hesitation in commending the Annual Report and the Accounts 24/25 for approval by our Members. The Annual Report & Accounts were approved by the Board of Trustees at the Board of Trustees meeting on Thursday 24th July 2025. They were available on the website from the start of August and as hardcopies by request. The motion asking Members to approve these documents was originally proposed by Mick Armitage and seconded by Michael Graham. Members were asked to support the recommendation from the Board of Trustees to approve the Annual Report and Accounts 24/25.

On this matter members voted 229 for, 0 against and there were 12 abstentions. The motion is therefore approved.

5. Appointment of Auditors

Mick then moved on to the appointment of the Auditors. Members were asked to vote to support the recommendation to appoint Armstrong Watson as the Trust's auditors for 2025/26. This motion was originally proposed by Mick Armitage and seconded by Michael Graham.

Members voted 226 for 2 against and 13 abstentions. This motion was therefore approved.

Mick thanked everyone who took the time to vote.

6. Election and re-election of Trustees

Nick Perks continued the meeting by outlining the election and re-election of the following Trustees:

Nick Perks – re-election for a further four years

- Proposer: Ceri Williams
- Secunder: Nabil Abbas
- Members voted 226 for, 3 against and there were 12 abstentions. The motion to elect is therefore approved.

Mick Armitage - re-election for a further four years

- Proposer: Nabil Abbas
- Secunder: Michael Graham
- Members voted 225 for, 4 against and there were 12 abstentions. The motion to elect is therefore approved.

Anna Dimitropoulou

- Proposer: Ceri Williams
- Secunder: Nabil Abbas
- Members voted 225 for, 3 against and there were 13 abstentions. The motion to elect is therefore approved.

Suzannah Rockett

- Proposer: Pete Meadows
- Secunder: Michael Graham
- Members voted 223 for, 5 against and there were 13 abstentions. The motion to elect is therefore approved.

Neil Bramley

- Proposer: Michael Graham
- Seconder: Ceri Williams
- Members voted 222 for, 4 against and there were 14 abstentions. The motion to elect is therefore approved.

7. Thanks to Professor Sir John Lawton

Nick Perks expressed an incredibly warm thank you to outgoing President, Professor Sir John Lawton. He observed that it is hard to overstate the contribution Sir John Lawton has made to the Trust. He is stepping down, at his own request, at this AGM. We will dearly miss his steer, incredible knowledge and counsel.

Nick wanted to take this opportunity to mark a very special moment and thank Sir John Lawton for his many years of service to the Trust.

Sir John has been our President for 11 years and has held several positions on our Board including as Trustee and Vice Chairman Yorkshire Wildlife Trust from 2007-2009 and the Chair of our Board from 2009-2014. John is an eminent and incredibly well known and respected ecologist and advisor, the author of the often quoted Lawton Report 'Making Space for Nature' in 2010, and has a string of awards and honours to his name. He's been a strong voice and advocate for nature including our own campaign fighting the development at Askham Bog in 2019. He's been a leading light, and we will miss his regular appearances – though I suspect we will still hear his voice from the sidelines when the mood and opportunity strikes!

Nick then shared some quotes that had been received from long-standing Trust staff and peers across the Movement, reflecting on their outstanding experiences of working with Sir John.

8. Appointment of new President

Nick was delighted to say that Professor Alastair Fitter, our current Vice President, was happy to be put forward to become the President of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

After a long career at the University of York, today Alastair is Professor Emeritus of Ecology. Alastair also has a long history with the Trust. A member for over 50 years, he has also been a member of the Board of Trustees of YWT from 2008-2012 and again from 2016-2024 and advises the Board on ecological and conservation issues. We were overjoyed for him last year when he was awarded the prestigious Cadbury Medal by The Wildlife Trusts. In the last few years, he was closely involved in our successful campaign to save Askham Bog from development, and was very closely involved in the research, publication and promotion of our first State of Yorkshire's Nature report, which provides the evidence base for our Bringing Yorkshire's Nature back, Blueprint document.

The motion was proposed by Nick Perks and seconded by Jane Smart. Members voted 227 for, 2 against and 13 abstentions. Professor Alastair Fitter CBE has therefore been appointed as the new President of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

9. Question and Answer Session

Nick Perks explained that questions had been received in advance, members were also encouraged to put questions in the chat or use the raise hand function in Zoom if they would like to ask a question. Nick commenced the session by addressing the following advance questions:

Why is there never any information about reaching the sites/walks/reserves by public transport in any of your publications? Surely you wish to support sustainability?

Lauren Perthen, Interim Director of Fundraising & Engagement, responded to say that we do not tend to mention public transport in our publications because public transport routes are dynamic and ever changing and quite hard to keep current in print. We absolutely support sustainability and, where our nature reserves are accessible by public transport or cycling, we promote this on our website. We have a webpage dedicated to reserves accessible by public transport with more information on our reserve pages. We also include reserves with cycle parking in the guidebook. Additionally, we successfully lobbied East Yorkshire transport to reinstate the Spurn Explorer bus to Spurn last year. We want our reserves to be accessible by as many people as possible who want to enjoy and experience nature. We recognise that the car will still be better for many people, including busy families or those with reduced mobility, with electric cars best of all and thus we will be expanding electric vehicle infrastructure to support this.

Have any negotiations taken place to offset the impact of a new housing estate that being developed adjacent to the (Staveley) reserve?

Sharne McMillan, Director of Nature Recovery, replied saying that YWT share the concerns of the local people and that the planning team have submitted a comprehensive response to the application outlining a number of potential negative impacts that the development might have on the reserve. We are committed to protecting the reserve and will continue to enhance it and even expand it to ensure that we are protecting and sustaining those important species and habitats that rely on the reserve. As part of these negotiations, we should have received some Section 106 agreement money, but we are still waiting to hear from the council about this. If there is anything members can do to raise it with their ward councillors, we would really appreciate that support.

Carbon offsetting especially around addressing funding of a natural resource that might literally go up in smoke.

Martin Slater answered that YWT does not currently own any peatland sites that would be eligible for the IUCN peatland Code although we are working hard to enter into this and acquire peat sites. The peatland code does recognise that any peatland sites that are creating carbon credits are at risk from natural human risk factors so there is a 20% risk buffer to accommodate things like fires.

Nick Perks then asked if there were any questions from the audience. One was received from the chat:

Why is the raffle (advertised within the Wildlife Yorkshire magazine) payable by cheque only?

Lauren Perthen replied that it is a good question. It is an oversight and we will look into it. Thank you for bringing it to our attention.

Nick Perks, noted that all remaining pre-submitted questions will be answered in writing.

10. Next meeting

It was announced the Trusts next AGM will take place in York on Saturday 3rd October 2026.