

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

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held by videoconference
on Thursday 8 July 2021 at 1300 hours**

PRESENT

Dr Phil Wadey (chairman)
Mr Steve Warr (treasurer)

and 33 other members of the society, plus eight members of staff.

APOLOGIES were received from nine members.

WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN

- 21/1 The AGM chairman, Phil Wadey, welcomed everyone to the meeting, saying that this was the first time we had met by videoconference, explaining that the meeting would be recorded, and giving some tips about the protocol for using zoom.
- 21/2 He explained that this year we celebrate the 150th anniversary of a number of important events concerning the society, particularly in and around London. At the end of June, we marked the 150th anniversary of the Hampstead Heath Act, which empowered the Metropolitan Board of Works to purchase 200 acres of Hampstead Heath and save it from development, a move which was at least partly due to the campaigning by our predecessors. Today, 8 July, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of a demonstration on Wanstead Flats in East London against the threat of enclosure of Epping Forest.
- 21/3 He said that we are indebted to our member Mark Gorman for the following information. A number of members of our founding body, the Commons Preservation Society (CPS), were prominent platform speakers at a series of meetings across east London in the summer of 1871, urging action to be taken against what they called

'the obnoxious fences' being put up in Epping Forest. A mass meeting on Wanstead Flats was called for 8 July, but by then the CPS may have become worried that it had stirred things up too much. It printed posters warning against any violence against the fences. At least two CPS members were present at the meeting, one was the local MP Richard Wingfield-Baker. There may well have been others (as there were at other local demonstrations). They made speeches, then withdrew from the scene before fence-breaking began. Within a month the government rushed through the first of a series of acts which eventually (in 1878) established Epping Forest as a public open space. This is probably the first time in English law that the right of public access to private land for leisure was established.

- 21/4 The chairman requested participants to limit the time of their contributions to five minutes maximum for proposers of motions, and three minutes for all other speeches.
- 21/5 He explained that all voting had been done by proxy this year, so there would be no voting at the meeting, nor any need to appoint tellers. The votes had been gathered and collated by the office manager, Sarah Hacking, and office assistant, Christine Hunter.
- 21/6 The chairman reported that 71 votes were cast, 18 of which were proxies to the chairman. The chairman said that, in accordance with the mood of those who voted, he had applied all the proxies in favour of the motions.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 9 JULY 2020

- 21/7 It was agreed that the minutes be approved and signed: the voting was 60 in favour, none against, and ten abstentions.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 21/8 The chairman reported that as we are still in covid, we are having an online meeting this year which gives more interaction than last year. The Charity Commission understands that articles do not always allow for virtual AGMs, but is content that we do the best we can and record the fact in the minutes.
- 21/9 Simon Pearson referred to minute 20/2 regarding joint members having two votes and asked that a method be found to achieve this for those who register to vote online. The chairman said we would investigate this.

ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2020

- 21/10 The adoption of the annual report was proposed by Phil Wadey and seconded by Tara-Jane Sutcliffe.



- 21/11 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, presented the trustees' report and gave some updates. She spoke of our work in re-registering lost commons, our charters for open spaces, the campaign to persuade public bodies voluntarily to register their land as town or village green, the campaigns on paths and access, the legal cases and our work to influence legislation and policy. She ended by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff and members for their support and activities through the year.
- 21/12 Brian Reader asked, in relation to our legal action at Blackbushe in Hampshire, whether we were also taking action against the illegally-obstructed bridleway across the common. Hugh Craddock (case officer) replied that we were aware of it but were tackling one case at a time.
- 21/13 Simon Pearson expressed concern that at Primrose Hill Park, one of the Royal Parks close to his home, the gates were locked at night, causing local outcry, and he wondered what could be done. Nicola Hodgson (case officer) replied that one would need to check the powers of the Royal Parks. She suggested that he write to us about it.
- 21/14 Diane Andrewes said that her local council did not want to register land as a village green, arguing that it was too small, and that village green status was too restricting. She wondered whether pocket park designation was an option. Nicola Hodgson replied that pocket parks had no protection in law, and that village greens would give the land proper protection.
- 21/15 The adoption of the annual report was carried by 69 votes for, none against, and one abstention.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2020

- 21/16 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by Steve Warr (treasurer). Steve said that 2020 was an unusual year in many ways, including for our finances. The financial results for 2020 were dominated by four things:
- 1. Legacies:** we were fortunate to receive £192,588 in legacies, which is the item which fluctuates year by year. Because of legacies received in the past we are able to spend more on activities than our recurring revenue.
 - 2. Applications to re-register commons,** which have two impacts on the accounts. We spent £102.3k in the year, plus £60.5k in 2019, and this is funded from the Candy Fund set up in 2018. We have a reserve set aside to complete our applications on paths and commons if they are challenged, which was increased by £270k to £435k.



3. Legal cases: we spent about £60k supporting two major legal cases: opposing the de-registration of Yateley Common by Blackbushe Airport, and challenging a footpath diversion at Rollright in Oxfordshire.

4. Reduction in value of investments: covid-19 sparked a big fall in the value of stock markets. It took until mid 2021 for the markets to recover, with the result that in 2020 our investments were reduced by £171k.

21/17 He concluded that we still ended the year in a strong position with reserves of over £1.7m including £944k in cash. We have not seen the fall in donations and loss of members suffered by many other charities.

21/18 Stuart Bain seconded the adoption of the accounts.

21/19 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried by 69 votes for, none against, and one abstention.

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

Vice Presidents

21/20 In introducing the elections the chairman reported with sadness that two of our vice-presidents had died since the last AGM: Tony Greaves and Ronald Smith.

21/21 Tony Greaves was a Liberal Democrat Peer who was assiduous in his support for the society in the House of Lords, always ready to table and argue amendments to legislation or promote a debate about the public's rights to paths and open spaces, and never accepted a brush off from a minister. It is thanks to him that Pendle Borough Council voluntarily registered a town green at Barnoldswick.

21/22 Ronald Smith was our treasurer from 1989-1995 at a time when our resources were tight, but he steered us through it. With his wife Margaret (who preceded him as vice-president until her death in 2010) he gave countless talks to publicise our work and raise funds for us.

21/23 Since we last met physically in 2019, we had lost three more vice-presidents.

21/24 Paul Clayden was our general secretary from 1976 to 1984. He was the author of *Our Common Land* among many other legal books, and was enormously kind and helpful in giving advice on commons and open spaces problems. Len Clark, who had died at the age of 103, was deeply involved in our campaigns for commons over a long period and was a pillar of strength to, and wise critic of, many countryside organisations. Edgar Powell was our local correspondent for parts of Herefordshire and Worcestershire for 24 years; he was a former trustee and vice-chairman and gave enormous help to local correspondents and other members.



21/25 The chairman concluded that the extraordinary achievements of these past vice-presidents showed how dependent we are on professional people.

21/26 Graham Bathe had proposed and John Hall had seconded the election of the vice-presidents. They were all elected as follows:

Name	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
David (Lord) Clark	65	1	4
Mike Clarke	64	1	4
Roger de Freitas	65	0	3
Richard Mabey	68	0	2

Trustees

21/27 Four people were standing for election and there were five vacancies. The trustees were elected as follows:

Name	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
Stuart Bain	68	1	2
Chris Beney	69	0	2
John Hall	69	0	2
Simon Hunt	68	1	2

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2021

21/28 It was proposed by Steve Warr, seconded by Stuart Bain and agreed nem con that Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, be appointed independent examiners for 2021. The voting was 68 for, none against, and two abstentions.

SPECIAL RESOLUTION

21/29 The chairman reported that the trustees had intended at this meeting to propose a special resolution to amend the articles for the better governance of the society. The resolution was proposed by the chairman on behalf of the trustees and seconded by Chris Beney. The main change was to make provision of online general meetings, such as the annual general meeting in 2020 and 2021, while expressing a preference for a physical general meeting. The opportunity had been taken of removing transitional provisions that were required at the incorporation of the Open Spaces Society now that they have no further effect, to correct minor typographical errors, and to clarify potentially ambiguous statements. The proposed revised articles, and a table listing the changes in each amended article, were provided with the AGM papers.

21/30 Unfortunately a defect had been found in the voting forms, such that this question was not put to members. Although nobody had asked a question on the matter, and the chairman felt sure it would go through if we voted, he considered it better to do this properly as a special resolution at a general meeting in due course. He very much regretted that this had happened.

21/31 Brian Reader commended the schedule of changes which had accompanied the proposed amendments to the articles.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

21/32 Diane Andrewes expressed her appreciation of the amazing activity and achievements of the society during a very difficult period. It was obvious that the OSS had never been more successful than it had been this last year, and she wanted to thank the trustees, staff, local correspondents, and volunteers.

21/33 Elizabeth Wild asked what members can do to help those who are working so hard on the various issues outlined by the general secretary. Kate Ashbrook replied that this was a very good point and we needed to be alert to opportunities when members could make a difference by lobbying politicians.

21/34 The chairman thanked members and staff for joining the meeting and for their contributions. He closed the formal meeting at 14.00 hours.

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Following the AGM, Katrina Navickas, the Open Spaces Society's Fellow at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), University of Reading, gave a talk on open spaces preservation in the first half of the twentieth century and the society's lantern slide collection at MERL.

