

**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 6 July 2017

PRESENT

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

and 32 other members of the society, six members of staff and one guest.

Apologies were received from 78 members.

WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN

- 17/1 The AGM chairman, Paul Clayden, welcomed members to the meeting. He said that money in the agricultural budget was currently controlled by the European Union and the previous government had said it would guarantee until the next election (ie 2020) the same level of agricultural support when we left the EU. There was an opportunity for us to influence how that money was spent and we should urge government to make payments to improve or increase public access.

APPROVAL TO LIMIT SPEECHES

- 17/2 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

- 17/3 It was agreed to appoint Ellen Froggatt and Christine Hunter as tellers and scrutineers.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 7 JULY 2016

- 17/4 It was agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 17/5 Dilwyn Chambers (Harrow) referred to minute 16/11 regarding the commercial use of open space and asked whether it was legal for Harrow Park to be used for a circus. The chairman invited him to send details to the office so that staff could give a considered view.
- 17/6 John Lavery (trustee) gave an update on the Finsbury Park court case, which was to be heard in the Court of Appeal on 2 November. The society had joined with the Friends of Finsbury Park in the appeal so as to test the interpretation of the Greater London Parks and Open Spaces Order 1967.

ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2016

- 17/7 Graham Bathe (chairman) proposed the adoption of the trustees' report for 2016. The society was in good heart and there was a mood of optimism. We had a brilliant and dedicated staff, backed by an enormous range of volunteers, correspondents and supporters. We were able to undertake the vast scope of work described in the report, and also advance certain key initiatives. The support from members and others had been remarkable, and our financial position, under the watchful eye of our treasurer, financial administrator and finance committee, had strengthened, despite this time of austerity. But we still had difficulty retaining members, and the net membership continued to decline.
- 17/8 Graham reflected that the trustees were there primarily to ensure strategic direction, and observe probity and integrity befitting our charitable status, and to provide support. It was not their job to interfere with day-to-day management. He expressed particular thanks to Phil Wadey, the vice-chairman, for standing in for him above the call of duty. He also thanked two very long-standing trustees who were standing down, Chris Beney and Peter Newman. Chris had been a trustee since 1997 with a vast range of experience, and could always be relied upon to contribute. Nothing gets past him in our technical, legal and financial papers, when accuracy is all important. Peter had served since 1986. He lived on the Welsh borders and had further to travel than most; he combined a practical, hands-on experience of improving and managing public paths (for which he received the society's first-ever Eversley Award) with our necessary but less exciting organisational management. Graham presented them each with a pen made from ancient and durable bog oak.



- 17/9 During this last year, when writing the next Pitkin guide on paths, the chairman had had opportunity to read many of the society's causes célèbres, and that, coupled with a year of extraordinary pressures, induced him to mention Kate Ashbrook's work in particular. Sometimes, the work she undertakes and the forces of opposition she faces (which come from moneyed and powerful individuals) become directed upon her personally so that she can be under massive attack. With truly fantastic legal support, for which the society is so grateful, Kate stands up for the protection of rights, directly inheriting the legacy of opposition to enclosures by the oppressed masses, which had spawned the society 152 years ago.
- 17/10 The trustees' report was seconded by Claire Cunningham.
- 17/11 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, spoke to the trustees' report. She thanked Graham for his generous words and said that the staff were a team; all of them worked beyond the call of duty and we were immensely fortunate to have them. The year had been uncertain and unpredictable politically but, as Paul Clayden had said, Brexit provided an opportunity to get money into access and the society was working with other user organisations to try to achieve this.
- 17/12 We were spending some of the reserves, which had been provided by generous legacies, to fulfil our aims. We had employed an additional case officer last year and were about to launch a project to reclaim lost commons, with a project officer who would show how this could be done and encourage others to do likewise. With more staff time we had been able to look in detail at some important issues. For instance, we had persuaded Defra that the screening for environmental impact assessment applied to commons, in addition to consent for works under section 38 of the Commons Act 2006.; we had objected to the proposed deregistration of the Warcop commons in Cumbria by the Ministry of Defence, and we were commenting on the regulations on rights of way in relation to the Deregulation Act 2015.
- 17/13 We had been involved in a number of Welsh issues, in particular the introduction of part 1 of the Commons Act 2006 which enabled lost commons in Wales to be registered, and the review of designated landscapes. We had met Harrow School following our victory in preventing paths across the school grounds from being diverted and we were pleased that the school was proposing a minor diversion around the obstructing tennis-courts and would make permissive routes of the proposed diversions and creations so that we gained all round.
- 17/14 Because casework could be overwhelming, the trustees had agreed a casework prioritisation scheme, and we needed to explain to members that first and foremost we must achieve our charitable aims and we do not exist purely to provide assistance with casework. The general secretary ended by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff and members.



- 17/15 Simon Pearson (Llandrindod Wells) warned that Harrow School must not be allowed to waymark the permissive diversion rather than the definitive one, and the general secretary assured him that we were pressing the council to ensure that all definitive routes were waymarked. Simon also suggested that, to deter people from lapsing their membership, we might introduce a reduced membership fee for people who joined by direct debit.
- 17/16 Dilwyn Chambers (Harrow) was concerned that his council had spent a great deal of money funding legal representation at the six-day public inquiry into Harrow School's path diversions. Kate suggested that he could appeal to the district auditor at the end of the financial year.
- 17/17 Jeremy Clyne (local correspondent for Lambeth and Wandsworth) asked whether the environmental impact assessment rules might apply to events on Clapham Common. Hugh Craddock (case officer) said that the EIA for the planning regime might be relevant.
- 17/18 Sarah Bucks was concerned that the National Farmers' Union, of which she was a member, was prepared to pay for legal assistance for its members to oppose definitive map modification orders to add paths to the map.
- 17/19 The adoption of the annual report was carried.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2016

- 17/20 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by Steve Warr (treasurer). Steve said that we did not raise enough from membership subscriptions and investment income to run the society, and it was thanks to the legacies that we were able to thrive. He referred to the casework prioritisation and said we gave priority to cases where there were important points at issue which were for the greater good and for the long term. It was not clear whether Brexit would have an impact on our finances.
- 17/21 Phil Wadey seconded the adoption of the accounts.
- 17/22 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried.

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

Vice Presidents

- 17/23 Jean Macdonald proposed and Phil Wadey 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.



Trustees

- 17/24 Six members had called for a ballot and so the election of the trustees was undertaken by a paper vote and the proxy votes were included. There were three vacancies and two trustees were standing for election: Hilary Hunt and Mary Traynor. Phil Wadey explained that trustees needed to have more votes in favour than against in order to be elected. Following the count, Hilary Hunt and Mary Traynor were elected as trustees.
- 17/25 Paul Brown (local correspondent for Mid Sussex) asked that details of the candidates be circulated with the AGM papers in future, rather than just being put on the website. The general secretary said this would be done.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2017

- 17/26 It was agreed that Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, be appointed independent examiners for 2017. David Williams (local correspondent for Hillingdon) asked that there be a review of the choice of examiners during 2018, and the general secretary said that the finance committee would discuss this.

- 17/27 The meeting ended at 12.00.

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The following took place outside the AGM:

#### The society's collection of magic-lantern slides

Graham Bathe, who had catalogued the society's unique collection of 1,038 magic-lantern slides, gave a presentation of a sample. The slides had been digitised and were held by the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading. We were currently investigating where they might be held digitally so that they were available to the public with a commons licence while protecting our copyright.

#### Campaign for paths and greens at Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Becky Waller of the Friends of Dorchester and Little Wittenham Open Spaces gave a talk about the group's campaign to register greens and record public paths, and greater widths of existing definitive paths, on land between Dorchester village and the Rivers Thame and Thames. This had arisen because last October a new landowner had erected many kilometers of fencing on land traditionally enjoyed by the public.



**The Open Spaces Society 25a Bell Street Henley-on-Thames RG9 2BA**



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**Other business**

Phil Wadey reminded members that he and Sarah Bucks provided training on how to apply to add paths to the definitive map based on historic evidence. The second edition of their book, *Rights of Way: Restoring the Record*, was coming out shortly and was available at a discount to members of the society.

Chris Beney said that the draft British Standard 5709 for gaps, gates and stiles was soon to be published for consultation, and he urged members to study the proposals and comment.

John Beswick (Northampton) said that he was trying to stop Northampton Borough Council from selling a green space to a developer who wanted to use it to construct a roundabout in connection with a new development. The council's cabinet had agreed to sell the land subject to further consultation.

The afternoon session closed at 3.00 pm.

Paul Claydon  
5 July 2018



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