

AGM & Wilder Futures Forum 2025

Saturday 15th November



Minutes of the 61st Annual General Meeting, held on Saturday 15th November 2025 from 11.00am at The Canalside, Bridgwater, TA6 6LQ.

79 members attended the meeting in person with voting carried out through a show of hands. 1 member (rising to 3 at a point) also attended via Zoom where online voting polls were conducted and are noted in respect of each resolution. Proxy votes were recorded in advance of the meeting which are also noted in the below minutes.

1. Welcome and formal apologies received

Rupert Taylor, Chair of the SWT Council, welcomed members to the 2025 AGM. He was joined on stage by Georgia Dent (CEO) and Steve Rogers (Treasurer).

Formal apologies were received from Richard Scarlett (Trustee), Holly Purdey (Trustee), and Dan Skinner (Trustee).

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on Saturday 9th November 2024, to be approved

The minutes of the 60th AGM were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Proposer: Steve Rogers

Proxy Votes received in advance:

Online Votes:

Seconded: Tina Trickett

For: 80

Against: 0

Abstain: 10

For: 1

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the room or online.

4. Report from the Chair

Rupert opened by reflecting on the Trust's progress at the midpoint of the Wilder Somerset 2030 Strategy, noting that this is a critical time to review achievements, reassess priorities, and set a clear course for the next five years.

Despite operating in a challenging external environment, marked by pressures from housing and infrastructure development, legislative uncertainty around Biodiversity Net Gain, and a damaging perception that nature hinders growth – SWT has delivered significant milestones. These include raising £25million over five years, growing membership by 10% to over 23,000, expanding the workforce from 35 to 85 staff, strengthening species recovery, investing in strategic land acquisitions such as Honeygar, and improving data and evidence capabilities through initiatives like the State of Nature report.

Looking ahead, Rupert emphasised three strategic priorities: accelerating delivery because "nature can't wait," building partnerships with farmers, landowners, communities, and other organisations, and telling the Trust's story more effectively to inspire action and influence policy. SWT will continue to focus on priority landscapes while enabling countywide action through Team Wilder, with plans to become a Responsible Body for Conservation Covenants, develop Honeygar as a peatland research hub, and enhance visitor experience at Catcott. A renewed commitment to measuring impact, not just outputs, will underpin this work, with

annual impact reporting alongside the refreshed 2030 strategy. Rupert closed by stressing that SWT’s role is not only direct delivery but also enabling and influencing others to act for nature, creating a “bigger engine for change.”

5. Report from the Chief Executive

Georgia Dent (CEO) started by noting the significant progress across the Trust’s strategic goals. In terms of Nature Recovery, 67 acres of land were added to the SWT holdings, including Sharpham Park and areas within the Brue Valley. The Mendip Farm Cluster continued to grow, with advice provided on 170 hectares of land. Peatland restoration work advanced at Honeygar, where interventions have enabled the site to retain 340,000m2 of water. Species recovery efforts included the publication of the Somerset Beaver Management Guide, the successful reintroduction of pine martins in partnership with Devon Wildlife Trust, and the recording of 41 bitterns on the Avalon Marshes.

Under the Team Wilder initiative, the Wilder Coast project was successfully completed, connecting communities to coastal habitats and raising awareness of their importance. Nature connection activities were scaled up through Somerset Libraries and wellbeing programmes. Volunteer engagement remained strong, with 443 volunteers contributing 13,235 hours of their time, equivalent to a value of £196,000.

Georgia also told of how the Trust has strengthened its Research and Evidence base, adding 242,688 species records to its database and deploying acoustic sensors that analysed over four million bird calls. The Somerset Peatland Partnership was established to coordinate restoration and monitoring efforts across the county.

In terms of Advocacy and Campaigns, the Trust launches its national “Cash to Trash” campaign, opposing changed to planning legislation that could undermine biodiversity protections.

The Trust has ambitious plans, Georgia mentioned improvements to the Catcott Complex, developing Honeygar as a peatland research hub, and securing Chancellors Farm to protect its species-rich grassland. These plans are supported by a strong organisation focus on income growth, inclusive recruitment practices, and digital transformation to enhance efficiency and engagement.

6. Presentation and adoption of the accounts

Steve Rogers (Treasurer) began his report by stating that this is his 3rd report as Treasurer, and the Trust is in a sound financial position. Income for the year increased by approximately 10%, reflecting strong performance across core revenue streams. However, expenditure exceeded income by £467k which was covered by reserves accumulated over previous years. A small investment loss was recorded earlier in the year, but this has since recovered by around £60k.

	2024/25 £000s	2023/24 £000s
Income	5,348	4,905
Expenditure	(5,773)	(4,701)
	(425)	204
Net (loss)/gain on investments	(42)	18
Net (expenditure)/income	(467)	222

Some other key points from the report include:

- Unrestricted income (membership fees, legacies, donations) provides flexibility in spending.
- Membership income is nearing £1 million.

- Grant income improved, with 70+ grants secured, including DEFRA and stewardship schemes.
- Pension scheme review revealed an additional liability of £376k which has been fully accounted for.
- Over £1million invested in nature reserves and £1million allocated to Team Wilder for community engagement.
- SWT Consultancy delivered £87k profit, gift-aided to the Trust (no corporate tax).
- Total assets stand at £5.6million, boosted by Sharpham Park acquisition (£800k).
- Future income anticipated from Biodiversity Net Gain credits, through legislation is still evolving.

Steve concluded by reminding members that the annual report and accounts are available on the Trust's website. He also acknowledged the hard work of Kate, Fiona and Diana in the accounts team, noting that the auditors praised improvements in accounting and information systems.

The 2024-25 annual report and accounts were adopted.

Proposer: Mark Steer	Second: Amy Coulthard		
Proxy Votes received in advance:	For: 79	Against: 1	Abstain: 11
Online Votes:	For: 1	Against: 0	Abstain: 0

7. Appointment of Auditors

Members approved the appointment of Albert Goodman as auditors.

Proposer: Stuart McBride	Second: Matthew Bell		
Proxy Votes received in advance:	For: 80	Against: 1	Abstain: 10
Online Votes:	For: 1	Against: 0	Abstain: 0

8. Election of Council Members

Rupert introduced the formal process for trustee elections and handed over to Tina Trickett, Chair of the Governance Committee, who oversees nominations.

Two trustees were seeking re-election, and two new trustees were nominated for their first term, Members had received detailed biographies in the notice of meeting.

Both trustees seeking re-election were re-elected via a show of hands:

Matthew Bell (one-year term of office)

Proposer: James Grischeff	Second: Mark Steer		
Proxy Votes received in advance:	For: 77	Against: 3	Abstain: 6
Online Votes:	For: 1	Against: 0	Abstain: 0

Mark Steer (three-year term of office)

Proposer: Amy Coulthard	Second: George Cockburn		
Proxy Votes received in advance:	For: 79	Against: 1	Abstain: 7
Online Votes:	For: 1	Against: 0	Abstain: 0

Both trustees seeking election were elected via a show of hands for a three-year term of office:

Barnaby Briggs

Proposer: Stuart McBride	Second: James Grischeff
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Proxy Votes received in advance:	For: 69	Against: 5	Abstain: 8
Online Votes:	For: 1	Against: 0	Abstain: 0

Charlie Fattorini

Proposer: Matthew Bell	Seconded: Steve Rogers		
Proxy Votes received in advance:	For: 87	Against: 2	Abstain: 3
Online Votes:	For: 1	Against: 0	Abstain: 0

9. Q&A

The panel took questions from the members in the audience which were:

- Nature Recovery Strategy and targeting non-designated areas.
- Collaboration with neighbouring Wildlife Trusts.
- River management and reed growth.
- Eel conservation and water quality projects.

10. Volunteers Awards & Recognition

Hannah Paddison, Volunteering & Community Support Officer joined Rupert on stage to thank all volunteers for their contributions and to present the winners of the volunteer awards:

Nick and Lesley Lanham-Cook are exceptional Engagement Volunteers at Westhay Moor, whose dedication and enthusiasm have transformed visitor experiences. Since June last year, they have welcomed hundreds of guests every Sunday (without missing a single week) sharing expert wildlife knowledge, delivering family activities, and creating a warm, inclusive atmosphere. Their commitment goes above and beyond, from arriving early to scout the best spots to supporting species surveys and local events.

Tim Jones has been an outstanding volunteer with the Mendip reserves team for three years, becoming an indispensable part of the crew. His versatility and enthusiasm shine through in every task, from tree felling and scrub management to dormouse monitoring and infrastructure repairs, always bringing skill, humour, and commitment. Tim's expertise, including rope access work, has enabled the team to tackle complex challenges safely and efficiently, making a tangible difference to the quality and resilience of our reserves.

Sharon Cooper has been an exceptional Honeygar Ranger since July 2023, making an extraordinary impact on wildlife monitoring and community engagement. She has pioneered a wide range of surveys, from camera traps and water vole rafts to harvest mouse studies, producing invaluable baseline data that guides site management and evidences our wilding approach. Her captivating wildlife videos have reached national news, inspiring thousands and showcasing the importance of nature recovery. Beyond her technical expertise, Sharon trains new rangers, supports events, and contributes to specialist projects like DNA barcoding, all while fostering volunteer retention through her passion and care.

Elizabeth Atkinson is an extraordinary volunteer whose vision and drive have created lasting impact across West Somerset. She founded the West Somerset Wild Ways project, inspiring countless people to record wildlife and dramatically increasing local biodiversity data. This year, she launched and coordinated the "Ponds Alive!" project, securing funding, recruiting volunteers, leading workshops, delivering family activities, and even personally delivering pond kits to create vital freshwater habitats. Her tireless commitment, creativity, and ability to mobilise her community have sparked a movement for nature, delivering real progress for wildlife recovery.

11. Close

Rupert thanked members, volunteers and staff for their support. Meeting closed at 13:00 followed by lunch and Wilder Future's Forum event.