

**Durham Wildlife Trust**  
**2023 Annual General Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023 (6pm), Online**  
**Formal Business**

Welcome by Sarah Lister, Chair of the Trust

- 1. Apologies for Absence:**
- 2. Minutes of 2022 AGM** – approved as a true record (carried by 57% of those present)
- 3. Review of Accounts** - Tony Pensom (Treasurer)

### **Highlights**

Just under £7m income, which has doubled since last year due to sources from grant applications for land acquisition.

Achieved the target of having 50 sites to coincide with the 50 year anniversary of the Trust and progress has been made with the 30 x 30 ambitions. No profit has been gained from this – it is land that is managed and controlled

### **Unrestricted**

- £819K carried forward;
- raised £400,000 through legacies and donations, visitors' centres and conservation;
- DWS consultancy

### **Restricted**

- Specified use - £4.25m for land purchase
- Great North Fen, Brightwater, Naturally Native and Seascapes projects

Breakdown given of unrestricted and restricted funding expenditure – conservation projects, reserve, education and visitors' centres. Invaluable land holdings for the future

### **Adoption of annual report and consolidation of accounts**

Proposed by Peter Bell and seconded by Sarah Lister – 83% of members present agreed.

- 4. Chair's remarks** (Sarah Lister)

### **Highlights**

- **Conservation** - achieved the target of 50 sites in 50 years of existence as a Trust

Cuthbert's Moor was the 50<sup>th</sup>. Took over management of The Folly, Chopwell East Fields and Hill 60 (Gateshead sites). 2 sites with Natural England in the Tees catchment – Nutrient Neutrality in Brightwater area with net gains for bio-diversity. The first trust in the country to purchase a site through Natural England for the Nutrient Neutrality scheme.

Healing Nature was completed in June 2022

Linked Together is a new scheme linking Sunderland Health and Local Authority.

Next-door Nature - aims to reach 1 in 4 people in the community to work with nature.

Seascapes – Little Terns project – successful year saw an increase of birds fledged compared with last year.

Naturally Native is still running along with Brightwater.

- Development and Communication supporter approach; membership performance

was up and down but on average overall there was an increase; increasing reach with supporters.

- Governance and administration – investors in the environment – silver accreditation;

Installation of solar panels; refreshment of Wild Play area at Rainton Meadows

#### **5. Election of members to the Board**

- All those standing have been proposed and seconded by members and have undergone a selection and interview process.
- All standing are recommended to the membership by the Trust Board - Sarah Lister and Vivien Kent both up for re-election for a second term and both were re-elected.

#### **6. Confirmation of Auditors**

- Current auditors are Haines Watts and it was proposed to re-appoint. Proposed by Tony Pensom and seconded by Peter Bell. Carried by 77%

#### **Presentation by Jim Cokill – Trust Director**

##### **Strategic transformations** – goals to achieve for nature recovery since March 2023

- Community organising – local presence – people to be led to do things for themselves
- Embracing digital – adding to what we do, not replacing
- Step change in funding – Nutrient Neutrality – biodiversity net gain to generate more funding. Legislation passed to take nutrients out allowing better habitats for nature and wildlife – prime area Tees-mouth

##### **Enabling Priorities**

- Need to get our own house in order – leading by example by reducing carbon footprint
- Improving data and evidence base – is it working?
- Invest in our people – staff and volunteers

##### **Nature Recovery**

To see nature recovery to be effective it needs to have at least 30% of land and seas managed

- DWT area approx. 270,000 ha
- Minimum of 90,000 ha for 30x30 target
- 50,000 ha already designated land
- Minimum of 40,000 ha in addition
- DWT through direct ownership or management has only 1,000 ha for its first 50 years and therefore to be realistic would aim for 2,000 ha by 2030.
- Need to influence, advice and campaign to encourage other stakeholders. Continue the traditional role of conservationists but also become 'change agents'.

## **Meaningful Action**

- To achieve this 1 in 4 people need to be taking action for nature and climate
- Co Durham, Darlington, Gateshead South Tyneside and Sunderland has approx. 1,260,000 people
- 315,000 will need to be taking action for nature by 2030
- Need a good measure to be meaningful
- Structure work around the needs of people – where they live
- Create local focal points to appeal to local people – new local operational bases
- Use local channels – refocus around local authority geographies
- Partnerships with large organisations such as NHS trusts, Universities
- Team Wilder model brings these strands together – the national approach needs to be used locally

## **How progress is being made**

- New income sources - £5.75m from Nutrient Neutrality for land purchase - £2.6m since April 2023
- DWT land estate is 1260ha – 315ha added in 2022/23 and 102ha so far 23/24
- Developing engagement – a new volunteer portal launched in 2022/23 has improved access to volunteering, recording over 2500 volunteer day since April 2023
- Investing in young people – 5 new entry level and training posts offered to young people since April 2023
- Retaining talent – a membership development officer role in 2016 now appointed head of Development and Communications in June 2023 (Emily Routledge)
- Growing project pipeline: £1.6m plus projects currently in development – push to £5m by 2023
- Support officer; growing retail and ecommerce; new regular giving product; better 'in memory' options and more defined business packages
- Marine – seascapes and stronger shores getting people involved with exciting marine habitat restoration projects – this has lagged behind - more work needed to move this forward. 30% of our area is marine habitat.
- Achievement of acquisition of Cuthbert's Moor in 2022/23 – first Wildlife trust in the country that has been able to acquire a grouse moor.

## **Presentation on Cuthbert's Moor – Rebecca Clark – managing moors officer**

An overview of the project to date and how it is being managed – currently the UK has 3m ha of peatland but only 20% is still left in its natural state.

- A healthy peat bog – peat stores more carbon than any other form of vegetation. A very slow process of development – 100 years for every centimetre
- Reduces flood risks with peat acting like a sponge – it improves water quality
- Offers access to green space and scenery
- Historical archive which can tell what has been done to the land in the past

Cuthbert's Moor is located in the North Pennines, an upland moorland of 121ha being part of the Teesdale SSSI - originally called Horden Allotment.

It is a 12 month project – the land had previously been privately owned – will look at the future and the legacy of the project. No professional surveys have been carried out in the past which is needed as a starting point. There has been community and school involvement. Need to restore 30ha of bogland.

So far:

- Bird survey has been carried out finding 37 different species – 12 that have been confirmed as breeding. Largest number of curlews recorded in the country.
- Looked at vegetation on site - a grouse moor that has been drained and burned. Survey results for this will be out in December giving priorities as to the way forward with restoration plans.
- Baseline invertebrate surveys have been carried out again with results later in the year
- Community engagement – 15 volunteers have signed up.
- Checks where there is more than 30cm depth of peat, less is a target for more restoration – again waiting for results to work on plan going forward.
- Habitat restoration – species poor – improve drainage channels - grip blocking in the north of site for height of heather – tree planting – sphagnum planting – plant scrub areas on edge of site.
- Work being looked at with help of restoration Natural England and ANOB partnership
- Upcoming events have been planned.

### **Q and A**

***Q - Ethan – although welcomes the change on the government policy of Nutrient Neutrality this could still be thrown out by the House of Lords – what effect would this have on the recent purchase?***

Jim (Director) - There may be new legislation with a new government but it will not make any difference to the trust's purchase as it is completed. It could though have an impact in the future.

***Q – Would it be possible to promote short term, specific projects to enable more people to volunteer who may not necessarily have the advantage of committing to volunteering on a regular or long-term basis?***

Jim (Director) - Currently the volunteer portal does not include short-term involvement opportunities. There is a proposal however to provide Saturday volunteering and the Trust is working towards 7 days a week to include more involvement.

***Q – Mr and Mrs Green had a concern about a natural pond where the local authority are wanting to do work on it – line it etc. and wanted some help and advice as to whether the process was correct. Can the Trust help with advice?***

Jim (Director) - Aware of the concern and the Next Door Nature officer, Tom Parkin will follow it up to see what we can do.

***Q – Michael Horsely – What impact will there be with the Cuthbert's Moor project when there is only a small area being worked on across such a vast moor?***

Jim (Director) - Small changes will be seen by neighbours, which could lead the way in habitat restoration. Could be used to influence others e.g. landowners, resulting in possible economic benefits.

***A comment was shared about the National lottery community fund having a good environmental thread running through it.***

Sarah (Chair) - if any supporters have any tips or advice with this, help would be welcome. We shall also be looking out for available grants and more funding. Emily's email can be used to contact her regarding any help [eroutledge@durhamwt.co.uk](mailto:eroutledge@durhamwt.co.uk).

A request was made for the slides to be sent along with the 2030 strategy.

Sarah (Chair) thanked Tony, Jim and Rebecca for their presentations and Emily for the slide show.

In addition, thanks were given for members' support and attendance.

**Meeting closed at 7.15**

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