**Shropshire Wildlife Trust**

**Minutes of Annual General Meeting**

**Saturday 28th October 2017**

**Harper Adams University**

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mary White, Howard Thorne, Mervyn Evans, Roger Owen, Jan Johnstone, Joy Nisbet, Daphne Phillips, Maralyn Hepworth and David Smith.

The Chairman, Kirsten Mould, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Hon Secretary, Malcolm Monie, Hon Treasurer, Alan Salt and Minutes Secretary, Heather Bennett.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

It was proposed by Veronica Cossons and seconded by Rod Aspinwall, that the minutes of the last AGM held on 8 October 2016, at Ludlow Assembly Rooms, be approved. Carried unanimously.

**3. Report of Council of Management 2015/16**

The Hon Secretary, Malcolm Monie, presented the Report of the Council of Management to members, highlighting the following:

Two additional landholdings had been added to the Trust’s portfolio this year, Farfields in south Shropshire and an extension to Prees Heath Common. Over the last year, the Trust has continued to work in formal partnerships including the AONB, The Environment Agency on our Rivers work, and Telford and Wrekin Council managing Lightmoor Nature Reserve. Living Landscapes growth has been tremendous with 888 ha of land in the county directly managed by the Trust.

The Trust’s people and wildlife area of work also expanded with the Growing Confidence project funded by the Big Lottery providing opportunities for over 850 young people between the ages of 11 and 25 to work with and learn about nature.

In Telford the Green Heroes health initiative worked with around 100 people to improve their health and wellbeing, engaging them in activities in and around the town’s green spaces.

A new project, Feed the Birds, paired up some of our volunteers with those in the community suffering social isolation and has been very successful. It is hoped that funding will be obtained to expand this popular project.

The Chair thanked the staff and our 600 regular volunteers for their hard work this year.

It was proposed by Jon King and seconded by Paul Bell that the Report of the Council of Management 2016/17 be accepted. All in favour.

**4. Treasurer’s Report – Annual Accounts 2015/16**

The Treasurer, Alan Salt, presented the Annual Accounts. A detailed presentation of the accounts is available on the Trust’s website.

The Trust’s turnover for 2016/17 was slightly down on the previous year from £1.82m to £1.78m. The overall deficit at the close of the financial year was £9k(-) which was less than was originally forecast in the budget.

For the current financial year a significant increase in turnover is predicted, mainly due to increased project work which the Trust is taking on.

Trust asset figures total £2.7m made up of £2.3m of restricted funds and unrestricted funds of £300k.

86p in each £1 of income to the Trust goes directly to supporting Wildlife in Shropshire.

The Trust appointed new Auditors, Whittingham Riddell for the financial year 2016/17 who gave us a clean audit report.

Thanks were recorded to the Trust’s financial team for their efforts over the last year.

No questions were raised and the report was approved on the proposal of

Helena Jefferson, seconded by Jacqui Seymour. All in favour.

**5. Nominations for Election to Council**

Four Trustees were due to retire by rotation.

Kirsten Mould (Chair) was due to stand down following 2 four year terms. In addition Malcolm Monie has held an association with Shropshire Wildlife Trust for over 21 years. Despite stepping down as Hon Sec and as a Trustee, Malcolm continues to be heavily involved in the work of the Whitchurch Branch and will continue his involvement with them.

A vote of thanks was recorded to Malcolm for his longstanding support and commitment to Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Rod Aspinwall and Katie Foster were also due to retire following their first four year term, but have agreed to re-stand and will continue in their role as Trustees.

Proposed by Veronica Cossons and Seconded by Richard Carpenter. All in favour.

Two additional Trustees have been nominated for election:

Adrian Platt and Roger Owen. Their CVs had been, and will remain on the Trust website.

Paper copies were supplied to members on the day.

It was proposed by Jenny Joy and seconded by Dan Wrench that the above named be elected to Council. All in favour.

**6. Appointment of Auditors**

Whittingham Riddell LLP were re-appointed as auditor for the financial year ending

31 March 2018.

Proposed by Alan Salt, Seconded by Dan Wrench. All in favour.

**7. Any Other Business**

Diane Monether raised a question re the Trust’s use of a high street bank and whether or not it should switch to one with a more ethical policy.

This will be discussed at the next meeting of the Trust’s finance committee.

There followed a short break for tea and coffee. Members were asked to view the maps of the county on display and add their knowledge of anything positive that was happening in their branch area and also any challenges.

**Branches Forum**

*Kirsten Mould*, Chair of Shropshire Wildlife Trust, introduced the Members’ forum. It is 5 years since the publication of the SWT 50 year vision following much consultation with members. Recently, new members were asked what they felt were the greatest issues facing wildlife and the natural environment. Some of these were shared. Members were encouraged to share the successes and challenges in their areas. Over the coming months, branches, ambassadors and local groups will feed in to this consultation. These key issues will be drawn together by SWT staff and Trustees to formulate the next Development Plan and to present to MPs and other decision makers to link with Brexit and the Government’s 25 Year Plan.

*Daphne Jones*, Chair of the Friends of Whitcliffe Common, gave an informative talk on the history of the Common right up to today’s work of the Friends in tandem with the Wildlife Trust.

In 1998 the Friends formed as a volunteer workforce and at the time were led by Alan Poulton, MBE, who has now sadly passed away. He was the pioneering spirit of the group for many years.

When the Friends took over the upkeep of the Common it was severely overgrown and as part of its restoration over 700 tonnes of wood from felled trees was removed by shire horses Bluebell and Rosie. In 2009 Shropshire Wildlife Trust took on a 99 year lease of the Common and commenced joint working with the Friends. They meet with Carl Pickup, Reserves Manager, twice a month to coordinate work on the Common with the Friends carrying out as much of the work plan as possible.

Over the past few years the Friends have installed memorial seats, created all ability trails and restored the historic Donkey steps.

The group are very well supported and have strong links with the local community both in Ludlow and the surrounding areas.

Daphne extended an invitation to everyone to pay a visit and see the Common for themselves.

*Alex Grant*, of Ellesmere Branch told members about the work on Birch Road Pond.

A recent vegetation survey carried out identified a diverse range of over 25 wetland plants there.

A massive problem of reed mace choking the pond has been overcome recently with a new method of cutting used under the surface and has resulted in very good results. Previously it had to be uprooted by hand which was an arduous task that did not result in a significant change. A slide showing the trial area taken in September this year showed an amazing difference and improvement in producing a clear water area.

Volunteers are planning to commence work on the board walk which was originally installed in 2006.

The branch are also involved in discussions around flooding issues which are likely to have been caused by recent new development in the town.

A huge commitment from the Branch and its volunteers is ongoing and has kept this area a pleasant place to visit for locals and a site for nature.

*Dave Taplin*, of the Friends of Pontesford Hill committee talked about the work of their group since the Hill was acquired by the Trust in 2015.

A firewood scheme is running well with locals involved in cutting and splitting logs into manageable sizes and they are then sold online and in the village shop, Hignetts. Some of the income from the scheme has gone towards purchasing equipment and trailers and access improvements and a car parking upgrade.

The group has introduced livestock to graze the Hill, starting with Hebridean sheep. It was a steep learning curve with the breed proving difficult to catch and handle. They now have a rare breed of sheep, Hill Radnors, which are hardier and easier to manage.

A herd of Dexter Cattle is also being built up. There are plans to rent them out to graze other areas and build up more funds as a result. Currently, the cattle graze different areas than the sheep and therefore compliment them. Fortunately TB tests have all been clear so far.

*Marilyn Chetwynd* from Market Drayton branch spoke about their habitat mapping project originally introduced to them by Gareth Parry from the Shropshire Council. An amazing 300 square metres has been covered by the group who split into different areas, northwest, south of Battlefield, north of Market Drayton and a group who worked in the evenings only covering the eastern part of the area.

At the end of each season the information collected is fed through to the Council who digitise and record it.

The group rely strongly on landowner cooperation who are generally helpful and cooperative. Word has gone round farmers and they have passed on wildlife information to the survey team.

The richness of habitats has been surprising and has helped inform planners when making decisions.

Overall a very valuable record and snap-shot of this area of Shropshire in the 21st Century.

*Professor Ralph Early* rounded up the speakers with a detailed talk regarding his thoughts on the implications of Brexit and its effect on sustainability of British farming and food producers.

Following the close of meeting, trustees presented Malcolm Monie with a cut glass beer mug and said thank you to him for his long serving stint on Council as a trustee.