

Campaign to Protect Rural England, Somerset Branch
Minutes of Annual General Meeting postponed from 2020
Held by Zoom 24th February 2021 at 6pm

The AGM itself started at 6pm. There were present:

Chris Lewis, Chairman, Somerset CPRE
David Julian, Executive Member
Don Parkinson, Executive Member
John Roberts Executive Member & Honorary Treasurer
Fletcher Robinson, Executive Member & Planning Consultant
Hugh Williams, Executive Member
Tim Whittingham, Executive Member

In addition Becky Collier, (Branch Manager), Richard de Peyer (minute taker), Simon Murray, (Chairman of CPRE), 36 other CPRE members; the attendance list is held by the Branch Manager.

1. Apologies for absence - the following members of Somerset CPRE had sent their apologies: Roger Martin (President, Somerset Branch CPRE), Matthew Bennett (who did join later in the meeting), Jill Fuller, Alan Townsend, Mary Acland Hood, Sandra Cook

2. Welcome – Chris Lewis opened the meeting explaining that the COVID emergency meant that there was no alternative to holding the postponed 2020 AGM remotely. The 2021 AGM would be held later in the current year. CL thanked Becky Collier for the excellent arrangements to facilitate this. Becky then gave housekeeping notices regarding conduct of the meeting using Zoom technology with others dialling in by telephone and of any questions from those attending.

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the 2019 AGM – CL presented the minutes of the last AGM, held on 18th October 2019, which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. These were approved as an accurate record and signed.

4. Matters Arising – there were no matters arising.

The meeting – Chris spoke to the agenda which was displayed on screen to all using Zoom with subsequent slides.

5. Review of the Year – (since the last AGM in Oct 2019)

- The branch had worked efficiently during the COVID emergency with Trustees meeting regularly by Zoom. Most events including our presence at external shows had unfortunately been cancelled.
- Finances had stood up well
- Work on protecting and promoting the countryside of Somerset had included:
 - Comment on planning matters – with Judith Chubb-Whittle in post as Planning Consultant until April and Fletcher Robinson from September. 80 written submissions had been made in respect of planning applications – many taking several days to process
 - Government had published proposals for changes to the planning system and many of our comments on planning matters had referred to the desirability of using brown field options for development wherever possible

- The photography competition 'Reasons to be cheerful' had appropriately encouraged the love of local green places. It had been won by Jeff Hutson who had donated his prize back to CPRE so we will now establish a new prize for young photographers in 2021. Many thanks to Kit Houghton and to Andrew Lee, Editor of The Leveller, for being our judges alongside Chris Lewis.
- The litter pick project had been launched with funding from national CPRE with a target of 100 volunteers and 5 litter pick stations. The support of Tincknells Country store in Wells, Somerset Waste Partnership and Wells Town Council with the project had been appreciated
- All grants towards the restoration of traditional fingerposts had now been allocated but covid has caused some delay in Parish Councils being able to carry out the work. Thanks to Hinkley C Community Fund for their grant towards this
- The local participation in Star Count had been good and noticed in local press reports
- Thanks to funding from CPRE SW, a strong social media 'Regeneration' campaign in Autumn 2020 had attracted new audiences, building on the national campaign.
- We adopted a new website in January 2020
- National CPRE support has allowed us to purchase branded display materials
- Organisational development- with 2 part time staff and 9 trustees and an ever increasing workload, there was a need for an active membership able to highlight local planning issues and to contribute funding support. Harnessing local partnerships had extended our ability to deliver our objectives for example in the litter pick project and in joint initiatives with the AONB and other CPRE branches. The help of SW CPRE had been particularly appreciated in supporting our social media work and for the offer of grant towards the proposed 2021 AGM focus on 'Rewilding'. Hugh Williams had kindly agreed to serve as vice chairman of the branch and this had been approved by the Trustees at their most recent meeting.
- Thanks – Firstly to the branch President Roger Martin who had unfortunately been obliged to step down in the past few days due to ill health. An approach to a new President was under consideration. Special thanks to Becky Collier who had done so much for the organisation during the year and thanks also to Fletcher Robinson for his sage advice on planning matters and to Richard de Peyer as minute taker. Thanks to John Roberts for his work as Treasurer and to Phil Michael for verifying the accounts. Thanks to everyone who has signed up as a litter volunteer. Finally, to the many members and donors that had helped to support the work of the branch during the year, including everyone who had bought a lottery ticket.

6. Treasurers Report – The Treasurer, John Roberts presented his report. Accounts for 2019 which had been confirmed by an independent examiner and submitted to the Charity Commission were displayed to the meeting participants on a slide. The Branch had been financially resilient in 2019 and although they displayed a fall in net resources at year end of nearly £5,000 this had been reduced from the budget provision – partly as a result of late appointment of the planning consultant during the year. Overheads had been reduced – due to retendering the printing costs and the purchase of a franking machine to reduce postal charges. There had been no major appeal in 2019 so income was slightly down on 2018. Steps were taken to initiate new projects for 2020 including the litter pick project and preparations for launch of the Somerset CPRE 100 club lottery.

In the absence of any questions the accounts were proposed by Don Parkinson, seconded by Ferelith Drummond and passed by the meeting. The Chairman thanked John Roberts for his report and his work during the year.

7. Election of Directors/Trustees – Although unable to attend, the President Roger Martin, had made a number of nominations of Trustees and Executive Members As follows: Chris Lewis, Fiona Wilkie, Vernon Hughes, Don Parkinson, John Roberts, Fletcher Robinson, Hugh Williams, David Julian and Tim Whittingham. FW had been coopted as a Trustee since April 2020. Election of all was seconded by Richard de Peyer and unanimously supported by those present.

CL noted that there was one vacancy among the Trustees and invited any nominations to be brought forward subsequent to the meeting. Nominations of women would be especially welcome due to the current gender imbalance.

8. Election of President - As explained Roger Martin had very recently been obliged to stand down and there could be no election at this time.

9. Address from Simon Murray (Chairman of national CPRE)

SM introduced his background as Chairman of the Forest of Dean District branch of the CPRE for 6 years and as a Deputy Director at the National Trust (NT) for which he had worked for 30 years before retirement 18 months previously.

He saw many parallels between the work of the CPRE and the NT but was aware that NT can offer an attractive product to members while the CPRE had a less tangible offer to make. CPRE membership had declined from c45k to c25k over the past twenty years. Following a national review started three years ago the decision had been taken to invest accumulated reserves in a two-pronged development plan:

- A 'Hard' campaign around the protection of the countryside notably against planning incursions
- A 'Soft' campaign around creating greater love for the countryside to include positive commentaries rather than focussed on negative campaigning

Recent developments included:

- CPRE's new brand and purpose
- Creating a 'Chairmen's chat' forum where branch chairs could exchange ideas for new initiatives
- The 'Regeneration' campaign in summer 2020 - the film has been seen by 240k people on You Tube
- Involving the public in CPRE projects eg Star Count (ten times greater participation in 2020 than 2019), litter campaigning
- Challenging the Govt's proposed changes to the planning system: CPRE has worked with over 40 charities to lobby government re these damaging proposals. One notable success was the withdrawal of the planning 'algorithm' which would have favoured rural development over urban. Govt had now reconsidered the proposed hard development targets as aspirations for local consideration. An 11 point "Vision for Planning" had been agreed between partners. Only CPRE had the breadth to develop such a scheme.

Upcoming work includes:

- A 2nd report on AONBs ('Beauty Betrayed') investigating the impact of housing intrusions
- Annual review of the state of Green Belts which have been under particular attack since 2013 (report launched 25th Feb)
- A 2nd report on 'Transport Deserts' focussing on the sustainable approach taken in Germany and Switzerland towards rural transport services
- Further work on Rural Housing development and Housing quality
- 'Missing Millennials' looking at the brain drain caused by lack of opportunities for young people in rural areas
- Project based work on eg hedges, soil quality and land use by agriculture

The 'watchword' was Making CPRE a movement working more strongly together.

Questions - Chris Lewis thanked Simon Murray for his presentation and invited questions to him:

Ferelith Drummond asked about the value of **positive campaigns**. SM referred to the Forest of Dean where CPRE had lately made three favourable comments on development proposals; local CPREs are encouraged to hold competitions such as Gloucester's awards scheme for good design.

Hugh Williams asked concerning **missing millennials** and SM referred to the need to encourage participation by young people in the organisation accepting their strengths as in social media work and their motivation which was often to enhance CVs.

Matthew Bennett proposed that the enthusiasm of the young concerning **global concerns** could be harnessed to work on local manifestations of these, perhaps bringing back the phrase "*Think global, act local*". SM felt this was a good way forward

Fletcher Robinson congratulated SM on CPRE's work to frustrate the proposed planning algorithm and asked what prospect there was of resisting moves towards the silencing of **local democratic voice**. SM felt there could be some movement on the opportunity for local opinion to be considered at Outline Planning stage. Certain Conservative MPs had been quite vocal about the algorithm and interested in the issue.

Malcolm Owen highlighted **litter** as an issue and felt this could be emphasised more. SM referred to two posts at national CPRE examining litter control models and its work with major companies, also the "Litter in Lockdown" report launch a couple of months ago but accepted that perhaps these had not achieved a high enough profile.

Mike Merrifield asked whether CPRE should be concerned that the Church of England was proposing to release more **church land for development**. SM agreed this could be problematic and that a close eye must be kept on local applications

Carmel Wilkinson thanked CPRE for support on local planning matters in Kingstone, South Somerset

10. The meeting was closed at 7.20pm and notice given of the 2021 AGM to be held in October on the theme of 'Rewilding'

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Prof. Chris Lewis, Chairman CPRE Somerset

Date: