

Campaign to Protect Rural England, Somerset
Minutes of Annual General Meeting.
Held at The Edgar Hall, Somerton
Friday 19th November 2021 at 3.15pm

The Rewilding Somerset event was held before the AGM with presentations by Mariella Frostrup (CPRE Somerset President), Sara King (Rewilding Britain), Jolyon Chesworth (Somerset Wildlife Trust), Holly Purdey, (Horner Farm, Exmoor), Cllr Sarah Dyke (South Somerset District Council). Over one hundred people attended in person, with a further 107 watching the livestream on YouTube.

The AGM itself started at 3.15pm. There were present:

Chris Lewis, Chairman, Somerset CPRE
Hugh Williams, Vice-Chairman, Somerset CPRE
Vernon Hughes, Executive Member
David Julian, Executive Member
Don Parkinson, Executive Member
John Roberts Executive Member & Honorary Treasurer
Fletcher Robinson, Executive Member & Planning Consultant

In addition, Becky Collier, (Branch Manager), Richard de Peyer (minute taker), Janette Ward (nominated as Trustee), Crispin Truman (Chief Exec. of CPRE), Cherise Emerson (SW CPRE Chair), plus 28 CPRE members; the attendance list is held by the Branch Manager.

1. Apologies for absence were received from the following members: Tim Whittingham, Executive Member, Ferelith Drummond, John & Barbara Lee, John Elder, Lilah Sansom, Jill Fuller, Merida Drysdale, Rosa Wellspring, Nick Whitsun-Jones.

2. Welcome – Chris Lewis opened the meeting referring to the fact that the COVID emergency meant that there had been no events during 2021 and that meetings had been largely conducted on Zoom. He hoped that there would be more opportunities to meet in 2022 subject to any COVID restrictions. The meeting was being livestreamed on YouTube and CL thanked Becky Collier for the excellent arrangements to facilitate this. CL then gave the usual housekeeping notices regarding conduct of the meeting.

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the previous AGM – CL presented the minutes of the last AGM, held online on 24th February 2021, which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. These were approved as an accurate record and would be signed.

4. Matters Arising – there were no matters arising.

5. Review of the Year – presented by CL.

- The charity operates with 2 p/t staff, 9 trustees and the newly elected president Mariella Frostrup. We now have many new volunteers, thanks to our litter project. We have gained 1 new Trustee during the year – Vernon Hughes – but lost another as Fiona Wilkie relocated to the midlands. Membership is stable.

- Finances had stood up well and project money had been raised for a number of projects including particularly litter pick equipment, A Boards and sanitiser stations relating to these.

Our work falls into three main categories:

Enhance the countryside

- #2minute litterpick project – funding from national CPRE grant. 5 litterpick stations now in place in Yeovil Country Park, Bridgwater, Watchet, Langport & Chard Reservoir. These all have built in sanitisers thanks to members supporting our fundraising appeal. All original 100 litterpicking kits have now been handed out
- A generous donation from one of our members has allowed us to buy more kits over the next 3 years so we are now recruiting volunteers again – all are encouraged to get in touch to sign up!
- Restoring historic signposts – funded by Hinkley C Community Fund. Working with Parish Councils & Somerset County Highways. Work is almost complete, all funds now allocated and grant almost signed off

Promote the countryside

- “My Somerset – at work, rest & play” photo competition – over 100 entries and quality better than ever before. The competition celebrates our lives in the countryside & is proving to be a great way of introducing people to CPRE. We had two age categories for first time, helping to connect us with a younger audience. Our President had presented the prizes earlier in the afternoon.
- Website & social media engagements have increased and we are collaborating with SW CPRE and national CPRE to boost our social media presence to attract new audiences.
- Events like the Rewilding Somerset event and project attracting new volunteers help us to share CPRE’s campaigns with a wider range of people.

Protect the countryside

- Planning casework is still very busy. Fletcher Robinson was appointed as Planning Consultant from September 2020. 54 detailed comments submitted on significant planning cases so far in 2021. Sue Levinge is supporting Fletcher as a Planning Volunteer, as are several of our Trustees. Fletcher undertakes regular site visits to meet with and advise concerned residents.
- An important part of our role is speaking at significant public inquiries & planning committees and we continue to work closely with AONBs & supporting our Parish Council members in responses to planning cases.

Chris then gave his thanks to:

- All this year’s Trustees – Chris Lewis, David Julian, Don Parkinson, Fletcher Robinson, Hugh Williams, Tim Whittingham, Fiona Wilkie, Vernon Hughes, John Roberts. Thanks to Hugh Williams for taking on the role of Vice Chair and to John Roberts for his work as our Treasurer
- Richard de Peyer our Volunteer Minute Taker
- Janette Ward for standing as a new Trustee
- Phil Michael for auditing the accounts
- Fletcher Robinson for his hard work as our Planner and Becky Collier as our Manager
- Mariella Frostrup for stepping up as our new President
- CPRE SW for their funding support for this event

- All of today's speakers
- Crispin Truman for coming all this way

Photo Competition

- Kit Houghton, Chris Lewis and Andrew Lee, Editor of The Leveller, for judging and to everyone who entered the competition. Thanks also to Jeff Hutson, our 2020 winner, who donated his prize money to support our Under 18s age category this year.

Litter Project

- Our small army of Litterpicking Volunteers
- National CPRE for funding our Litter project
- Our generous benefactor who has donated funds so we can buy more kits in the coming years.
- All our Trustees and Mike & Angela Merrifield who are helping to deliver kits
- Tincknells Country Store, Wells for giving us free use of a shipping container to store the equipment
- Mendip Hills AONB for encouraging their Young Rangers to take part

Finally

- Everyone who has bought a lottery ticket or a bag or Christmas cards
- Ordinary members who continue to support us by remaining members

6. Treasurers Report 2020 – The Treasurer, John Roberts presented his report. Accounts for 2020 had been circulated and had been confirmed by an independent examiner and submitted to the Charity Commission following the last AGM. JR felt that the branch was in a good financial state with scope for increased activity as occasion might demand.

Questions were invited and a member asked about the branch reserves policy. JR advised that the appropriate level of reserves had been discussed by the Trustees two years before and it had been felt that £25k should be retained to cover commitments.

Henry Best –congratulated the Trustees on maintaining the financial health of the branch.

7. Election of Directors/Trustees for 2022 – Mariella Frostrup was elected following her proposal as President of the Branch by David Julian, seconded by Don Parkinson. The following were proposed 'en bloc' by Becky Collier as Trustees for 2022 and seconded by Richard de Peyer: Chris Lewis, Vernon Hughes, Don Parkinson, John Roberts, Fletcher Robinson, Hugh Williams David Julian, Janette Ward and Tim Whittingham. Their election was confirmed by vote of the members 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. Address from Crispin Truman (Chief Executive of CPRE nationally):-

- Crispin noted the attendance of the national chairman Simon Murray at the AGM in February which had brought the membership up to date with many initiatives. He had been particularly glad to attend this time to recognise the contribution of CL as he stood down as branch chairman at a time when the branch was particularly successful with a strong support team,

growing membership, a successful record of comments on planning matters and the litter campaign.

- One of the conspicuous successes of the CPRE during 2021 had been the campaign to influence Planning Reforms and it was gratifying to learn that the government had promised a general commitment to leave the environment in a better place than it had found it and in particular to 'balance the pressures on the land' which were evident in planning matters. The CPRE had had a powerful influence on policy due to the powerful voice of its many members.
- The charity had launched its Hedgerows campaign during the year with a target of a 40% increase in hedgerow cover by 2050. A financial hedgefund had contributed £250k towards hedge planting initiatives.
- Other campaigns and reports had focussed on encouraging facilities for and initiatives to involve younger people to stay in the countryside, to expand rural transport systems, to encourage volunteering and a relaunch of the 'brownfield first' campaign. On the latter the government had promised much but underdelivered especially in the north of England.

In response to questions, CT explained that the charity's position in relation to population growth concerned the consequences of increased population and not policies that might affect population growth itself.

A second question from the floor enquired about how young people, particularly in colleges and secondary education, might be encouraged to join the branch and involve themselves in activity. CL agreed that this was desirable and some progress had been made to engage with new audiences in recent times, due to the litter project and the photo competition. He felt that the branch should involve itself in a range of activities on behalf of the countryside whether or not they resulted in additional member recruitment.

The meeting closed at approx. 4pm

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Prof. Chris Lewis, Chairman CPRE Somerset

Date: