**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF**

**CPRE Wiltshire – The Countryside Charity**

***(Limited Liability Company number 07127110 and Charity no 1134677).***

**Held on Thursday 22nd of September at 18:30 2022 at the Corn Exchange, Devizes.**

1. Welcome

Apologies for absence: John Eaton, Nick Stokes, Mr and Mrs Eccles, James Gray MP, Rosalyn Claydon, Philippa Morgan, Declan McSweeney, Nicky and Pete Alberry, Michael Maude, David Booth, Anthony Henniker-Gotley, Chris Altree, Mrs E. Turner, Carolyn Whistler and Gary Marshall.

1. Minutes of the AGM held online (Zoom) on 13th of September 2021**.**
   1. Accuracy - Minutes Approved
   2. Matters arising. None
2. President’s address.

It is with great sadness that CPRE heard of the death of our Patron for so many years. The Queen was in tune and in touch with the countryside and everything that CPRE do. Let us hope we will have a new Patron equally committed to rural life and everything that means.

There are so many concerns at present that it is hard to know where to start. We should be positive despite regular threats.  It is great that the young are very positive about the countryside, climate change and net zero.

I am much looking forward to our speakers and their new approach to caring for the land which grows our food. We have to consider the future for our children and grandchildren and the kind of world and life they will have.

1. Chairman’s Report.

Welcome, I am delighted to see you all tonight.

We are in a politically difficult and frustrating time. Decisions have to be held off; actions curtailed. It seems as though we have a new Leader who is no friend of the environment. This is worrying given the number of pressing climate change issues with which we have to grapple. Our Wiltshire Local Plan revision has been delayed until next Spring, 2023, and perhaps even longer. Economic growth is the mantra and that is the justification for increasing warehousing at places like M4Jt17, which is in open countryside, the dualling of roads like the A350 which bring roundabouts, bridges and other huge environmental costs. All at the expense of agricultural land and the knock-on effect on the fauna and flora in the surrounding environment. Every acre will be important in the future for food production if we are ever to become even faintly self-sufficient.

Land for energy use, such as solar farms, is controversial, as is fracking. The key is properly constructed and insulated new houses and roof top panels on all those new houses and large industrial buildings not productive land. The other important factor is energy reduction and learning to manage expectations.

Holding firm, in the face of adverse circumstances, to the main CPRE aspirations for our landscapes, particularly those iconic ones within the AONB, and the surrounds to our rural communities, is a growing challenge for us all.

An area of great concern over the past year has been the continued support of emerging plans for major road building by Wiltshire Council along the A350. These plans will have more than just landscape impact. If approved, they will change the character of the settlements along the length of the A350 and impact all the

smaller communities which lie to either side. We strongly support the local groups created to oppose these plans.

The Stonehenge saga continues, we continue to support the alliance.

The newest issue regarding roads is the threat of a dualled A350 with a bypass at Melksham and possible future by bypass at Westbury.

A combination of three local campaigning groups have to come together to create a new group called the A350 Alliance, these are working hard together for the protection of Chippenham, Melksham and Trowbridge.

The Best Kept Village competition continues to attract strong interest county wide.

Concern for the use of agricultural land for housing, roads and solar farms is rising and has an even higher profile since the war in Ukraine. Food dependency versus other land uses is an area set to be increasingly contentious and of great concern to CPRE.

1. Treasurer’s Report and proposed changes to Articles of Association.

Report

This year has been quite a challenging one from a financial point of view. We completed the year from 1st March 2021 to 28th February 2022 with an operating deficit of nearly £15,000. Normally, the performance of our investments would offset most, if not all, of our operating deficits, but that has not been the case this year as the investment markets have not fared well with various global issues. Our investments saw a gain of less than £150 in the year.

Unfortunately, this situation isn’t looking likely to improve any time soon and, in fact, became worse during the first few months of the 2022/23 financial year. I have since reported to the Board of Directors that urgent action needs to be taken to increase our income because if we continue at the same rates, the Charity will have no money left at all within 4 years. The Board of Directors are now formulating plans to increase the income by means of donations, legacies, sponsorship and newsletter advertising revenue. I know the Board of Directors would welcome any assistance that the membership is able to offer on this.

On a more positive note, the value of the membership subscriptions that we receive from CPRE National Office, which is one of our most reliable sources of income, increased by 3% compared to the previous year. This was in-line with the target set by the Board of Directors.

It has also been pleasing to see events return, post-pandemic. However, there is concern that the most significant event, the Best Kept Village Competition, has been running at a loss for some time now and continues to do so. The Board of Directors have been tasked with looking at ways to improve this situation.

Finally, one other significant factor in the accounts for 2021/22 that I must report to the members is that, during the year, it came to my attention that the District Groups were under the impression that the Charity was holding

separate funds on their behalf which was a result of the amalgamation of all accounting and banking for the Branch and the District Groups several years ago (prior to my involvement). This was not reflected in any of the accounting records that I inherited and therefore was not reported in any way in last year’s financial accounts.

After careful consideration and much investigation and calculation, I proposed to the Board of Directors that the following values be placed into Designated Funds for the District Groups as at 28th February 2022:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| North | £3,484.71 |
| Kennet | £4,009.98 |
| South | £3,885.39 |
| West | £6,373.98 |
| **TOTAL** | **£17,754.06** |

I also proposed that the District Groups would be able to call upon these funds for their own purposes going forward by submitting a request for the Board of Directors to approve, and that any gains/losses on our investment accounts would be attributed to these Designated Funds on the basis of the percentage value they represent of the overall investments as at the beginning of each financial year.

This proposal was agreed by the Board of Directors and has been reflected in the 2021/22 financial accounts.

The Charity's accounts have been examined by Independent Examiner, Phil Chow, a Member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and he has confirmed that they represent a fair and accurate view.

Accounts approved – *Proposer: Kate Fielden, Seconder: Anne Henshaw.*

Question from an attendee - Are we recruiting new members? Yes.

Articles of Association updated.

The proposed amendments to the company/charity’s Articles of Association have been made for the following reasons:

* To bring the Articles up-to-date with current company and charity legislation
* To remove ambiguity and provide consistency between Articles
* To correct some definitions that are unclear in the current Articles
* To ensure that current ways of working (e.g., board meetings held by electronic means) are covered
* To improve the process of rotation/retirement of Directors/Trustees
* To improve the definition of quorums for board meetings and general meetings

These changes have been recommended and drafted by an experienced solicitor who specialises in charity law. The document that has been shared with you highlights the proposed amendments to ensure it’s simple to see what has been removed, added and amended. Once these proposed changes have been agreed at the AGM, the final document will be updated to reflect new Article numbering etc.

Question from an attendee: Can we have hybrid meetings (in person and also on Zoom)?  Yes, these are allowed.

Articles of Association approved - proposed by Kate Fielden, seconded by Charmian Spickernell.

Anne Henshaw thanked Andrew for all his hard work.

1. Confirmation of co-opted trustees during 2021 – 2022: Annabelle Sanderson, Nick Stokes. *Proposer: Michael Hodges, Seconder: Geraldine White.*
2. Election and Confirmation of Trustees.

In accordance with the Company/Charity’s Articles of Association, one third of the elected Trustees/Directors must retire. The following have elected to retire: Kate Fielden, Anne Henshaw and Elizabeth Charmian Spickernell.

The Trustees who will continue in 2022-2023 will be:

Elected: Andrew Longland, Michael Hodges, and John Eaton.

The following have offered themselves for re-election/election as Trustees/ Directors:

Kate Fielden - *Proposer: Anne Henshaw, Seconder: Geraldine White.*

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1. Appointment of Independent Examiner of Accounts - Proposal P. Chow CPFA BSc (Hons) - Chartered Public Finance Accountant. All agreed.
2. Other motions for consideration at the AGM. None.
3. Any other business

Presentation to Charmain Spickernell (Our Vice Chair and Trustee who is retiring).

Charmian has been a member for 40 years; she was chairman of the North Wiltshire and Swindon Group for many years and very active at the time of the expansion of Swindon into what was then the fastest growing town in Europe. She has a huge knowledge of the planning system, based on years of experience and evidence. She will be much missed, but I am sure that when there is a thorny issue she will be there to help.

Anne Henshaw thanked her for all her hard work and support and then presented her with a book and some flowers.

**Guest speakers - Caring for the Soil.**

**Ben Taylor Davies - Regenerative Agriculture**

Runs Townsend Farm, Ross-on-Wye with his family.

Their farm is based on regenerative agriculture, a fairly new term in the world and is used to describe farmers who are literally regenerating their soils in order to provide a far more sustainable future and to leave farms in a far better condition in which it was acquired. You see the main asset of most farms is the soil and this is something that extreme care should be given to on the understanding that it is a living organism.

[**https://www.regenben.com/**](https://www.regenben.com/)

**Richard Gantlett - Biodynamic Farming**

The Gantletts have been farming at Yatesbury since 1968.

Richard and Charlotte Gantlett farm today, supported by their children

with the primary purpose of growing the life in the soil.

For more information about Yatesbury Farm go to their website <https://yatesbury.wixsite.com/yatesbury/soil-life>