

**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 7 July 2016**

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**PRESENT**

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

and 49 other members of the society, six members of staff and two guests.

Apologies were received from 91 members.

**WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN**

- 16/1 The AGM chairman, Paul Clayden, welcomed members to the meeting and said that it had been another year of great activity for the society. He mentioned in particular the urgent need to ensure that all common land in the nine 'pioneer' areas of England was registered, as provided in part 1 of the Commons Act 2006. He urged members to carry out research to apply for land which was omitted from the registers to be included, and to monitor applications to remove land and object where appropriate. He also mentioned that it would shortly be the one hundredth birthday of our vice-president Len Clark, whom he had known for very many years, and who was one of our most distinguished vice-presidents.

**APPROVAL TO LIMIT SPEECHES**

- 16/2 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**

- 16/3 It was agreed to appoint Ellen Froggatt and Christine Hunter as tellers and scrutineers.

## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 9 JULY 2015**

- 16/4 It was proposed by Phil Wadey, seconded by Graham Bathe and agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

## **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- 16/5 There were no matters arising.

## **ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2015**

- 16/6 Graham Bathe (chairman) proposed the adoption of the trustees' report for 2015. This had been our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year and the general secretary had sent a tweet every day referring to an event in our history—some national, some local yet all significant. We had a staggering history: the countryside and towns would look very different were it not for the society. Our work was not over; last year we had taken up 470 cases on commons, greens and open spaces and 157 on paths, we had issued 106 press releases, run a photographic competition with 2,000 entries, and been represented at an international conference on commons.
- 16/7 He said we could not wish for a harder-working, more dedicated or high-achieving staff. He thanked Tim Crowther who was leaving the trustees after 12 years' service including a spell as chairman, and the other trustees, as well as the local correspondents. The society remained effective and strong in these extraordinary times.
- 16/8 The trustees' report was seconded by Beverley Penney.
- 16/9 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, spoke to the trustees' report. She said that recent legacies to the society had made it possible for us to expand in a time of austerity. We had employed an additional case officer, Hugh Craddock, who was making a significant difference to our capacity to help members with casework, and we were able to embark on the project to re-register commons about which Paul Clayden had already spoken.
- 16/10 Last year had been dominated by our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations which had gone extremely well and had concluded this year with an event, which we organised jointly with the National Trust, to celebrate 150 years since the battle of Berkhamsted Common, when the society had arranged the felling of Lord Brownlow's unlawful fences.



- 16/11 The society had a great tradition of using the law and we were currently involved in a number of legal cases. Our local correspondent in Norfolk, Ian Witham, was taking Norfolk County Council to court for failure to maintain a public footpath. We had supported Save Battersea Park in its battle against the Formula E motor race in Battersea Park. This had been settled out of court without important legal issues being resolved, and so we had embarked on action against Ealing Council's plan to hold an Oktoberfest on Acton Green Common. This had been overtaken by another case regarding a Wireless Festival on Finsbury Park, in which the Friends of Finsbury Park had lost in the high court, leaving the protection offered by the Greater London Parks and Open Spaces Order 1967 in question. We were hoping to intervene in this case in order to fight the challenge to the 1967 Order. We were most grateful for the help of John Lavery, our trustee, and George Laurence and Adrienne Copithorne.
- 16/12 Our appeal to raise money for our Find Our Way Fund had already raised a staggering £12,000 and we were using it to train volunteers to carry out research, digitise essential records to make them more accessible, and on other projects to help get applications for historic ways submitted before the 2026 deadline. The Deregulation Act would come into effect in the next few months; a downside was that it would give landowners the right to apply for path changes, and with funding for this and tight timetables to process applications, local authorities would be likely to give this work priority over the much more important statutory work on public paths.
- 16/13 In Wales, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act required public bodies to work to achieve seven goals, most of which aligned with our work—such as resilience, health, social equity, cohesive communities. We were concerned about the Access Green Paper last year which suggested that greater access could be provided at the expense of the rights-of-way network, and we were fighting this. Following the election, we were intending to write to the Assembly Members to invite them to support our manifesto.
- 16/14 This was a time of uncertainty for us all, but the OSS remained constant, tackling around 800 cases a year and being prepared to say no even when we were a lone voice. The general secretary ended by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff and members.
- 16/15 George Laurence said that he was becoming anxious that open spaces in towns and cities were becoming privatised and put to uses other than quiet recreation. When local authorities come under financial pressure they are tempted to use their open spaces to raise money. He asked whether those present considered that we should have a compromise position whereby we accepted certain activities which were clearly for public enjoyment, or whether we felt that open spaces should be kept completely open at all times.



16/16 Rodney Whittaker (Surrey) said that there might be a parallel with the Community Infrastructure Levy, whereby a body which wished to use an open space for some other purpose would be required to make a contribution towards its upkeep.

16/17 John Lavery (trustee) gave a further explanation of our concerns that the 1967 order was being undermined. Frances Zammit (London Borough of Ealing) said that there might be scope for a new body to which people could leave properties when they did not wish them to go on the speculative land-market. Steve Farnsworth (Friends of Chase Green, London Borough of Enfield) said that his council was already charging people to go on the green because it provided anyone organizing an event to fill out a form, for which it charged.

16/18 Chris Meeks (Surrey) paid tribute to Len Clark and the late Bernard Selwyn who had introduced him to campaigning. He asked if there was a buddy scheme to help people research public paths. Kate Ashbrook replied that people needed to go on the training provided by Sarah Bucks and Phil Wadey and then to form groups to ensure they did not duplicate.

16/19 The adoption of the annual report was carried.

#### **ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2015**

16/20 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by Steve Warr (treasurer). Steve said that it was important to have strong finances, this was vital to give the trustees the confidence to commit resources to campaigns. We had ended the year with more than we started, thanks to legacies of £134,000. Without legacies we would be spending more than our income and would gradually have to reduce our ability to carry out our work. The format of the account had changed because of the Charity Commission's new accounting regulations.

16/21 Chris Beney seconded the adoption of the accounts, saying that they now gave a very clear picture of our funds.

16/22 Bernard Kestelman asked why gift aid accounted for less than 25 per cent of the subscriptions and donations. Steve Warr said we reminded people of the importance of this when asking for subscriptions and donations, but as personal allowances increased fewer people paid income tax and therefore were not eligible for gift aid. Additionally gift aid cannot be claimed on donations from other charitable organisations.

16/23 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried.



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

### Vice Presidents

16/24 Phil Wadey proposed and Tim Crowther 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.

### Edgar Powell

16/25 Kate Ashbrook said that Edgar Powell was standing down as local correspondent in Worcestershire after 23 years' exemplary service. The trustees wished to recognise his significant contribution by conferring honorary life membership on Edgar and his wife Audrey. Kate presented Edgar with a certificate.

### Trustees

16/26 The meeting elected three trustees: John Lavery, Jean Macdonald and Steve Warr.

### APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2016

16/27 It was agreed that Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, be appointed independent examiners for 2016.

15/25 The meeting ended at 12.30.

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The following took place outside the AGM:

### **Eversley Award for outstanding personal endeavour**

Graham Bathe said that the trustees had agreed to establish the Eversley Award for outstanding personal endeavour, to be awarded on an occasional basis to someone who had championed the society's work and made an exceptional contribution. Anyone could make a nomination, and anyone could be nominated. The trustees had further agreed to make the award this year, to someone at this meeting.

Graham presented the award to Peter Newman, explaining that he was our longest-serving local correspondent of 32 years, and had just completed 25 years with Herefordshire Council and the Hereford Probation Service, enabling offenders on Community Payback to work on public paths. They had installed about 800 stiles and gates, waymarks and fingerposts, and many notice-boards and footbridges, in 16 parishes in north-west Herefordshire. Peter had earned plaudits from Herefordshire Council and the probation service and he richly deserved to be the first recipient of our Eversley Award.

### **National Trust**

Beverley Penney, the society's appointee on the National Trust council, explained her role. The council ensures that the trustees make decisions in line with National Trust purposes and holds the board to account. During her six years as our appointee Beverley had sought to influence the council from the society's perspective, at a strategic level. She had encouraged the trust to open its arms to people enjoying trust properties. A modest example was the trust's digital map of its land, which was dedicated to our former appointee and chairman, the late Rodney Legg. A change in governance and reduction of council members from 52 to 36 would mean that we had observer status until 2018, when we would have to apply to continue as an appointing body. If successful we would need to find a new appointee as the trust limited the period for which any one person could serve on council. Beverley thanked the society the general secretary for their support for her work.

### **Coastal path and access**

After lunch, Quentin Grimley, Wales Coast Path Officer for Natural Resources Wales gave a presentation on the Wales Coast Path. Paul Johnson, Principal Specialist—Statutory Access at Natural England gave a presentation on coastal access in England. There was then a discussion and questions.

### **Member's campaign**

This was followed by a presentation from Diane and Simon Pearson on their campaign to prevent the closure of a public footpath on a footbridge across the railway line at Llandrindod Wells in Powys.

The afternoon session closed at 3.00 pm.

*Paul Clancy (6.7.17)*



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



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