

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF OPEN SPACES SOCIETY**
(limited company number 7846516, charity number 1144840)

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at
Friends House, Euston Road, London
on Thursday 9 July 2015**

PRESENT

Mr Paul Clayden	(vice-president)
Mr Graham Bathe	(chairman)
Dr Phil Wadey	(vice-chairman)
Mr Steve Warr	(treasurer)

and 27 other members of the society, five members of staff and two guests.

Apologies were received from 92 members.

WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN

- 15/1 The AGM chairman, Paul Clayden, welcomed members to the meeting and congratulated them on braving the rail and tube strikes. He began by referring to the society's 150th anniversary and said that it was remarkable that such a small body had lasted so long in such a good state. It was needed as much now as ever. He spoke of the importance of members getting involved in neighbourhood planning and in particular seeking to designate open space as Local Green Space and Assets of Community Value. He congratulated the society on its success in Wales, in which it persuaded the Welsh Government not to copy England's changes to the law of village greens. He closed by observing that the Conservative party's 2015 election manifesto was very brief on environmental matters and it remained to be seen what progress we might make with politicians in furthering our cause.

APPROVAL TO LIMIT SPEECHES

- 15/2 It was agreed that speeches on resolutions (other than the adoption of the annual report and accounts) would be limited as follows: proposers of motions maximum five minutes, others maximum three minutes.

APPOINTMENT OF TELLERS AND SCRUTINEERS

- 15/3 It was agreed to appoint Ellen Froggatt and Christine Hunter as tellers and scrutineers.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 8 JULY 2014

- 15/4 It was proposed by Phil Wadey, seconded by Brian Reader and agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 15/5 **14/18 commercialisation of urban open spaces**

The general secretary reported that our trustee John Lavery (who could not be present because he was attending a meeting on our behalf with United Utilities regarding the Thirlmere fencing scheme) had drafted a paper on the commercialisation of urban spaces, but this was work in progress. He would welcome thoughts from members. George Laurence commended John Lavery's work and said that we needed a member who would qualify for legal aid in a selected place where we believed a breach in the law had occurred. He felt that London's open spaces were becoming a perpetual fairground.

ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2014

- 15/6 Graham Bathe (chairman) proposed the adoption of the trustees' report for 2014. He said that throughout our 150 years we had tried to protect rights which were based on custom and practice and were truly ancient. Information was being discovered on Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and around Stonehenge which showed that in Bronze Age times there were enormous feasts with tens of thousands of cattle killed for festivals, and that animals had travelled long distances, along ancient drove roads, from places which were still commons today.

- 15/7 Throughout our 150 years we had been served by staff with energy and vision, and now were supported by local correspondents who were our eyes and ears. He thanked everyone who had been involved with the society over the past year. He was pleased that we were developing the international side of our work. He thanked the treasurer, Steve Warr, and the financial administrators Mark Taylor and now Trevor Quantrill, who brought a new insight to our work.



- 15/8 After 150 years our work was not finished; certain aspects of the countryside were more threatened than ever before. We had won a major achievement with village greens in Wales, but faced in Cumbria deregistration of common land the like of which we had not seen since the inclosure acts, while United Utilities was threatening a ten-kilometre fence across the Thirlmere fells. He was proud of our heritage and confident of our future. We had had a successful year even in these straitened times.
- 15/9 The trustees' report was seconded by George Laurence.
- 15/10 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, spoke to the trustees' report. She said that in our present-day work we were constantly reminded of our history. Only last week, before giving a talk to the Heath and Hampstead Society, she had walked over Hampstead Heath and felt proud that the society was responsible for its existence. The recent 'Andrews 2' rights-of-way case in the Court of Appeal, where George Laurence successfully led for the Ramblers, demonstrated the importance of inclosure awards for claiming public paths. Our work on commons was still not complete, there were still commons to claim but the legislation had not been implemented fully in England to enable us to do this, and it had not been implemented at all in Wales.
- 15/11 She spoke of our role in creating the National Trust. We needed to remind the trust of our joint history. Our appointee on the council, Beverley Penney, (who was absent due to the strike) had sent a report in which she mentioned the governance review. This would lead to a reduction in appointed members, and the society would have to compete to remain on council. The trust was publishing an online map of its properties which had been inspired by our former chairman, the late Rodney Legg, and we would ensure that he was given proper credit for this.
- 15/12 With a government so pro development it felt like we were facing a new inclosure movement. We needed all the help we could get and were fortunate in the assistance we had received with casework from Jackie Warr and in the support of our local correspondents. We were undertaking work to increase membership and, in particular, retention, as people tended to join us for advice and then leave. We needed to emphasise that we are a charity which deserves support regardless of the advice we can give.
- 15/13 The general secretary ended by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff and members.
- 15/14 Brian Reader expressed concern that Surrey County Council had said it wanted its countryside estate to be self-financing by 2021.

15/15 Gary O' Leary (Friends of Panshanger Park) thanked the society for its help and for speaking at a rally in March about the lack of access to the ancient park. He said that more access was shortly to be opened up.

15/16 George Laurence said he had seen a press release suggesting that the National Trust was going to start involving itself in the protection of green spaces in towns and cities, which he considered to be good news.

15/17 Phil Wadey thanked the general secretary and the society and said that the role of the society as a statutory consultee was valuable. He cited a case at Stevenage, Hertfordshire, where the council had applied for fencing of a common without consultation; the society had objected and the application had been withdrawn.

15/18 The annual report was carried unanimously.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2014

15/19 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by Steve Warr (treasurer) and seconded by Chris Beney.

15/20 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried unanimously.

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

Vice Presidents

15/21 Phil Wadey proposed and Diane Andrewes seconded the election of the following vice-presidents: Lord Clark of Windermere, Len Clark, Mike Clarke, Paul Clayden, Roger de Freitas, Tony (Lord) Greaves, Richard Mabey, Edgar Powell and Ronald Smith. This was carried unanimously.

Trustees

15/22 Diane Andrewes, Graham Bathe and Phil Wadey were standing down having reached the end of their three-year term but were eligible for re-election and were standing again.

15/23 There were no other candidates and all three were re-elected.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2015

15/24 It was agreed that Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, be appointed independent examiners for 2015.

15/25 The meeting ended at 1.55.

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The following took place outside the AGM:

Pippa Langford, Natural England's Principal Specialist for Access and Rights of Way, spoke about her role on commons, as representative on the stakeholder working group on unrecorded ways, and on agri-environment schemes and cross-compliance.

Kate Ashbrook reported that our member Maurice Philpot was granting the society a right of estovers on St Clement's Common, Dickelburgh and Rushall in Norfolk. The right had been granted to him by the late landowner, Daphne Buxton. The documents were in the process of being signed and soon would be sent to the county council for processing, after which we would publicly thank Maurice and obtain publicity.

George Laurence explained the recent 'Andrews 2' case in the Court of Appeal, at which he had represented the Ramblers.

After lunch, Rachel Sanderson, Commons Project Officer for the Chilterns Conservation Board, spoke on Championing Chiltern Commons

This was followed by brief presentations from members:

- Inheritance tax exemption by Jerry Pearlman
- Lost fight for common exchange land at Walton Heath, Surrey, by Gillian Hein
- Coldham Commons, Cambridge by Chris Smith from The Friends of Coldham's Common.
- Solar farms and public paths by Dave Ramm.

The afternoon session closed at 3.25 pm.

*Paul Clayden*

*7.11.16*

