



## NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST

### Minutes of the Trust's 97<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024, 6.00pm Held virtually online via Zoom

Present: Patrick Barkham (President)  
Alice Liddle (Chair)  
Lyndsay Whiteman (Treasurer)  
50 Trustees, Members and Staff

In Attendance: Eliot Lyne (Chief Executive Officer)  
Marion Riches (Governance Officer)

The President welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the Trust's 97<sup>th</sup> AGM

#### FORMAL BUSINESS

##### **Resolution 1**

*To confirm the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023*

**Resolution 1: Approved**

##### **Resolution 2**

*To receive the Report of Council and approve the Report and audited Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2024.*

The Treasurer presented a summary of the year's results

**Resolution 2: Approved**

##### **Resolution 3**

*To re-appoint Lovewell Blake as the Trust's auditors and authorise Council to determine their remuneration.*

**Resolution 3: Approved**

##### **Resolution 4**

*To re-elect/elect members of Council of Trustees*

#### Results

*Re-elected:*

Glenn Houchell – 998 votes

*Elected:*

Harry Buscall – 998 votes

Richard Carter – 990 votes

Richard Powell – 998 votes

Bailey Tait – 998 votes

## Resolution 5

*To approve the nomination of Sue Roe as Vice-President*

**Resolution 5: Approved**

The President congratulated all those elected to Council, and stated that the interest of all applicants was very much appreciated.

There being no further business, the President closed the formal part of the AGM.

## INFORMAL BUSINESS

1. The Chair, Alice Liddle, gave her address; a condensed transcript is given below:

“Before I embark on the main theme of my talk, may I pay tribute to a great man, without whom NWT would not be the organisation that it is today. I am talking about Brendan Joyce. We heard the sad news in January that Brendan had died. Brendan was an exceptional person, a man with a vision. He gave so much to Norfolk’s wildlife during over 30 years in conservation. He joined NWT in 1995 as Chief Executive and spent 23 years successfully leading it through many changes, challenges and celebrations. During his time, Brendan saw membership numbers soar from 15,000 to over 35,000. Under his leadership, thousands of acres of land were brought into active conservation management through acquisitions and restoration projects. In his own words, Brendan also viewed ‘education with the same importance as the land management function’ and under his tenure the scale of workshops, publications, community projects and work with schools increased considerably. Brendan continues to be remembered with respect and loyalty by members, staff, volunteers and supporters. He was tireless in his devotion to the wildlife of Norfolk. As was said at his funeral: ‘Many people leave behind a legacy. Brendan leaves a landscape’.

Now to the main theme of my talk: how NWT’s strategy delivers impact. Our strategy – labelled A Wilder Norfolk for All - was officially launched in September 2023. It guides us to 2030 and beyond. We strive to work to the strategy in everything we do.

The goals to achieve the first outcome - **abundant and thriving nature** - are to improve (by increasing the abundance and diversity of wildlife in our land and sea); to expand (by creating more space for nature); and to connect (by connecting wild spaces for nature’s recovery). Just a few of the many highlights: Spoonbills bred at Hickling for the first time in about 400 years; new habitat was created for specialist Brecks flora; and the year saw a substantial increase in the natterjack toad population at Syderstone Common. There are so many other examples I could share with you but some of them are:

- The work we have done at Thompson Common to turn agricultural land into nature-rich habitat, particularly with the restoration of pingos for northern pool frogs and other rare wildlife
- The adaptation of our Cley reserve to mitigate the effect of a changing climate by realigning and restoring the New Cut (a very deep drain) to counteract shingle movement and postpone the ingress of saltwater into our freshwater habitats
- The improvement to wetlands near Kings Lynn and the restoration of Norfolk’s precious peatlands alongside the Fens East Peat Partnership
- Various work to restore and connect priority habitats. We offered advice on 61 County Wildlife Sites; re-surveyed 60 grassland sites; restored meadows, fen and ponds as part of our Network for Nature project; worked with the County Council to protect 120 Roadside Nature Reserves; and are returning agricultural land to woodland at Foxley.

The second outcome of our strategy is to see **people valuing nature** so that they are connected to, inspired by and taking action for nature. We aim to break down barriers and allow people to take more action, we aim to grow a movement of active wildlife supporters and we aim to enable meaningful connections for people and nature. There are all sorts of ways we address these aims. For instance:

- We launched a pilot initiative, Wilder Schools, to facilitate the use of school grounds for wildlife, learning and wellbeing.
- We have a Wilder Wardens scheme for younger people aged between 11 and 25.
- Nearly 300 people attended one of our 20 sessions of our Wilder Communities workshops, a scheme now in its third year.
- Our Nextdoor Nature programme continues to demonstrate the value of empowering communities to make changes where they live or work.
- And one of our flagship projects has been Sweet Briar Marshes. Since opening in Spring this year, we have held over 50 events on the site.
- Another flagship project – with more to come – involves our vision for Hickling. In October last year, we bought the Pleasure Boat Inn to develop our vision for the area's wildlife and people. The pub provides us with an opportunity to create new ways to introduce people to nature and the landscape.
- In all, we connected over 11,000 children and young people on our reserves or elsewhere, benefitted from 2,000 hours of conservation work from 380 volunteers, (work for which we are very grateful) and ran 37 churchyard nature activities.
- And, at the close of the year, there were 37,905 members of NWT, the highest it had ever been. If that doesn't demonstrate that people value nature, I don't know what does.

Our third outcome is to see NWT being leaders for nature, ensuring that we are an influential, resilient and a collaborative organisation. We strive to build on our foundations and systems to enable success, scale up to be strong and influential and empower leadership and collaboration.

Some of the foundational work is inward-facing: for instance, we have

- Installed a new finance system
- Reviewed our pay structure in a positive step to ensure people are paid fairly and we can attract talent
- Formed an EDI working group
- Instituted a staff forum

At the same time, we continue to look outwards. You will be aware of our campaign against the proposed Norwich Western Link road which threatens the largest UK population of barbastelle bats as well as ancient woodland and other wildlife. Our collaborative approach is epitomised by the project at Sweet Briar Marshes: we asked local communities and members what they wanted to see in this important Norwich nature reserve, listening to some 1,000 people. We shared our vision with Aviva, major donors, Norwich City Council and the Greater Norwich Growth Board receiving positive responses and now Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society is conducting monitoring work over a two-year period.

A key feature of being resilient is, of course, making sure our financial position is strong. We are fortunate in having the support of so many members and of our corporate supporters – we never take you for granted. From over 90 Investors in Wildlife to major sponsors for projects, the commercial sector contributes hugely to the success of our work. We are also very grateful to those who leave money to NWT in their wills or make donations.

I'm coming to the end but have left the most important until last. I would like to say thank you. A thank you to all our members, donors, supporters, investors, grant providers, all our volunteers, ambassadors, vice-presidents and all those other organisations who work with us. And an overwhelming thank you too to the whole of the expert, dedicated staff within NWT. I hope you know what a positive difference each one of you makes to our work and towards realising our vision and aims. We are so grateful to you”.

2. The Chair of Trustees handed over to Eliot Lyne, CEO, to give his address, of which a condensed transcript is given below:

“Good evening friends, colleagues, supporters, staff and volunteers. Many thanks for attending our AGM this evening.

Alice has just given you an excellent overview of the things that we achieved in 2023/24. My role is to look forwards.

Last year I outlined our new strategy, which we had just launched at the time and 2023/24 was the first full year in delivery of that strategy.

I mentioned last year that the challenge we face is grave and serious. Many of you here tonight will understand that and will also understand why, in response to that, we need to take bold and innovative action, some of which entails additional risk, which itself often leads to greater opportunity for nature. This doesn't happen overnight, and it takes time to change and transform an approach and an organisation. We are being careful to preserve and build on the things we are good at – our core activities – and add to this with new approaches and innovative ideas.

The world we live is becoming more uncertain. This week's US presidential election result will create more challenge in our collective response to the climate and nature crisis for example. But we remain focused and positive in the long game. The climate transition is baked in to economic expectations and we must ensure that we continue to work with business in particular to drive nature markets forwards, regardless of short-term government volatility.

We continue to manage our nature reserves as we have done for the last 98 years, and will continue to do. We are challenging ourselves about how we are doing this. Our monitoring framework is starting to gather pace and is a really exciting development.

In terms of creating more space for nature, we have recently completed the purchase of an additional 28 hectares adjacent to Foxley Wood (thus increasing the size of the wood by up to 20%) and are in advanced negotiations on two other land parcels in other areas totaling some 50 hectares. We are also in negotiations on our first funding package around new “green finance” markets.

We are starting to build momentum with our work in the wider countryside, and we'll be looking at an exciting range of new projects around pond and meadow restoration together with building on our recent work in the Claylands area of South Norfolk.

In delivering Outcome 2, I've been delighted with our progress so far this year. The first step in ensuring that people value nature is to widen access. Our acquisition of the Pleasure Boat Inn was designed to do this and early signs are very encouraging. We purchased the land and buildings last year, and this was a strategic acquisition which complements our purchase of the wider Hickling estate in 2017. We renovated the building this year and it opened in August, taking advantage of the summer trade. This acquisition was the key to unlocking the wider investment that is planned at Hickling over the coming 5-10 years, which aims to enhance the whole of the Upper Thurne landscape for nature (working with farmers and landowners), enhance the visitor experience and deliver sustainable local livelihoods and financial return to the Trust from owned assets.

We are breaking down barriers to nature with our work at Sweet Briar Marshes, enabling greater access for people with mobility and other impairments. We are following this up with

an accessibility audit of our entire nature reserves network which will allow us to prioritise investment in the areas with the greatest benefit.

We did our first ever audience research last year, which gave us a huge insight into who our audience currently is (our members and supporters). And this year we are following this up with a more forward-looking piece of work which aims to help us understand how we can broaden audience reach and strengthen and deepen our engagement with current audiences.

In terms of becoming a Leader for Nature, some of this work is progressing well, and some is in its infancy. We have progressed well with building our foundations. Our new finance system is bedding in, and our new website enables us to do so much more in terms of connecting with people. We're also planning a major modernization of our server and online filing which is essential for keeping us effective and efficient.

Building on our foundations, we are scaling up to be strong, influential and resilient. We put some effort into creating a general election campaign and connecting with prospective parliamentary candidates, and have continued building relationships with new MPs post-election. We are in the process of building an internal advisory offer which will better allow us to provide advice to farmers and landowners across all disciplines within the Trust – and I'll say more about this later. Through all of this our financials are strong and being well managed.

Finally, although slow to get going, we are starting to build important relationships with major corporates, MPs, local authorities and opinion formers outside our rather narrow previous confines. It is important that we build a consensus with key decision makers within Norfolk and beyond about the importance of nature for its own sake, and for our future prosperity, health and happiness.

But although we are making huge progress, we are not yet winning. Why do I say this, because what we want to achieve, nature's recovery, is not yet showing through in the data. I think we need to find a new way to work together on nature and the rest of this talk will be about that.

There are four big shifts that we need to make in order to make this a reality. First, we need to embrace what is known as "triple bottom line" thinking. Where Planet, Prosperity and People are balanced which leads to truly sustainable outcomes. Second, we need fewer disparate projects and more holistic programmes. Focussing on clear and strategic outcomes for the long term. We hope that the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy might provide that county-wide coherence.

Thirdly, we need to grow out from our nature reserves. First, we need to make these the best they can be and then we need to use them as the ark, the source, the wellspring of a new landscape-scale approach to bringing nature back, which is rooted and based in our communities, our farms, our companies, schools and towns, the length and breadth of Norfolk.

And finally, we can't do this on our own. We must create and build new relationships and partnerships. We have a huge range of active organizations around nature. We have the highest concentration of Landscape Recovery projects in England. The inaugural Norfolk Landscapes Conference in October with over 300 attendees was testament to that energy and enthusiasm.

To ensure that we are as best placed as possible to succeed, we are just starting the creation of a new advisory offer. This will be a new way of bringing our current and new skills to the market.

The reality is that we have far more opportunities than we can possibly respond to. This is a great sign that nature's recovery is being taken seriously and the tide of history, the thrust of policy has turned in our favour. But is also frustrating to all of us that we are not able to do more.

We are hugely thankful though with the support that we currently have. We know that we, together with others, can turn the corner for nature's recovery in Norfolk and create a county where nature is abundant and thriving and valued. Together we can do this, but we need your continued support and that of many others to join us on that journey. I'd like to close by thanking you for being here."

3. The CEO handed over to the President, Patrick Barkham to give his address, of which a condensed transcript is given below:

"At last year's AGM, I spoke about how the sense of a climate and nature crisis can seem overwhelming and depressing for all of us.

I'd love to report that there are now no massive geo-political events that make us feel anxious or helpless! And I'd love to tell you that nature is no longer in decline. Unfortunately the past year has seen a raft of bad news for specific species here in the UK. We've also seen it with our own eyes this summer, with the worrying absence of beetles, bees, butterflies and wasps in our gardens (although I managed to get stung by nine last week).

But over the past year in my day-job reporting about environmental issues for the Guardian I've also seen with my own eyes an astonishing presence – a great abundance of a species that only emerged in recent years, in an evolutionary blink-of-an-eye.

This species is the nature-restoring human being.

I say this with genuine conviction: there has never been a moment in the history of our planet when so many people care for its fate and are now starting to take action to save and restore species other than ourselves.

You are all taking action and you all care. That's why you're here tonight. Thank you. Later we will hear from two fantastic, inspirational Norfolk farmers, who have been taking brilliant action to restore nature on their farms.

All year, I've seen how desperate people are to take part in the restoration of nature across our country. I wrote a story back in July about Beds, Cambs and Northants (BCN) Wildlife Trust raising money to buy a farm, Strawberry Hill, which was accidentally rewilded 35 years ago and is now a haven for nightingales. In a flash, word spread through my Guardian article and on social media, and BCN raised the additional £1.5 million they needed to secure the whole 350 acre site.

You can see this public enthusiasm for restoring nature enables all the Wildlife Trusts to ratchet up their ambitions and action – we see it this autumn in Cumbria Wildlife Trust's purchase of the mountain of Skiddaw; and in the Trusts' acquisition of the colossal 9,500-acre Rothbury estate in Northumberland – a rewilding project three times the size of the famous Knepp Estate in West Sussex.

As our chair, Alice Liddle, will outline in her speech, we at NWT have been busier than ever with a range of ambitious projects in the last financial year. And our chief executive Eliot Lyne may give us a hint of the exciting near-future in his speech. All I can say is: watch this space here in Norfolk!

What can we do as individuals? Of course we can all join in with national campaigns and international causes – as we see with the thousands attending the recent Restore Nature

and Clean Up our Rivers marches in London. But as I said last year, I passionately believe that the best antidote to those feelings of helplessness and anxiety brought on by the global challenges we face is to take local action.

Acting locally means we protect the places we know and love best, we link up with like-minded people, we find community, and we see the positive impact of our actions. Watching nature bounce back in our local patch – what a feeling this is!

So your support for Norfolk Wildlife Trust is absolutely vital for us, but I hope it is vital – life-affirming – for you too.

The role of NWT President is largely ornamental but as I'm not the prettiest face I wanted to share with you two little things I've been doing for the Trust this autumn.

The first begins here, on the edge of Foxley Wood. Several key NWT folk – Kate Adlridge and Nick Acheson – had mentioned the idea of collecting acorns to grow oaks to mark our centenary in 2026. So I decided to go to Foxley to pick some up last month. NWT's Steve Collin warned me that the grey squirrels had eaten most of them, and he was right. But after a long and fruitless search, I finally found some Foxley-edge oaks that the squirrels had somehow missed. I ended up collecting a bucket-load. I've planted 220 acorns in pots in my garden. They are netted and protected from squirrels and mice. I'm not counting my acorns before they've sprouted but check in with me at next year's AGM – I'm hoping to have 100 Foxley oaks ready for us to plant in 2026. I'm also joining an NWT committee to plan our centenary and I'd love to hear your ideas for how we can best celebrate it.

The other small thing I've done for nature recently is to get NWT into a place where perhaps it hasn't been before – on the football pitch.

This is the Bure Valley Bengals U13s team. They are a girls football team and my daughter plays for them. They needed a new kit, so I paid for it, and put NWT's logo on the front. You probably can't see the logo very clearly in this picture so here is Esme modelling the shirt. I must stress, this is something I did myself, at no cost to NWT. It's taught me an important lesson: nature has hidden powers. Esme's team have never been very good but, with the tern on their shirt, for the first time ever in four years, they suddenly won five matches in a row!

I appreciate these are small, random-seeming actions but there's a connection – both actions are looking positively towards the future. Not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to sponsor a football shirt but we can all plant an acorn. I've got so much pleasure from these acorns, honestly! It's a small, simple, free act that may, hopefully, continue delivering benefits for people and nature far into the future.

As you go about your actions for nature, don't forget something important: to enjoy our natural world in Norfolk.

Last month I took two of my children to Burnham Overy Staithe at dusk to watch the pink-feet fly in to roost. Almost none arrived but we had the most magical experience.

This is Norfolk. This is our county. A flat place in one the most nature-depleted and the most densely-populated country in Europe. Isn't it glorious? Isn't it special?

And these children – all our children – racing onwards with their lives. They deserve a place that is just as special, or even more special, than the county we know, love and call home.”

#### 4. Presentation of the Sydney Long Medal 2024:

A short film was shown where Dr Anne Edwards was awarded the Sydney Long Medal for 2024 for her outstanding contribution to natural history and conservation in Norfolk.

The President added his congratulations for such a well-deserved award and Anne's huge contribution to natural history and conservation in Norfolk.

#### 5. A number of questions had been received in advance of the meeting and a selection of these, and their answers, are shown below:

**Q:** Sweet Briar Marshes - It would be nice to know more re cattle - assume white park cattle with bull, Dexters, Belted Galloway (by gate). Info re Birds and Loos!

**A:** Carefully selected British White cattle from NWT's herd are used to graze the reserve to ensure only animals of good temperament are present on site. It is NWT policy that bulls are not placed on sites where there is public access so there will not be a bull on Sweet Briar. There is a full suite of monitoring in place at Sweet Briar Marshes and a breeding bird survey is conducted each year.

Part of our vision for Sweet Briar Marshes is to welcome school groups to the site to inspire them to care for our natural world and for it to be an accessible space for everyone to experience nature. Therefore we are currently exploring possible sites for changing places toilets and accessible car parking spaces. There are no plans for these to be on the reserve itself, but close enough to enable those with mobility or other needs and young children to have easy access.

**Q:** As new members we were concerned that the Nominations Group only selected 5 candidates out of 15 for 5 seats. We felt disenfranchised and understand that 10 people rejected did not want to stand independently. It feels a foregone conclusion. How is this the best democratic process?

**A:** In the past couple of years we have improved our Trustee recruitment process and advertised more widely than ever before. This has brought in a greater a number of candidates, and the new process allows the current Board of Trustees to review their skills against what is required on the Board for the coming year(s). This year we had 15 interested parties, which were then shortlisted and the final 5 were selected as the Nominations Group preferred candidates. I agree that this year it may seem peculiar that we are asking members to choose up to 5 people from a selection of 5, but legally we do have to ask the members to vote on all resolutions. All members are able to put themselves forward to become a Trustee as per the terms sets out in our Memorandum & Articles of Association, and those who were unsuccessful in making the Nominations Group preferred candidates list were invited to stand should they so wish. Whilst these unsuccessful candidates decided not to stand this year, it does not prevent them, or any member, from applying in future years.

**Q:** How much money was spent to buy/refurbish the failing pub at Hickling? No mention in this of last years accounts. I guess full expenditure is hidden in 'current assets' or 'other expenditure'. It was never divulged on the press releases meanwhile my local Holme Dunes Reserve lacked the funds (for 2 years) to have a reliable working ATV until this April! Hickling pub project NOT mentioned at all in the 2023-24 or 2022-23 Impact Report - why not?



**A:** Investing in a popular local pub is the first step in allowing us to create new ways to introduce people to the nature, landscape and wildlife of Hickling, including walking routes and a growing programme of boat trips from Staithe.

We will work in partnership with pub tenants, Rick and Felicity Malt, to ensure that the pub works in harmony with the interests of Norfolk Wildlife Trust, including aligning with our core values and playing a valuable role in welcoming people to Hickling Broad and Marshes to enjoy and learn about the area and its special wildlife.

The Pleasure Boat pub was purchased in Oct 23 and refurb carried out March-July 24. The purchase was in the annual accounts but was within the fixed assets schedule, the increase in the value of freehold property we own.

In the annual report we wrote: 'Our Hickling Vision - We purchased the Pleasure Boat Inn at Hickling Staithe to develop our vision for the area's wildlife and people.'

The purchase of the pub, with adjacent buildings, a large car park, public toilets and an associated mooring, complements our existing land and property holdings around Hickling Broad and Marshes.

In addition to reinstating the pub for the community and visitors, we will develop additional visitor facilities at our new site, from which people will be able to find out more about Hickling Broad and its wildlife, as well as book and enjoy boat trips.

Next steps will be to find a suitable business partner to run the pub on our behalf and work alongside the community to develop our 'Hickling Vision'.

In terms of the UTV, (UTV is sit 'beside', ATV is sit 'astride' which we have a policy against using for safety reasons) Holme had a UTV which had an unexpected engine failure that could not be economically repaired so it was a sudden and unexpected loss of the machine. We seconded the Cley UTV up to Holme for some periods while we were trying to secure budget for purchase of a replacement machine for the site.

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A discussion entitled 'The Highs and Lows of Nature-Friendly Farming' hosted by NWT's Helen Baczkowska took place with Olly Birkbeck from Little Massingham Estate and Stuart Mayhew from Old Hall Farm.

The President thanked Olly, Stuart and Helen for their informative and entertaining discussion and thanked everyone for attending the AGM, wishing them all a good evening.