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**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, and by videoconference  
on Thursday 7 July 2022 at 11am**

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**PRESENT**

Dr Phil Wadey	(chairman)
Mr Stuart Bain	(treasurer)

and 30 other members of the society, plus nine members of staff.

**APOLOGIES** were received from 12 members including our former chairman, Tim Crowther.

**WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN**

- 22/1 The AGM chairman, Phil Wadey, welcomed everyone to the meeting, saying that this was the first time we had held a hybrid AGM. He explained that the meeting would be recorded on zoom, and gave some tips about the protocol for using zoom.
- 22/2 He said that this year we celebrated the centenary of the 1922 Law of Property Act which, thanks to the society's efforts, contained clauses which gave the public rights to walk and ride on certain commons, and protected commons from encroachment and development.
- 22/3 He went on to say that the new agricultural-payment regimes in England and Wales provide a perfect opportunity for farmers and landowners to give public access a leg up. The Westminster government and the Wales senedd have agreed that farmers and landowners should receive agricultural payments to provide more and better access, but we have yet to see any action on the ground. With other recreation bodies we are pressing both governments for this to be implemented as soon as possible. Such payments can fund the improvement of existing public paths, as well as the creation of new paths and access. The system needs strong enforcement so



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those who block public-paths have their payments docked; this needs a proper system of checks and reporting but will be cost-effective because it will reduce the burden on hard-pressed highway authorities.

- 22/4 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.
- 22/5 He explained that all statutory voting had been done by proxy this year. In the event that any other business comes before the meeting, there may need to be tellers and scrutineers. He proposed that Sarah Hacking and Lucy McKean be appointed to these roles. This was agreed.
- 22/6 The chairman reported that 53 votes were cast. 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 8 JULY 2021**

- 22/7 It was agreed that the minutes be approved and signed: the voting was 50 in favour, none against, and three abstentions.

#### **MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2021**

- 22/8 The minutes were approved and signed: the voting was 49 in favour, none against, and four abstentions.

#### **RATIFICATION OF ANY DECISIONS TAKEN REMOTELY AT GENERAL MEETINGS**

- 22/9 The chairman explained that the Charity Commission had recommended that, at the first physical general meeting a charity held after the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the opportunity was taken to ratify anything decided under the remote or hybrid arrangements that took place prior to the charity's articles being changed. This item was to record that we are happy with the formal decisions taken over the last two years.
- 22/10 This decision was approved. The voting was 50 in favour, none against, and three abstentions.

#### **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- 22/11 **Minute 21/9:** The chairman reported that we had recorded Simon Pearson's request that a method be found to allow joint members to have a vote each, rather than one between two. The staff had put in place a mechanism to achieve this, and it had been used for this year's annual meeting voting.
- 22/12 **Minute 21/12:** Blackbushe blocked bridleway, raised by Brian Reader. The chairman reported that this was a long-running saga and we had nothing further to report yet.
- 22/13 **Minute 21/13:** Locked gates at Primrose Hill Park. Simon Pearson had asked for help on this and we had requested that he write with further information. We had not yet received this. Simon said that this continued to be a problem and that he would write to the society.

## ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2021

- 22/14 The adoption of the annual report was proposed by Phil Wadey and seconded by Brian Reader.
- 22/15 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, presented the trustees' report and gave some updates. She spoke of our recent legal cases, two of them in the court of appeal. We were particularly concerned about fencing and tree-planting on commons. We were currently deeply engaged with the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill, as part of the Planning Coalition of like-minded bodies, and hoped that the new Act would encourage the voluntary registration of town and village greens. We had increased our work on rights of way thanks to the appointment of our new officer, and were able to give greater support to our local correspondents. We were aiming to reach new audiences through our website and social media, and had recently updated our strategic plan and rolled it forward to 2027. Our society, though small, was vital and flexible, jumping in where others feared to tread. Kate ended by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff and members for their support and activities through the year.
- 22/16 Points raised on the annual report included concern about gated communities, highway authorities' failure to adopt streets, and the backlog of definitive-map applications with surveying authorities.
- 22/17 The adoption of the annual report was carried by 52 votes for, none against, and one abstention.

## ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2021

- 22/18 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by Steve Warr, who was treasurer during 2021, the period of the accounts. Steve had stepped down in June and the trustees had elected Stuart Bain as treasurer.
- 22/19 Steve highlighted five important numbers from the statement of financial activities:
- 1 Donations were the largest single income item (£283k) including £148k of legacies—which was a very important component of income over many years, giving the trustees the confidence to be able to give financial support to campaigns—and a £100k donation from the Dennis Curry Trust.
  - 2 Candy Fund expenditure (£66k) on re-registration of commons was significantly less than in 2021 (£102k) when we had a burst of expenditure before the deadline for seven pioneer areas in England.
  - 3 There were investment gains of £109k; this was a large swing from the losses of £171k in 2020. Our reserves were broadly invested half in equity funds and half in bank deposits to mitigate the fluctuations.
  - 4 The surplus for the year was £102k, compared to a deficit of £267k in 2020. This illustrates how we can use the reserves accumulated (mostly from legacies) to maintain our commitment to activities when income varies from one year to the next.

5 The end-of-year reserves of just over £1.8m leave us in a strong position to continue activities.

22/20 John Lavery seconded the adoption of the accounts.

22/21 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried by 52 votes for, none against, and one abstention.

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

### **Vice Presidents**

22/22 In introducing the elections the chairman said we were fortunate to have such wonderful professional people as our vice-presidents.

22/23 Simon Hunt had proposed and John Hall had seconded the election of the vice-presidents. They were all elected as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Votes for</b>	<b>Votes against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
David (Lord) Clark	50	0	3
Mike Clarke	49	0	4
Roger de Freitas	51	0	2
Richard Mabey	52	0	1

### **Trustees**

22/24 The chairman declared an interest as a candidate for election. He invited those present to agree that the treasurer, Stuart Bain, should take the chair for this item. This was agreed.

22/25 Stuart explained that two people were standing for election and there were four vacancies. The trustees were elected as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Votes for</b>	<b>Votes against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
Graham Bathe	52	0	1
Phil Wadey	53	0	0

## **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2022**

22/26 It was proposed by Stuart Bain, seconded by Brian Reader and agreed that Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, be appointed independent examiners for 2022. The voting was 53 for, none against, and no abstentions.

22/27 Chas Townley asked how often we reviewed the independent auditors. Steve Warr said that we had last reviewed them four years ago and would be undertaking a further review before the next AGM so that the result could be presented there.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

22/28 **Retirement of Steve Warr as treasurer and trustee**

The chairman paid tribute to Steve Warr who was retiring from the board of trustees. Steve was co-opted as a trustee in 2014 and was elected treasurer shortly after. Steve has served in that role ever since. The chairman expressed our immense

gratitude to Steve for getting things in really good shape, so that we fully understand our financial position. He presented a gift to Steve for his eight years of service.

### **Eversley Award for Outstanding Personal Achievement**

22/29 The chairman then introduced the Eversley Award which is presented on an occasional basis to individuals for outstanding personal endeavour, typically lifetime or long-term work, in the protection of commons, greens, paths and access.

22/30 He was delighted to announce that the trustees wished to present the award to Chris Beney, who has devoted his life to these topics for at least the last 30 years. In addition to the work he has done for the OSS, he chaired the British Standards Panel for three revisions of BS5709; he obtained agreement from users, local authorities and land managers for the changes made, including the shift from a technical specification to one requiring the least restrictive method of achieving any lawful interference. In turn that has been incorporated into public path orders and various gate or stile authorisations by local authorities, so facilitating the improvement of paths across England and Wales. He remains very active locally, having undertaken physical work on path improvements, and ensuring proper recording and signposting. He has also been a local pioneer in encouraging landowners to dedicate their land for access, and to provide additional benefits. The highlight of his work, however, has been that he has been able to reach agreement among the diverse and conflicting interests of landowners, users, councillors, and officials. His way of dealing with people has made him able to negotiate difficult subjects well, and with resulting success.

22/31 The award was presented to Chris by his son Charles, Chris having joined the meeting remotely. Chris expressed his delight at receiving the award.

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

22/32 James Dunnett expressed concern about the lack of open spaces in housing developments, and there was discussion about the impossibility of registering as greens land which was held by local authorities under the Housing Acts.

22/33 The chairman thanked members and staff for joining the meeting and for their contributions. He closed the formal meeting at 12.20 hours.

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Following the AGM, the nine members of staff each gave a brief introduction to their work. John Lavery spoke about the proposed holocaust memorial on Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster; Colin Saunders spoke about the Vanguard Way and the newly-formed Vanguard Way Association; and Phil Wadey spoke about the dedication of a bridleway and access land at Sarratt in Hertfordshire.



Phil Wadey  
Chair of Trustees



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