

AGM & Members' Day 2024

Saturday 9th November



Minutes of the 60th Annual General Meeting, held on Saturday 9th November 2024 from 11.00am at Cedars Hall, The Liberty, Wells BA6 2ST

157 members attended the meeting in person with voting carried out through a show of hands. 11 members also attended via Zoom where online voting polls were conducted and are noted in respect of each resolution. 149 proxy votes were recorded in advance of the meeting which are also noted.

1. Welcome and formal apologies received

Rupert Taylor, Chair of the SWT Council, welcomed members to the 2024 AGM, noting that this was the second year it was being held as a hybrid event, with members attending both in person and online. He was joined on stage by Georgia Dent (CEO) and Steve Rogers (Treasurer).

He thanked members for attending and their continued support stating that they were critical to the Charity's success, particularly now when there are so many challenges facing nature and the environment.

Formal apologies were received from Mark Steer (Trustee) and Dudley Cheesman (VP)

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on Saturday 18th November 2023, to be approved

The minutes of the 59th AGM were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Proposer: Tina Trickett

Seconded: Steve Rogers

Proxy votes received in advance:

For: 137

Against: 0

Abstain: 3

Online votes:

For: 4

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the room or online.

4. Report from the Chair

Rupert began his report by noting that 2024 marks the 60th anniversary of Somerset Wildlife Trust. His report would reflect on the Trust's achievements over this period and highlight the work done in the past year.

In 1964, Ernest Neal, along with 14 others, founded what was then known as the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation. The first meeting was held at Taunton Museum, with David Attenborough as the inaugural speaker. Rupert highlighted key milestones over the past 60 years, including the name change to Somerset Wildlife Trust in 1994. Today, the Trust boasts nearly 24,000 members, 850 volunteers, 87 staff, and 76 nature reserves, managing nearly 1,700 hectares of land.

He provided insights into the changes in Somerset's wildlife over the years, mentioning the loss of nearly 6% of grassland, the rise in invasive species, and declines in watercourses and air quality. However, there were notable successes, such as a 61% increase in booming bitterns from 2014 to

2022, record numbers of Great White Egrets, and 169 Bearded Reedlings observed in one day, up from 20 a decade earlier.

Rupert explained the Trust's vision for 2030: to establish a Somerset-wide nature recovery network. The 'Wilder Somerset 2030 Strategy' aims to create more space for nature, restore natural processes and ensure that at least 30% of land and sea are managed positively for nature. He detailed the progress made towards three specific goals: Telling Somerset's Story, A Movement for Nature and More Space for Nature.

In conclusion, Rupert emphasised the need to develop partnerships with farmers, landowners, local government and other stakeholders to achieve the overarching goal of 30%, given that the Trust currently owns or manages only about 0.5% of the land.

He ended by expressing gratitude to the volunteers, staff, and members, acknowledging that their support is crucial to the Trust's achievements.

5. Report from the Chief Executive

Georgia Dent (CEO) outlined the Trust's plans for the year, focusing on achieving greater impact and aligning with the Wilder Somerset 2030 Strategy. She emphasised the importance of making the best use of resources to meet these goals.

The Trust has been reorganised into three directorates, each led by a new Director responsible for three teams. This restructuring aims to enhance collaboration across the organisation. Each team has Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will be compiled into Impact Measures and reported to members in the annual report.

Georgia introduced the Theory of Change model, a strategic methodology that helps the organisation evaluate how each piece of work contributes to overarching goals, ensuring focused efforts.

She also discussed the international target of protecting 30% of land and sea, which Governments have signed up to and is legally binding in the UK. For land to be included in this target, it must meet three criteria: its primary purpose must be nature recovery, it must be protected for at least 20 years, and it must be managed effectively to achieve nature recovery outcomes. She noted that Somerset has established a baseline of 10% as part of the Local Nature Partnership.

Georgia highlighted other key areas for the coming year, including the next iteration of the Somerset State of Nature report, priority landscapes and making teams clear on what we will do in them, advocacy and planning, species recovery and helping communities coexist with wildlife, working with communities and supporting them to lead social change and our supporter journeys.

In conclusion, Georgia outlined four transformative initiatives to increase the Trust's impact: changing the financial model and increasing unrestricted income to meet strategic objectives, fostering an inclusive and diverse learning culture that reflects local communities, being a bold and authentic voice, ensuring key messages are supported by data and evidence and leading and influencing change, including developing Honeygar as a research centre.

6. Presentation and adoption of the accounts

Steve Rogers (Treasurer) began his report by stating that the Trust is in a strong financial position, with net assets of £10.7m and a surplus of £222k. Although this surplus is lower than last year's, fluctuations in income are typical for a charity.

Financial summary of the year:

	2023/24 £000s	2022/23 £000s
Income	4,905	5,436
Expenditure	(4,701)	(4,611)
Net income	204	825
Net gain/(loss) on investments	18	(93)
Net income	222	732

Some other key points from the report included:

- Grants, a significant part of our income, were lower last year, which is the main reason for the overall decrease in income.
- Expenditure slightly increased compared to last year, primarily due to higher payroll costs from an increase in staff numbers. Other costs rose in line with inflation.
- Nearly £3.5m was spent on direct charitable activities, categorised as follows: Nature Recovery (£1.297m), Nature Reserves (£993k), Team Wilder (£888k), and SERC (£243k).
- Net assets increased slightly due to the acquisition of land at Westhay.
- A new designated financial reserve of £500k has been set aside for investment in the Trust. This means that a deficit might be reported next year, but it would not be a cause for concern.
- The free financial reserve stands at approximately £1.8m, covering six months of core operating costs. This confirms our sound financial position, as recommended by the Charity Commission and the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts.

Steve concluded by reminding members that the annual report and accounts are available on the Trust's website. The accounts were audited by an independent auditor, who gave an unqualified report, indicating no material errors or omissions.

He also acknowledged the excellent work of Kate, Head of Finance and the Finance Team in preparing the accounts, which were also praised by the auditors.

The 2023-24 Annual report and accounts were adopted.

Proposer: Stuart McBride

Seconded: Holly Purdey

Proxy votes received in advance:

For: 140

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Online votes:

For: 2

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

7. Appointment of Auditors

Members approved the appointment of Albert Goodman as auditors.

Proposer: Steve Rogers

Proxy votes received in advance:

Online votes:

Seconded: Richard Scarlett

For: 139

Against:

Abstain: 3

For: 2

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

8. Election of Council members

Rupert explained that Holly Purdey and Stuart McBride were standing for re-election following their first three-year term.

They were re-elected via a show of hands for a three-year term of office:

Holly Purdey

Proxy votes received in advance:

Online votes:

Proposer Amy Coulthard

For: 141

Against: 2

Seconded Tina Trickett

Abstain: 1

For: 2

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Stuart McBride

Proxy votes received in advance:

Online votes:

Proposer Richard Scarlett

For: 137

Against: 1

Seconded Steve Rogers

Abstain: 3

For: 2

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

The panel took questions from members which were:

- SWT's comments on the acoustic fish deterrent at Hinkley Point C
- The importance of data and if SWT are doing enough to support SERC
- The effectiveness of pop up membership recruitment stands in towns
- SWT's partnerships with other organisations such as RSPB, WWT and The National Trust
- SWT's authority to influence and effect change
- If SWT are doing anything about improving sewage works and the effluent waste from them
- If SWT are optimistic about the direction of change or commitment from the government
- The ecological and financial aspects of Ash Dieback
- If there are ways that local groups and Parish Councils can have a voice with the Agritas development
- How we can get the younger generation involved, particularly in terms of volunteering

9. Volunteer Awards and thanks

Hannah Paddison, Volunteering & Community Support Officer presented the winners of the volunteer awards:

- **John Howard**, a volunteer for over 10 years who as well as participating in lots of practical volunteering tasks, also set up a group which will introduce many more volunteers to Somerset Wildlife Trust.
- **The Youth Forum core members** (Emma Watson, Erica Cox, Heidi Dalgarno, Maya Neville, Rachel Hiscox and Rosie Saxon), who have shown great commitment to wildlife conservation in Somerset, nature inclusion and the work of SWT.
- **Simon Briggs**, whose time volunteering as a Planning for Nature volunteer dated back further than could be traced. Based on his experience, he has quietly and purposefully monitored planning applications in Somerset.
- **Vanessa Lloyd**, the local Somerset and Exmoor Volunteer Coordinator for Sea Watch, has been monitoring and recording sea mammals in Somerset for over 10 years. She produces

annual reports, regular newsletters, runs annual training days, and has even initiated a photo ID project for porpoises in Porlock Bay

Hannah expressed her gratitude to all volunteers, acknowledging that the work of Somerset Wildlife Trust would not be possible without their dedication.

Special thanks was also given by Rupert, to Stephen Moss, who had been the President of Somerset Wildlife Trust since 2013 and had recently stepped down.

Close

There being no further notified business, the meeting formally closed at 12:50pm.