**MINUTES OF THE 41st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Held on Saturday 18th November 2023, from 10:30 to 12:00 o’clock via Zoom**

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| **Present:**  Lisa Pinney (LPi), Chair of Trustees  Phil Beardmore (PBe), Trustee  Anna Bright (ABr), Trustee  Jack Daniel (JDa), Trustee  David Green (DGr) Vice Chair (Chair)  James Larner (JLa), Treasurer  Eamon Mooney (EM), Secretary  Joe Moran (JMo), Trustee  Alex Nicholson-Evans (ANE), Trustee  *\*Members also present please see separate list on page 8* | **Apologies:**  Denise McLellan (DMc), Trustee  Lynn Besenyei (LBe), Trustee  Sabra Khaan (SKh), Trustee  **Absent:**  Andy Wayro (AWa), Trustee  Waheed Saleem (WSa), Trustee |
| **In attendance:**  Delia Garratt (DGa), CEO, Ex-Officio  Jane Dominese (JDo), Snr Governance & Administration Officer (Note taker)  *\*\*Also in attendance please see separate list on page 8* | |

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

1.1 LPi opened the meeting at 10:36, highlighted the continued progress the Trust had made against its strategic goals, during 2022/23, and shared that the Trust had continued to diversify its reach and connections in Birmingham and the Black Country.

LPi went on to celebrate the Trust’s achievements, such as the opening of the new building at EcoPark, and the consequent growing engagement with the local community, adding that the Trust made the biggest difference by enabling others to make the changes themselves

There had also been progress in the Trust’s people strategy which was enabling it to achieve the Trust’s ambitions.

LPi acknowledged that there was always more work to be done and that the needs of nature, climate and wildlife were greater than ever. The Trust continued to work with the wider Wildlife Trusts to ensure that its collective voice was heard.

She concluded her introduction by thanking all the Members, volunteers, staff, partners and individuals for their engagement and contribution to the Trust’s work and making a difference to the environment.

1.2 JDo confirmed there was a quorum to proceed and the meeting moved to official business.

**2. MINUTES OF THE 40th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (15TH October 2022)**

2.1 The Chair asked those Members present if there were any factual corrections of the minutes; there were none.

2.2 Following a vote to confirm the minutes were an accurate record of the AGM of 15th October 2022, the minutes **WERE RATIFIED**.

**3. MATTERS ARISING**

3.1 There were no matters arising from the minutes.

**4. ANNUAL REPORT OF COUNCIL FOR 2022 AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

4.1 LPi outlined the changes that had taken place since the last AGM, the key management personnel, Trustees, organisational structure and they key commitments the Council had made. She shared that DGa would be expanding on the matter in her presentation.

4.2 There being no questions on the Trustee’s report, JLa was invited to present the Treasurer’s report.

4.3 JLa shared that, once again, the Trust had delivered a surplus, albeit smaller than the previous year.

This was partly due to accrued income, with funds being received in one year and being spent the following year or not yet spent, such as those for Stourton Castle Weir Bypass, a project that was not yet completed.

4.4 Unrestricted Income had been 72%. The long-term aim had been for the Trust’s position to be maintained at above 70%.

4.5 15% of income had been raised from Membership.

4.6 Restricted income had also been received, such as that for Natural Prospects and Love your River Stour.

4.7 The Council’s aims had been to maintain circa nine months of core funding as Operating Reserves, circa £425K, and the target had been met comfortably.

4.8 Five additional posts had been added, in-year, to the staffing projections.

4.9 Thanks were given to Ian Holmes, the former Acting Head of Finance, who had managed the finance function on an interim basis. A new appointment, Hana Chatwin, had now been made.

4.10 Discussions had previously taken place between JLa and the former Treasurer in relation to the amount of cash at hand. JLa explained that because a lot of the funds held were due to deferred work, the Trust had been unable to deposit them in a long-term investment solution and had, instead, deposited them in a higher interest, immediate access, cash account.

4.11 The Trust had also received some shares by way of a donation and it would be aiming to grow the investment.

4.12 Questions were invited and there being none, the Chair asked for Members to vote for The Report and Accounts for the year to 31st March 2023, together with the Auditors’ Report, to be adopted. The Members **UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED** the adoption of the Report and Accounts

**5. APPOINTMENT OF TRUST AUDITORS**

5.1Members were asked to officially re-appoint Auditors, Luckmans Duckett Parker Limited, for a further year and for their remuneration to be decided upon by the Council.

The Members **UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED** the motion.

**6. RE-ELECTION OF TRUST COUNCIL OFFICERS**

6.1 The Secretary outlined the election process and explained that the Articles of Association stipulated that the Trustee Officers were to be appointed on a yearly basis. The Council had endorsed the re-appointment of the current Officers and proposed them to the Members for re-election. They were:

**Chair:** Lisa Pinney MBE

**Vice Chair:** David Green

**Treasurer:** James Larner

**Secretary:** Eamon Mooney

6.1.1 The Members **APPROVED** the re-election of the nominated Trustee Officers and the Trustee Officer appointments were **RATIFIED**.

6.2 There were some sections in the Articles of Association that would benefit from re-wording to ensure clarity and ease of operations and it was intended that the Articles be reviewed and brought to the next AGM for ratification.

**7. TRUSTEE ROTATIONAL RETIREMENT AND REAPPOINTMENT**

7.1 EMo explained that a requirement of the Articles of Association was for one third of Trustees to retire, on a rotation basis, at every AGM, and should they choose to do so, to seek re-appointment.

On that basis, five Trustees with the oldest appointment date were retiring at that meeting and would be seeking re-election. They were: Phil Beardmore, Anna Bright, Lisa Pinney, James Larner and Eamon Mooney. It was requested that those present vote for their reappointment and, by show of hands, the re-appointments were **RATIFIED**.

***The formal meeting closed at 10:56 and moved to the informal business***

**8. ADDRESS BY DR DELIA GARRATT**

8.1 DGa opened that it had been the intention to hold the meeting online so as to allow a larger audience; however, in person events were being planned for the new year.

8.2 DGa presented highlights from the Annual Report and touched on some of the work that had been completed in the current calendar year. She expressed her thanks to all staff, volunteers, partners and supporters for their contributions.

The Trust had begun to deliver against its key strategic priorities:

1. 30% of land in Birmingham and the Black Country being managed well for Nature.
2. By 2030 to see one in four people taking action for nature and an understanding of Nature’s central role in addressing local and global problems.
3. A target of 500 hectares of land being used and improved to provide nature-based solutions to climate crisis.

The scale of the task ahead was recognised and the importance of individual contributions, strategic partnerships, local and central government decision-making and engagement were highlighted.

DGa emphasised that change would only happen when local communities were supported and enabled to act together. Thus, the new building at the environmental centre in EcoPark had been of paramount importance to the Trust’s work and strategic aims. The local community continued to actively utilise the site and engage with the Trust’s work. Thanks were given to those present for their contribution to the project.

The Trust’s operational structure had also been one of the areas developed during the year and a number of key roles had been recruited to such as the People and Operations Manager, Governance and Administration Officer, Volunteer Coordinator and Individual Giving Manager.

The Trust’s conservation work and gains achieved were outlined.

It had been recognised that in order to achieve all of the Trust’s strategic goals, significant resources and support from Members and partners would be required, as well as a review of how the Trust fundraised, communicated and engaged with its members and the general public. As a consequence, it had been agreed that two new roles be incorporated into the staffing structure, a Director of Fundraising and Engagement and a Director or Nature Recovery. Both roles had been appointed to and the new members of staff had recently started in post.

The new Senior Leadership Team had been further strengthened by a part-time appointment of a Director of Finance.

Thanks and best wishes were given to long-standing members of staff who had moved onto similar roles within the sector.

Work continued with key partners, including Local Authorities, the West Midlands Combined Authority, Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Birmingham Settlement at the Red Shed and Riverside House in Stourbridge.

Advocacy and campaigning work also continued, in collaboration with other wildlife trusts, to develop campaign plans for the general election. Policies targeting species recovery, water pollution, funding wildlife-friendly farming, enabling healthy communities and tackling climate change would be required.

DGa concluded by thanking all stakeholders for their ongoing support and commitment to the Trust’s work and mission.

8.3 Questions were invited.

8.3.1 **Question from Alison Millward:**

*In the Annual Report there was reference to 25 Local Wildlife Site Assessments that the Trust had completed over the course of the year. Is there anything that the Trust could do to encourage the relevant Local Authorities to sign them off?*

*Delays in sign-off have been experienced at Highbury Park and Dawbery Fields and concerns have been expressed that, due to their present financial situation, Birmingham City Council may wish to release some assets.*

DGa advised that she was not aware of any specific reason for the delay. She confirmed that it was a priority for the Trust to ensure that the assessments were completed in a timely fashion.

8.3.2 LPi shared that a number of questions had been forwarded in advance of the meeting and she would pose them on the Members’ behalf.

8.3.2.1 **Question from Dene Stevens:**

*What do you think are the reasons for the turnover, what is the current structure and complement at the level below chief exec (not clear from the site), what is being done to ensure that the Trust has a well-performing, highly-skilled and stable management team in the future, and what are the trustees doing to help with this?*

DGa responded that she recognised that it had been a period of significant change in relation to staffing, particularly so for the senior team. There were a variety of reasons why individuals had chosen to leave the organisation when they did, change being one of them. That being said, the sector had experienced a lot of change and ongoing recruitment challenges since Covid.

She explained that the Trust completed exit interviews with staff, to ensure that any practical arrangements to support colleagues, could be put in place.

Data was scrutinised by the Personnel Committee as delegated by the Council.

Ongoing programmes of training and leadership development were in place, as were regular one-to-ones and structures to support colleagues.

LPi added that support for cost of living had also been agreed. Mentoring and coaching had been made available to the senior team.

In turn, DGr, as Chair of the Personnel Committee, added that during the recruitment process, the panel had focussed on what the candidates could bring to the Trust in terms of ethos as well as their skills and expertise. Which would allow stability and a workforce that felt valued.

Task and finish groups had recently been implemented for Fundraising and Volunteering with the aim of supporting colleagues in those key areas.

* + - 1. **A second question from Dene Stevens had also been posed:**

*Is there a staff survey and if so, what are the most recent results?*

DGa responded that Staff Surveys had been introduced in 2021 and a second survey had been completed in 2022. They had provided a valuable source of data on staff experience and engagement that had allowed the development of action plans. Areas of focus were staff health and wellbeing, physical facilities and pay and recognition.

The Trust had recently signed-up to the Thrive at Work initiative, and was working towards the foundation level accreditation. Work had been undertaken to benchmark salaries against those in the sector and other Trusts. As an output of the benchmarking, the Trust’s salary policy was being revised and other staff rewards and recognition initiatives were being completed.

Time to embed the current strategies was required and a further survey was planned for the following year.

* + - 1. **Question from Nicolas Crombie:**

The Trust’s Annual Report sets out the successes and importance of the work we are trying to do but, in terms of how we do it, we can’t do it all ourselves and that’s why campaigning and influencing is very critical and I wanted to ask for Council to think bout the resources and strategy for influencing the strategic bodies that play some part in the campaign for biodiversity.

DGa responded that one of the key skills the panel were looking for, when they were appointing the Director of Nature Recovery, was the ability to understand the policy context, in order to be able to represent the Trust strongly in different fora, such as the Local Nature Partnership, which it was hoped to re-establish.

Furthermore, in support of the Directors, coaching in marketing and communications skills were being implemented for their staff teams.

LPi added that it was very important to encourage the broader engagement, consider where the priority areas for engagement were, and how the Trust’s time could be invested to make the biggest difference.

* + - 1. **Question from Peter Beck:**

*Thank you for making it possible for me/us to attend today.*

*I have been attending the AGMs for many years, going back to the days of the Urban Wildlife trust. It makes me aware of how much things have changed since then when the likes of Chris Baines, Chris Parry and Peter Shirley were very active.*

*The 1980s were a very different time with Chris Baines joining local people to campaign to save most of Woodgate Valley as a Country Park, and the local authority creating a Head Ranger and Assistant Rangers. Elsewhere green spaces such as Parks were transformed into areas attractive to wildlife, and others into Nature Reserves. Battles were fought to prevent built development: for example a further small part of Woodgate Valley was saved after a 14 year campaign by local residents and the Wildlife Trust. This area became known as Quinton Meadows, including what eventually became a BCC Local Nature Reserve, with the local community heavily involved through the Quinton Meadows Consultative Committee (of which I am Secretary).*

*Fast forward to today where Rangers are few and BCC Parks and Reserves struggle to maintain their green spaces and to carry out their management plans as a result of underfunding. Green spaces are now heavily reliant on Friends Groups supported by Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and, where it can, Wildlife Trust projects. But I feel that this is probably not enough.*

*My question is what can we do to save our green open spaces from further decline?*

DGa thanked Mr Beck for his question and shared that she echoed the feelings in the Trust about leading effective campaigns. However, the support for a lot of the local spaces would need to continue to come from the local campaigners and ‘Friends of’ groups.

The Trust had been working with Birmingham Open Spaces forum to ensure that it could provide more advice in the community. How the same support for ‘Friends of’ Groups could be offered in the Black Country was being considered.

LPi shared that opportunities for engagement and how they could be harnessed were also discussed at Council but that, ultimately, it had to be many different voices in order to make the biggest difference and thus the Trust would continue to work to encourage local groups to take action.

* + - 1. **Question from Lynda Gibbon:**

Lynda thanked DGa for the comprehensive report on partnerships and engagement. She shared that she was a member of the Women’s Institute (WI) and queried if the Trust had considered engaging with the WI across the region. There were 1,800 Members of the WI, in 40 groups, across the West Midlands and a lot of the Trust’s campaigning would cut across Women’s Institute’s campaigning.

Lynda explained that she had just accepted the role of Chair of the Public Affairs Committee for the region and she suggested that opportunities for engagement and partnerships could be discussed outside of the meeting.

It was agreed that JDo would share Lynda Gibbon’s contact details with DGa and Dan Brown after the meeting. **ACTION JDo**

* + - 1. **Question from Clare Sandercock:**

Clare shared that she volunteered in a local school. She would be interested in further details on how the Trust’s Volunteer Coordinator engaged school children to encourage them into green spaces.

DGa responded that the best way for schools to engage would be via the Trust’s education programme, which gave teaching staff the skills and confidence to access green spaces. She suggested she facilitate a discussion outside of the meeting with the Trust’s education officer in order to outline the programmes delivered. **ACTION DGa**

***James Larner left the meeting at 11:53.***

**9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

9.1 LPi thanked colleagues for their work throughout the year and in completing the annual report.

She also thanked everyone for attending and shared that the date of the next AGM would be advertised in the Trust Magazine in due course.

9.2 There being no other business the meeting closed at 11:56.

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| **Minutes approved by:** | | | | |
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**MINUTES OF THE 41st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Held on Saturday 18th November 2023, from 10:30 – 12:00 o’clock via Zoom**

**\*Also Present**

1. Martin Smith
2. Peter Beck
3. Peter Shirley
4. Alison Millward
5. Graeme Muirhead
6. Dorothy Williams
7. Clare M Sandercock
8. Laraine Preece
9. Alun Jones
10. Anne Gilbert
11. Margaret Sherward
12. Phil Harper
13. Lynda Gibbon
14. Nicolas Crombie
15. Martin Smith
16. Jill Mallander

**Online and Postal Votes**

1. Mr and Mrs V Tranter
2. Susan Leighfield
3. Andrew David Hardie
4. Simon May
5. Jennifer Hubbard
6. Stephen David Green
7. Lynn Besenyei
8. Denise McLellan
9. Sabra Khan

**\*\*Staff in Attendance**

1. Dan Brown (DBr), Deputy CEO, Director of Fundraising and Engagement