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**Minutes of the twenty-second meeting of the Board of Trustees of  
the Open Spaces Society held at 12 noon on Thursday 10 December 2015 at  
Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ**

**PRESENT** Graham Bathe (chairman)  
Diane Andrewes  
Chris Beney  
Peter Newman  
Phil Wadey  
Steve Warr

**IN ATTENDANCE** Kate Ashbrook (general secretary)

**APOLOGIES** Tim Crowther and John Lavery

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

114/15 There were no declarations of interests.

**DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE LAST MEETING**

115/15 It was noted that the general secretary had approved payment of £150 to Wildlife and Countryside Link as a contribution towards counsel's opinion on the Ministry of Justice consultation on costs protection in environmental claims.

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2015**

116/15 The minutes were approved as a correct record and for publication on the website.

## FINANCIAL MATTERS

### Minutes of finance committee meeting on 16 November 2015

- 117/15 The treasurer drew attention to the treatment of the NS&I index-linked bond. The old version of the NS&I certificates did not include statements of the value at intermediate periods but the new ones do. In the past we have taken all the indexation and interest over the five-year period at maturity. Now we shall get the valuation at the end of December this year and account for all the indexation and interest accrual from the start of the bond to the end of December. The net effect will be about £2,000 of additional income in 2015. If we roll this over we shall take the annual amounts as they come.

### Management report to end October 2015

- 118/15 The treasurer noted that we are roughly in line with budget. The variances are largely explained by the items of expenditure which we approved after we had set the budget.

### Investment and cash summary

- 119/15 The treasurer reported that we still have a healthy reserves excess, of £390,000, in part because of legacies which have come in during the year.
- 120/15 It was agreed that the next finance committee meeting would look at trends in legacies since 1990, with a graph.
- 121/15 It was agreed that we would present to the trustees at the December meeting each year the trend in legacies since 1990.

### Draft budget for 2016 (excluding additional items)

- 122/15 The treasurer reported that the draft budget for 2016 was broadly in line with this year with a shortfall of roughly £100,000 excluding legacies and large gifts. We had budgeted for a slight decline in membership. There was additional expenditure of about £8,300 to replace and upgrade the server; this would be shown as a depreciation charge over four years.
- 123/15 The trustees approved the budget, which includes a 0.8 per cent RPI increase for staff. The trustees noted with gratitude that the general secretary continued to donate a day's salary a week.

- 124/15 The trustees expressed their thanks to the staff for their hard work and dedication.

### Proposed additional expenditure for 2016 budget

- 125/15 The treasurer introduced the item by stating that either or both proposals could be afforded given our reserves position and taking account of the impact on the close-down reserve and a new office lease in 2018.

Membership project

- 126/15 The chairman introduced the paper from the office manager. The proposal, to which trustees had given an amber light at the last meeting, was for a budget of £21,000 for a consultant to prepare a plan so that we were clear about what methods we should use to increase membership, and for further work on search-engine optimisation, website and social media. The proposal was for one year's funding only, although it was likely that the work would lead to a request for further funding next year. It was noted that the membership had fallen by one-sixth in five years but in the last year it had stabilised.
- 127/15 Reservations were expressed about what the spending would achieve, and that it would lead to ongoing expenditure, and there was particular concern about becoming dependent on consultants. However, it was also felt that we had made a good start and that it would be premature to stop this work when we were starting to build momentum.
- 128/15 After discussion it was agreed, by four votes in favour and two against (of those at the meeting—Tim Crowther and John Lavery had previously sent notes of support), that we would allocated a budget of £21,000 for preparing a membership recruitment, retention and reactivation plan, providing advice for staff engaged with bolstering membership, and maintaining and expanding integrated, online social media and website support. This was with the provisos that we must not have long-term dependence on consultants, the plan must contain options which do not rely on consultancy, and there was no assumption that we would continue spending on this in future years. The membership working party would approve the specification for the work. It was further agreed that Steve Warr would join the working party.

Case assistant

- 129/15 The proposal, to which the trustees had given an amber light at the last meeting, was for a permanent, part-time case assistant working on common land, town and village greens and open spaces, and the costs would be recurring. The general secretary had commissioned a study by Rachel Sanderson, who had spoken to the staff and had analysed the need for the role and set out some further ideas for consideration. Rachel was thanked for a very full and helpful paper. The trustees recognised the need for the post but expressed concern about the danger of being overwhelmed by burgeoning casework levels, which had capacity to escalate further. Casework is a very important part of what we do, but must not be allowed to dominate our charitable work. Concern was expressed that we seem to be picking up queries which local authorities were unable to deal with because of budget cuts. There was also a question of our limited office space.
- 130/15 The trustees recognised that Jackie Warr had made a significant contribution and thanked her for her valuable help with casework. It was considered that we might do more to encourage people to make a donation when they received help from Nicola Hodgson who was a trained solicitor.

- 131/15 After discussion, and taking note of comments made in writing by Tim Crowther and John Lavery, the trustees attending agreed to make provision in the budget for the part-time case assistant, at a cost of £23,000 next year and for a further three years (total £93,000). This was subject to the adoption of a casework strategy, for which Graham Bathe would provide a list of headings, and consideration of the outcomes of casework, from which the benefits could be better evaluated.
- 132/15 Phil Wadey asked that we consider his idea of having different levels of help for different categories of members with a pricing structure to reflect this. It was agreed that Phil would write a paper for the membership working party.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

#### **Membership figures at end of November 2015**

- 133/15 The trustees noted with pleasure that membership had increased by 34 net this year, and thanked the staff for their work on this.

### **RISK REGISTER**

- 134/15 This was approved with minor amendment.

### **REVIEW OF OUR 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY YEAR**

- 135/15 The report of activities was noted with pleasure. The trustees wished to put on record the large amount of work by staff, and the general secretary in particular, and they considered the result to be superb.

#### Photo competition

- 136/15 Chris Beney reported that there had been about 1,500 entries which had now been judged and the winners would be informed and announced shortly. It was noted that the entrants retain the copyright and we have licence to use the photos. The trustees thanked Chris for undertaking such a huge job.

### **PARLIAMENTARY REPORT ON PRIVATE BILLS**

- 137/15 The report from Paul Clayden was noted with thanks.

### **LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS**

#### **Reappointments**

- 138/15 It was agreed to reappoint Ian Witham (Breckland District, Broadland District, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough and North Norfolk District, Norfolk) for a further three years.

#### **Reports**

- 139/15 Chris Beney and Peter Newman had studied the reports and raised various points.

## PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE

- 140/15 The trustees were not aware of any claims or circumstances or problems which may give rise to a claim.

## ANY OTHER MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 141/15 The report was noted as follows:

### Discussion forum for local correspondents (142/14)

- 142/15 Phil Wadey had set up the pilot yahoo group and would send the office manager instructions for inviting local correspondents to join and participate. We would inform local correspondents that we would close down the ring after a period.

### Correspondence from a member (98/15)

- 143/15 Some trustees had received further correspondence from a dissatisfied member after the chairman had reviewed his case and told him the matter was closed. The trustees reaffirmed that the matter was closed.

## REVIEW OF MEETING

- 144/15 The trustees were content with the meeting.

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### General secretary's appraisal

- 145/15 The general secretary's appraisal had not taken place in 2015. It was agreed that it would be undertaken by Phil Wadey in early 2016 and that trustees should send him comments, looking back and forwards.

## DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 10 March Friends House, London

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm.

*Gracious M D*



