

**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 3 July 2025 at 11am**

PRESENT

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

and 44 other members of the society (25 in person and 19 online), plus eight members of staff and one guest.

APOLOGIES were received from 14 members.

WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN

- 25/1 The AGM chairman, Phil Wadey, welcomed everyone to the meeting in our 160th-anniversary year. He said that this was the fourth 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.
- 25/2 He said that this time last year our AGM coincided with the general election when he had made an impassioned plea that the new government would treat public access as a priority. Among other things he had asked the government to repeal the Path-Extinguishment Day provision in section 53 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to prevent the loss of public rights from the hundreds of miles of unrecorded and under-recorded rights of way.
- 25/3 He therefore was delighted that, on boxing day, the government had announced that it would do this, and we now looked for legislative opportunities to hold the government to its announcement. Meanwhile he was overjoyed that in Wales, submissions from the Open Spaces Society had led to the inclusion of Path-Extinguishment Day repeal in the Legislation (Procedure, Publication and Repeals) (Wales) Bill, and was now

awaiting Royal Assent. He gave special mention to our case officer Hugh Craddock for his work on the bill.

- 25/4 He concluded that there we had it, good work in Wales and an announcement in England—but much more to be done.
- 25/5 It was agreed that participants should limit the time of their contributions to five minutes maximum for proposers of motions, and three minutes for all other speeches.
- 25/6 The chairman explained that all statutory voting had been done by proxy this year. Should any other business come before the meeting, there might need to be tellers and scrutineers. He proposed that Sarah Hacking and Lucy McKean be appointed to these roles. This was agreed.
- 25/7 The chairman reported that 64 votes were cast and, 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 4 JULY 2024

- 25/8 It was agreed that the minutes be approved and signed: the voting was 58 in favour, none against, and six abstentions.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 25/9 **Minute 234/10: Blackwell Park in Darlington.** Michael and Angela Green gave an update on Blackwell Park in Darlington. The parkland was handed back to the local authority by the people who had restored the land, and now they would work at getting the land dedicated as a town green. The leader of the council and the elected members were supportive of this, and Michael and Angela were to meet the new chief executive to discuss moving this forward. The chairman congratulated Michael and Angela on their work.

ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2024

- 25/10 The adoption of the annual report was proposed by Phil Wadey and seconded by Dave Howerski.
- 25/11 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, presented the trustees' report and gave some updates.
- 25/12 Kate opened by giving a big thank-you to the staff, whose professionalism, dedication, and hard work led to the society's many successes; much of the work was unseen but was vital to ensure that the organisation operated smoothly and efficiently. We had enjoyed a year of achievement and had made a difference in many ways.
- 25/13 Kate listed some cases in which the society had led the way. We had made a significant contribution to the successful outcome of the Dartmoor backpack-camping case in the supreme court; we had persuaded West Northamptonshire Council to concede that it had acted unlawfully in making a temporary traffic regulation order for blocked paths at Staverton, instead of acting to remove the obstructions; we had registered eight lost commons, and had come to an agreement with Clinton Devon Estates to win access to newly-registered common land ahead of the access-mapping review.



- 25/14 There were many cases where we had been able to offer valuable help. These included the removal of unlawful gates across a path at Cwmparc, Treorchy, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, and at Stanwick in North Yorkshire, and the quashing of planning permission on Wilmot Gardens in Plymouth. We were assisting members in fighting the commercial abuse of open spaces in London, and were challenging developers who were misleadingly claiming that they were providing village greens as part of development. We had served legal notices on Powys and Wiltshire county councils regarding blocked paths, and our local correspondents were pursuing numerous cases.
- 25/15 The lack of action on access by the Westminster government, beyond the pledge to repeal the 2031 guillotine, was worrying, but we were working with others to apply pressure, through a new All Party Parliamentary Group for Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature.
- 25/16 Kate concluded by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff, and members for their support and activities throughout the year.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT

- 25/17 Phil Escritt (local correspondent for St Albans, Herts) urged the society to seek the help of members in contacting their MPs.
- 25/18 Martin Plaut (London) asked whether we had a relationship with Slow Ways. Kate said that we were aware of it, but our interests did not particularly coincide.
- 25/19 Chris Meeks (Surrey) expressed warm appreciation for the sense of positivity and celebration which the society conveyed. He spoke of his personal success on a case under the Cycle Tracks Act 1984 whereby he achieved a route which was shared safely by walkers and cyclists.
- 25/20 The adoption of the annual report was carried by 62 votes for, none against, and two abstentions.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2024

- 25/21 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by the treasurer, Stuart Bain, and seconded by Charlie Morriss.
- 25/22 The treasurer presented the accounts, explaining that the total income for 2024 was £357,643, an increase from £267,138 in 2023, the increase being primarily due to an increase in donations and legacies of about £57,000, with appeal income increasing by about £20,000 and investment returns by about £15,000. Our major income sources included donations (£122,564), subscriptions (£78,860), and investment income (£101,471).
- 25/23 The planned increase in expenditure, of £564,385 from £457,182 in 2023, was due to an increase of about £39,000 in salaries to reflect organisational changes over the last two years, and legal costs to further our charitable objectives. Trustees had budgeted for a deficit of £422,000 in 2024 but there had been a positive variance of £239,995, primarily due to legacies which were not budgeted, an underspend on the website, and



an unexpected increase in investment returns. The trustees were happy with the financial health of the society. The treasurer explained the split between the various funds: endowment, restricted, designated, and general.

- 25/24 He concluded with an update on the work of JM Finn, our investment advisers, who were divesting investments from Charifund (M&G) into a portfolio which was actively managed by JM Finn. The society had put investment restrictions in place to ensure that it meets its environmental social and governance standards. These exclude defence, oil, gas, coal, mining, and home construction.
- 25/25 Paul Howland (Hampshire) asked whether the continuing deficit was sustainable. The treasurer replied that the deficit was planned, but the trustees kept a close watch on it.
- 25/26 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried by 61 votes for, none against, and three abstentions.

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

Vice Presidents

- 25/27 Tara-Jane Sutcliffe proposed the election of the vice-presidents, giving some information about each. James Lean seconded their election. They were all elected as follows:

Name	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
Diane Andrewes	61	1	3
David (Lord) Clark	59	1	4
Mike Clarke	60	0	4
Roger de Freitas	60	0	4
Richard Mabey	62	0	2

Trustees

- 25/28 As the chairman was one of the candidates he passed the chair to the vice-chairman, Graham Bathe for this item. There were five vacancies on the board of trustees, and three candidates: James Lean (proposed by Stuart Bain and seconded by Phil Wadey), Andrew Packman (proposed by Tara-Jane Sutcliffe and seconded by James Lean), and Phil Wadey (proposed by Sarah Bucks and seconded by John Hall). The voting was as follows:

Name	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
James Lean	60	0	4
Andrew Packman	60	0	4
Phil Wadey	64	0	0

The three trustees were therefore elected to serve for three years.

- 25/29 The chairman expressed his thanks to Graham Bathe, who had not sought re-election as a trustee. Graham had first become a trustee in 2012, shortly after his retirement from Natural England, and had served as vice-chairman and chairman before standing

down for a year. He then returned and became vice-chairman again in 2020, serving until the AGM.

25/30 Phil said that Graham had led on the production of our strategic plan, and was a calm influence when we had tricky times, and a helpful member on staffing issues. He has a strong belief in our work and a particular understanding of the importance and role of commons. He has been hugely supportive of the staff and an excellent vice-chairman. The AGM expressed its thanks with a round of applause.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2024

25/31 Stuart Bain proposed, and Martin Plaut seconded the motion to appoint Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames, as independent examiners for 2025. The voting was 61 for, none against, and three abstentions.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nicola Hodgson, honorary life membership

25/32 The chairman was delighted to present honorary life membership to Nicola Hodgson, who had worked as our case officer for open spaces and town and village greens for 25 years before retiring early this year. Nicola had helped countless members with their problems and had led the society in winning beneficial changes to the law. She was a leading expert in the registration of town and village greens. Her intervention had resulted in the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 being improved, so that it was easier to register greens in Wales than in England. She was respected for her knowledge of planning law.

25/33 The chairman presented Nicola with a certificate.

25/34 Nicola said it was a great honour to be made an honorary life member, and that she had enormously enjoyed her time with the society. She thanked the trustees, local correspondents, staff, and members for their support over the years and looked forward to a continuing involvement as a member. The meeting applauded this appointment.

25/35 The chairman thanked members and staff for joining the meeting and for their contributions. In particular, he thanked Sarah Hacking, Abbie Cavendish, and Lucy McKean for all their work in organising the hybrid AGM. He closed the formal meeting at 11.59 hours.

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#### **Discussion about future format of AGM**

Following the AGM, the chairman led a discussion on the future format for our AGM, asking whether people would prefer it to be solely in person, solely on-line, or hybrid as now. The overwhelming preference from those present was to continue with the hybrid arrangement.



## Talks

In the afternoon, the meeting enjoyed the following presentations.

- 1 Paul Johnson, Natural England: *Reflections after 40 years working on countryside access.*
- 2 Kate Ashbrook and Hugh Craddock, OSS: *Wild about camping*, an explanation of the supreme-court judgment on backpack camping on the Dartmoor commons.
- 3 Mark Olney: *The fight against enclosure 200th anniversary*, about the Lammas lands at Eton in Windsor and Maidenhead.
- 4 Dave Ramm: *The effect of solar panels on public rights of way in the countryside.*
- 5 Richard Clarke: *Gategate*, the successful campaign to remove unlawful gates obstructing an unrecorded highway in Treorchy, Rhondda Cynon Taf.