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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Friends' House,
Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ on Tuesday 5 July 2011

PRESENT

Mr Paul Clayden	(vice-president)
Mr Bernard Selwyn	(vice-president)
Mr Tim Crowther	(chairman)
Mrs Jean Macdonald	(vice-chairman)

and 44 other members of the society, six members of staff
and two guests.

Apologies were received from 90 members.

WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN

- 11/1 The AGM chairman, Paul Clayden, welcomed members to the meeting. He referred to the coalition government's recent natural environment white paper and welcomed the commitment to make it easier to claim unrecorded rights of way. He criticised the astonishing failure to mention common land which uniquely provides a wealth of public benefits, for wildlife, landscape, history, archaeology and enjoyment. He urged the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government fully to implement part 1 of the Commons Act 2006 so that the registers of commons and village greens can be updated.
- 11/2 He criticised the report of the Farming Regulation Task Force (the Macdonald Report) for its remarks about village greens, challenging the view that 'inappropriate applications [for new greens] were being sought to thwart planning applications'. He said that local people sought village green status for areas which had been used for recreation for 20 years or more, whether or not those areas had planning development potential, and that sometimes a planning application will trigger a village green application where village green status had previously been taken for granted.

- 11/3 Turning to the recently published draft National Planning Policy Framework, he welcomed the proposal that local communities should be able to designate green areas of particular importance to them as local green space which would be permanently protected from development.

APPROVAL TO LIMIT SPEECHES

- 11/4 It was agreed that speeches would be limited as follows: proposers of motions maximum five minutes, others maximum three minutes.

APPOINTMENT OF TELLERS AND SCRUTINEERS

- 11/5 It was agreed to appoint Ellen Froggatt and Julie Jiggins as tellers and scrutineers.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 6 JULY 2010

- 11/6 It was proposed by Pat Luxford, seconded by Chris Borland and agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

10/8-11: Incorporation

- 11/7 Chris Borland (trustee) spoke to his paper which had been distributed to attendees. Although the Charity Commission had recently announced that the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) could be introduced in the autumn, there was no clear process to determine which charities would be first in the queue, and we might well have a long wait. In any case, our solicitor had advised that there might be little advantage in becoming a CIO so the trustees had decided to proceed with forming a company limited by guarantee. The principal reasons were that the trustees at present have personal and unlimited liability for the actions of the society, and consequently there was a reluctance by prospective candidates to stand for election.
- 11/8 The trustees hope to have incorporated by September, with an extraordinary general meeting in October when we would ask members to transfer to the new organisation. The old organisation would continue in parallel until all outstanding matters had been resolved.
- 11/9 Chris confirmed that the trustees have budgeted £10,000 for this, and that we would need the landlord's consent to transfer the lease to the new company. There was no intention to alter the terms and conditions of staff.

10/15 New greens

- 11/10 Peter Jackson (Derbyshire) asked what was happening about the government's proposed review of legislation for new greens. The general secretary replied that we did not yet know, but were lobbying against this since the desirable changes could be achieved by improving the registration process and amending the guidance. We suspected that the government's proposed new green space designation might include amendments to greens legislation and we were anxious to prevent this.

10/32 History of the society

- 11/11 Bernard Selwyn (vice-president) spoke to his paper which had been circulated to attendees, in which he reminded members of his proposal last year for a history of the society to mark our 150th anniversary in 2015. The general secretary said that the trustees had agreed to try to find an intern or student to do the research. Joyce Bellamy (London Borough of Merton) suggested we seek lottery funding for this.

10/33 Council officers

- 11/12 Dilwyn Chambers (London Borough of Harrow) said that he was still having trouble with council officers whom he did not believe to be telling the truth. Members made various suggestions, such as complaining directly to the chief executive with a threat of going to the local government ombudsman, and reporting the matter to the monitoring officer.

ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2010

- 11/13 Tim Crowther (chairman) proposed the adoption of the trustees' report for 2010. He referred to the society's longevity and said that our core purpose had changed very little over the years. We are small, focused and unbureaucratic, and we cover a wide range of issues. He was enormously encouraged by the help the society can give to its members on the registration of new greens which had caught the public imagination. In our 111 press releases in 2010 we had recorded some notable successes.
- 11/14 The trustees had been wrestling with the governance of the society, but this was now bearing fruit: we had a strategic plan, a revised constitution, restructured finances, proposals to maintain our membership and extend our influence locally, and plans to incorporate. This was a strong base on which to build for the future, and he hoped that in four years' time, we shall celebrate our 150th anniversary with conviction and panache, while not losing sight of the vision of our founders and those who have followed them.
- 11/15 The trustees' report was seconded by Diane Andrewes.

- 11/16 The general secretary spoke to the trustees' report. She began by introducing the staff: Nicola Hodgson, Ellen Froggatt, Julie Jiggins, Mark Taylor and our newest member, Esther Finch, the support officer, working with local correspondents and members to increase our spread and influence. Some generous legacies had enabled us to make this appointment.
- 11/17 The bulk of the casework from the office was on new greens, and recent court cases had taken a worrying turn. We were involved in amendments to the Localism Bill to protect green spaces and had submitted proposals from our members on the nature of the new green-space designation to the Department of Communities and Local Government and Defra.
- 11/18 On commons there seemed to be an increase in the number of applications for works, but our expertise was sought and respected and our publication *Finding Common Ground* was a valuable tool in encouraging commons managers to take account of the public interest. We had been sad that Graham Bathe, who had championed commons at Natural England, had retired but were pleased to welcome Naomi Oakley whose work would include commons.
- 11/19 In Wales, 17 of the 60 new Assembly Members had pledged support for our bilingual action plan, including seven ministers and deputy ministers. It was important to maintain our presence in Wales as it becomes increasingly divergent from Westminster.
- 11/20 On rights of way, one positive consequence of the budget cuts was that local authorities were making fewer orders for path changes. Our local correspondents continued to be dogged in defence of paths and to fight changes which were not to the public's benefit. We were seeing many more gating orders and privacy cases. We were concerned about the reference in the natural environment white paper to 'streamlining the processes for making changes to rights of way' if that means making it easier to move paths, and would fight any such measure.
- 11/21 The society was embarking on a marketing exercise to enable us better to promote ourselves and our unique qualities. The society would always be forthright in defence of the public realm against developers and those who want to privatise, encroach on or develop open spaces and paths.
- 11/22 In closing she thanked the trustees, local correspondents, members and staff for their continued support for our work.
- 11/23 Chris Ambrose (North Somerset) asked whether the society opposed all diversions. The general secretary replied that the policy was to oppose unless there was clear public benefit in the change.

- 11/24 Hugh Pratt (North Somerset) asked how many new footpaths the society had created. He pointed out that the first verb of the objects was to ‘create’ and only the second verb to ‘conserve’. In other words he suggested OSS was not fulfilling its ‘primary activity’. Peter Kidner (Somerset) said that local correspondents could report on path creations specifically in their quarterly reports.
- 11/25 Peter Jackson (Derbyshire) asked that the society consider finding one repository to house our archives, such as the Wellcome Institute or a university library.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2010

- 11/26 Chris Beney, a member of the finance subcommittee, proposed that the accounts be adopted. He expressed his appreciation of the work of the financial administrator, Mark Taylor. He reminded members of the strategy to stretch out our reserves so that we had adequate warning of any potential funding crisis: at the end of each year we work out the next year’s budget and set aside funds for it. We extrapolate that figure for three more years and set aside funds for that. We estimate our closing down costs (unexpired lease, redundancy etc) and set aside funds for that. The remaining funds, if any, are then either invested or spent on our charitable aims—hence the new support officer post, which should improve delivery of our aims through more local correspondents and through support in areas where we are currently overburdened (eg commons responses).
- 11/27 As quite a long-serving trustee, Chris felt we had now got a much more logical and robust way of working than before. Nevertheless, looking further ahead than four years, we will need substantially more than the current ten-year-average in legacies, or, alternatively, a very great increase in members and in members’ donations in order to continue at our present strength. So he had no hesitation in repeating last year’s message: consider a legacy to OSS; if dealing with other people’s estates, consider a legacy by a simple deed of family arrangement. The government plans to reduce the inheritance tax percentage rate for wills that give a certain amount to charity, and that may be a useful incentive in some cases.
- 11/28 Claire Cunningham (Essex) seconded the adoption of the accounts. She commended the revamped website and asked whether we should invest more in IT.
- 11/29 The accounts were approved.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2011

- 11/30 It was agreed that Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, be appointed independent examiners for 2011.

ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENTS AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Vice Presidents

- 11/31 Tim Crowther proposed and Peter Newman seconded the election of the following vice-presidents: Lord Clark of Windermere, Len Clark, Paul Clayden, Roger de Freitas, Tony (Lord) Greaves, Richard Mabey, Edgar Powell, John Riddall, Bernard Selwyn, Ronald Smith, Anne Wilks and Pat Wilson.

Trustees

- 11/32 The following had been proposed and seconded as trustees: Chris Ambrose, Chris Beney, John Ives, Peter Newman and Hugh Pratt.
- 11/33 The chairman pointed out that, although there were insufficient candidates for a ballot, the members were entitled to ask for a vote for each candidate individually. However, there was no such request and the candidates were automatically elected.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 11/34 Diane Andrewes proposed a vote of thanks to the trustees, local correspondents and staff, which was approved with acclaim.
- 11/35 Michael Bach (Kensington Society) spoke about the encroachments on London open spaces and in particular his campaign to protect the open spaces at the Natural History Museum.
- 11/36 Naomi Oakley Natural England's senior adviser, uplands and commons, introduced herself, explaining that she was particularly involved in agricultural commons, and she was a commoner on Dartmoor.
- 11/37 Nicola Hodgson, the case officer, spoke about the society's work on the Localism Bill and the amendments which, with considerable help from Bernard Selwyn, we had drafted for Lord Greaves regarding part 4, assets for community value.
- 11/38 Beverley Penney, the society's appointee on the National Trust council, gave an update on the trust's direction, which was to focus on going local and bringing properties and places alive, with a shift in power from the centre to the properties. With the Ramblers' appointee she would be attending a meeting with the trust's director of conservation, Peter Nixon. She said the contribution of her predecessor, Rodney Legg, was respected by the trust and part of the organisational memory. The trust was currently carrying out its six-year review of appointing bodies and the society had submitted its case for remaining as such a body.

11/39 The meeting closed at 1 pm.

In the afternoon, members spoke about their campaigns as follows:

David Nellist (Coventry): village green application in major park where school, becoming an academy, wishes to restrict access.

John Toplis (Basildon, Essex): Judicial review appeal

Adam Cook (London Borough of Islington): town green application

Diane Andrewes (Bursledon Rights of Way and Amenities Preservation Group, Hampshire): issues including cuts to countryside services and non-compliance with legislation

Donald McGillivray (Kent): the work of the Kent Law School in relation to access to land, especially greens and public paths.

Wendy Rapacchi (Central Bedfordshire): registering a farm courtyard and traditional orchard as a village green.

Pat Luxford (Kent): village green applications.

A large, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Luxford', is centered on the page below the list of members.

