

**Campaign to Protect Rural England, Somerset
Minutes of Annual General Meeting.
Held at Caryford Community Hall, Ansford, Castle Cary
Thursday 28th November 2024**

The Building Better Places event was held before the AGM with a video message by Mariella Frostrup (CPRE Somerset President) and a presentation by Nicholas Boys Smith of Create Streets. 65 people attended in total.

The AGM started at 2.45pm. There were present: Hugh Williams, Chairman, Somerset CPRE, Trustees: Gerhard Hattingh, Vernon Hughes, Sarah Hutchison, David Julian, Jenny Raggett, John Roberts (also Honorary Treasurer), Fletcher Robinson, (also Planning Consultant) and Janette Ward.

In addition, Elli Moody, (Director of Policy & Advocacy, CPRE), Becky Collier, (Branch Manager) plus 18 CPRE members. The attendance list is held by the Branch Manager.

Apologies for absence were received from the following members: Mike & Angela Merrifield, Julie Chant, Bill Bishop (High Ham PC), Axbridge Town Council plus CPRE Somerset President, Mariella Frostrup.

Confirmation of the minutes of the previous AGM – Minutes had been circulated and were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters Arising – The matter of Gift Aid would be covered later by the Treasurer.

Review of the Year: presented by Hugh Williams, Chair. Hugh gave a presentation showing highlights and achievements this year.

Planning: Hugh praised Fletcher Robinson's, planning work and felt that CPRE's work is being taken seriously around the county. Significant planning wins are the Hurlestone bungalow, Exmoor and Nythe Road solar farm. Some "losses" include the approval of large solar farms at Ham (Creech St Michael), Washford and Rode. The work continues with battles like Wayford solar farm. We have set aside a small budget each year so that we can commission expert evidence to challenge planning applications. Hugh highlighted the positive feedback we receive from community groups. This year we have commented on 40 planning cases in detail.

Influence: CPRE Somerset is active on social media and our audiences are growing. We appeared on BBC Points West in August in an article about solar parks on farmland. We emailed all election candidates and are now physically meeting up with new MPs. We work hard to engage with new audiences. We held more events than ever this year. We began with a Stargazing night in Middlezoy, held a talk on West Country Myths & Legends in Wells in June, attended the Dunster Show in July, sponsored a landscape painting prize at Bruton Arts Society exhibition in August, and held a CPRE Countryside Day event in September in the Quantock Hills and spoke at an SOSLevels event in October in Shapwick.

Projects: Litter project is going well. We now have over 300 volunteers. This year we received sponsorship of 60 new litterpicking kits from SUEZ – all made from recycled ghost fishing gear washed up on UK beaches. We recently sent out 24 of these kits to In The Mix Youth Project in Wiveliscombe, Cambian Lufton College in Yeovil, for use by young adults with autism and learning difficulties and The Onion Project, which works with children at risk of exploitation. Our young people are gathering data to make their litterpicking educational as well as satisfying!

We have set aside £2000 of our budget each year to support Parish & Town Councils who want to restore their historic fingerposts. This year we have helped fund repairs in Milborne Port, Fivehead, Ruishton & Thornfalcon and Ilminster.

Partnership: We pride ourselves on working with national CPRE as much as possible as part of the OneCPRE network and Hugh and Becky and Janette Ward are all on the national CPRE Assembly. We also work with countless other external groups. Hugh thanked the following:

- All this year's Trustees – Gerhard Hattingh, Vernon Hughes, Sarah Hutchison, David Julian, Jan Owen, Jenny Raggett, John Roberts, Fletcher Robinson, Janette Ward, Hugh Williams. A special mention for Jan Owen who has decided to step down. We thank her for her hard work and support, and we hope she will stay in touch.
- Mariella Frostrup - we are so proud to have Mariella as our President. She loves the countryside, loves Somerset and is a tremendous ambassador for our charity.
- John Roberts for his work as our Treasurer.
- Phil Michael for auditing the accounts.
- Bron Purkiss, our Volunteer Minute Taker.
- Catherine Anderson and Mike Lanning – our Volunteer Photographers.
- Fletcher Robinson, our Planner and Becky Collier, our Manager.

Litter project:

- All of our Litterpicking Volunteers
- SUEZ, for their generous sponsorship of our fabulous litterpicking kits. Lily Morton, their Community Liaison Manager is incredibly supportive and enthusiastic about our litter project, and we really appreciate her support.
- Thanks to Julie Chant and Space4Crewkerne volunteers for organising a litterpick event for us to christen our new litterpicking kits with Lily, back in May.
- All our Trustees, plus Mike & Angela Merrifield, who are helping to deliver kits to new volunteers.
- Tincknells Country Store, Wells for discounted use of storage space.
- Somerset Duke of Edinburgh Coordinators at Somerset Council for setting up links with SEND schools and providers. This means we are able to reach out and forge new links with younger people across Somerset who have not had the easiest start in life.

Events: We have run more events than ever this year – thanks to everyone involved.

- Somerset Levels Stargazing Group for hosting a stargazing evening in Middlezoy in February.
- Janette Ward for speaking to Creech St Michael Annual Parish Meeting in May
- Tony Painter for a fascinating talk on West Country Myths & Legends in June
- Vernon Hughes and Ruth for running the CPRE Somerset stall at Dunster Country Fair in July
- Quantock Hills National Landscape Team and Stowey Green Spaces Group for laying on such a brilliant event for us at New Stowey Farm for our first ever CPRE Countryside Day in September.
- SOS Levels Group for inviting us to speak at their evening looking at loss of farmland to solar farms and housing in October.

Donations: This year we have had a few generous donations in gratitude for the planning support they have had from Fletcher. These include Exmoor Natural History Society, CA Redfern Charitable Trust, Residents of Shapwick village, Save Shudrick Valley Group plus some individual donations. We are very grateful for any donation, large or small. We offer our advice free of charge, of course, but it can take many, many hours of work plus travel to meetings. Somerset is a big county for a small charity to cover!

Finally: Everyone who has bought a lottery ticket or Christmas cards. Everyone who has recycled their ink cartridges for us and shopped via easy fundraising – small amounts but it all adds up! Everyone who follows us on social media and likes and shares our posts.

And - last, but not least - our members! Thank you all for your continued support

Photo competition: This year's theme was **Somerset: my special place in all seasons**. We received 111 entries. Hugh thanked everyone who entered and thanked his fellow judges – Kit Houghton, Andrew Lee (Somerset Confidential), Ross Alexander (Moment Photography, Bridgwater). Neither winner was able to attend but their £100 prize money has been sent to them: Amanda Baldwin (adult) for “Blowing a hoolie – Brean beach” and Sophie Carver (under 18s) for “The Highlanders”.

2023 accounts: The Treasurer, John Roberts presented his report. The accounts had been circulated to members. Gift Aid has now been claimed but will show up on the accounts for next year. The reserves have continued at a stable level.

Election of trustees: Becky Collier, CPRE Somerset Manager, took the chair and reported nominations received for trustees. Nominations had been received for members of the existing board, namely Hugh Williams, Gerhard Hatting, Vernon Hughes, Sarah Hutchison, David Julian, John Roberts, Jenny Raggett and Janette Ward. Fletcher Robinson has reached his maximum term as Trustee but will remain as Planner. These were proposed for election by Linda Bennett and seconded by Phil Holms. On a show of hands all were appointed en-bloc. Mariella Frostrup was proposed by Hugh Williams, seconded by Linda Bennett, and re-elected as President.

National update: Elli Moody – Director of Policy & Advocacy, CPRE

2024 has been dominated by the General Election. The key themes in CPRE's election manifesto, remain our key themes going forward. Hedgerow Heroes has seen the planting of 60 miles of hedgerow so far, with 100 miles on target by the end of our centenary year in 2026. CPRE has worked with partners

including: Create Streets, Zero Hour, Kings Foundation, Wildlife & Countryside Link. CPRE will be hosting the Better Planning Coalition in 2025.

Housing is a serious challenge for CPRE as Govt targets are so high and the new algorithm will disproportionately affect rural areas. CPRE replied to the NPPF consultation: the revised version is expected just before Christmas. We challenged the Grey Belt concept. The Govt targets will not bring us the kind of homes Nicholas Boys Smith talked about. Big housebuilders and the market are not delivering the affordable and social homes we need but are still making big profits. The Govt has committed to make "Brownfield First" happen and we need to hold them to this.

Rooftop Solar campaign has had some success, but there is much more to be done so the campaign will be rebooted in 2025. CPRE will be championing Green Belt and the importance of the countryside next door as well as pushing for a Land Use Framework. Exciting plans are coming for CPRE's centenary year. The following topics were raised by the audience:

Fletcher Robinson – solar farms are a big problem in Somerset and now we are getting applications to increase the size of wind turbines. Could CPRE push for offshore solar and suggest this in response to the consultation on a Land Use Framework? Elli said that the Govt is committed to net zero energy generation by 2030 but there is no masterplan, and National grid can't keep up, so we need a land use strategy.

Fletcher – valued landscapes (non-designated) should get some sort of protection.

Tidal energy was suggested as a solution as it is predictable and reliable (unlike solar and wind) but it has complex environmental consequences.

The topic of Hinkley C was raised - and the intention to not install an Acoustic Fish deterrent (ADF) but to create salt marshes up the Severn Estuary instead. Hugh said all local CPREs in the area will be robustly challenging this plan.

Elli said the lack of Planners and Ecologists in Local Authorities is a big issue.

Mary Acland Hood was pleased that CPRE is working with other groups and suggested that fly tipping should be an issue to look at as well.

Vernon Hughes felt CPRE was not well enough known. Elli acknowledged this, saying brand awareness is 18% and her aim is to increase this - and this is a key target of the centenary.

Bron Purkiss made a plea for speaking up about loss of biodiversity. Elli agreed this is important but there are lots of other groups doing this.

There was general agreement that local voices are not being listened to in planning decisions. Fletcher urged CPRE to push for proper community benefits when solar farms are approved.

10. Any other business - none

Hugh thanked Elli and thanked members for attending. The meeting closed at 4.00pm

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Hugh Williams, Chairman CPRE Somerset

Date:.....