



The countryside charity
Kent

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2021

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE KENT BRANCH OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CHARITY NUMBER 1092012, COMPANY NUMBER 04335730) AND THE KENT BRANCH OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL ENGLAND (CHARITY NUMBER 286183) HELD ON NOVEMBER 19 2021 AT LENHAM COMMUNITY CENTRE WITH A VIDEO-CONFERENCE LINK FOR THOSE UNABLE TO ATTEND

1. Attendance and apologies for absence

Both charities were considered together. Twenty-four members were present, 21 watched via video-conference link and eight sent apologies.

2. Minutes of 2020 AGM

The minutes of the annual general meeting held on November 13, 2020, were presented and accepted unanimously.

3. Chairman's Welcome

Chairman John Wotton welcomed all present and introduced the review of the past year's work.

4. Annual report

Hilary Newport, Director, said that work had not slowed, with Local Plans still coming forward despite delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Infrastructure projects such as the proposed Lower Thames Crossing had kept us busy, while we had taken part in the process of having the Swanscombe peninsula designated as an SSSI, which might yet halt plans for the giant London Resort theme park there.

Proposed garden villages at Lenham, Lidsing, Tudeley and Otterpool were still being promoted. Otterpool was the furthest advanced and the most we could realistically do was keep Folkestone & Hythe District Council to its design promises.

The application for a Development Consent Order to establish a freight hub at Manston airport was back for redetermination after its previous approval had been quashed by the High Court.

Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling Local Plans were in disarray as local authorities tried to accommodate huge housing targets despite many constraints. However, CPRE had joined 21 other organisations in producing a six-test scorecard against which the government's forthcoming Planning Bill could be measured. This action had been described as a "masterpiece of advanced campaigning".

COP26 [the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference] was good in parts and had moved us forward a bit, with 90 per cent of countries setting net-zero targets.

However, we were not building energy-efficient homes, while both local and national government was still car- and plane-addicted. There was not enough planning in relation to climate change, for example proposed garden towns were car-dependent.

Solutions included extra focus on brownfield sites.

In better news, the worst of the government's planning changes were to be quietly dropped, but we would not stop lobbying on behalf of the environment.

5. Chairman's Report

Chairman John Wotton thanked members of staff for their efforts over the year, noting an excellent last edition of Kent Countryside Voice.

Sadly, this would be CPRE Kent planner Paul Buckley's last AGM as he was retiring – we had benefited hugely from his knowledge.

National Office had launched a hedgerow campaign and was calling for a hedgerow network increase of 40 per cent by 2050.

CPRE's annual State of Brownfield report had been published only the previous day and showed that, despite brownfield land being available for the building of some 1.3 million new homes, large amounts of greenfield land were being developed for housing. There was clearly a campaign to be fought here.

Otherwise, we seemed powerless to stop the loss of AONB and Green Belt land.

Not all brownfield land was suitable for development, for example at Swanscombe, but there was no conflict here as such sites should not be included on brownfield registers anyway.

Both the local authority and developer had been against us during the public planning inquiry into a scheme to build 165 houses at Turnden in the High Weald AONB, but we were doing our best for the local community. Such inquiries were costly on resource and expensive – this one had amounted to some £10,000 external cost.

Finally, we would be pushing for greater sustainability within the building industry, with due regard to climate, energy, water, solar panels and charging stations.

6. Questions

It was asked where we were with Binbury Park, the planned development at Detling, with the developer Quinn Estates possibly appealing against non-determination by Maidstone Borough Council.

Dr Newport said the proposal was totally unsustainable and inappropriate, but there could be problems if MBC was unable to demonstrate a five-year housing supply.

Henny Shotter added we should ask why MBC had not dealt with this application. Richard King then asked what CPRE Kent was doing to help people challenge the Lenham Heath garden village proposal.

Dr Newport replied that we were working with local people in combatting it, but the local authority [Maidstone Borough Council] was in favour of the scheme so it might be harder to fight. Homes England was involved with this proposal, but we didn't believe it should be.

Christine Drury asked for comment on our capacity to deal with NSIPs [Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects]. The Cleve Hill solar-farm project had been treated as such and there was a similar situation at Aldington, where a whole farm had been put up for a solar scheme, meaning its scale required it be treated as an NSIP.

Paul Buckley highlighted the workload caused by large projects, referring to the 27,000 pages relating to the London Resort scheme. Both the county council and Dartford Borough Council had sent a letter asking for more planners to help deal with it.

With the planning process for the LTC and London Resort likely to come at much the same time, together with Local Plans, we would need to be canny in how we dealt with them and work in alliance with others.

Richard Knox-Johnston said the proposed Aldington scheme would require battery storage so there would be safety issues.

Dr Newport said she was concerned about carbon offsetting being used as a way of getting to net zero.

The government's roads programme did not take account of climate change. The Lower Thames Crossing was not about congestion – rather, it was about aiding development in the Thames estuary. There was no pretence anymore.

Becky Smart, an environmental campaigner, spoke from the floor to say that by building on greenfield sites we were building on carbon sinks. She noted the Prime Minister's statement that the government would protect greenfield sites.

Liz Akenhead responded that any government promises would not come soon enough for Tunbridge Wells and particularly Tudeley as any changes would not apply to it. The government was allowing greenfield development while saying it wanted building on brownfield.

Then came a member's question asking how much brownfield land there was in Kent.

Dr Newport said every district held a brownfield register online but targets were unambitious. Perhaps we could do some citizen science and give people the resource they needed. Watch this space in the New Year, said Dr Newport, who added that CPRE data was not granular enough to detail brownfield by district. Rather, it could only be done by region.

7. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Michael Moore went through the summary accounts briefly – all present had a copy of them and they are also **available on the CPRE Kent website**.

The previous year had seen a total income of £180,785, with a net loss for the year of £93,069.

A questioner asked about the increased investments fund, suggesting congratulations were in order.

Mr Moore replied that we had a worldwide portfolio – global investments had done very well but UK investments not so well.

Richard King asked how ethical our portfolio was.

Mr Moore said we had invested in unit trusts – there was a broad band of these and any unethical investments were likely to be fairly minute.

It was agreed unanimously that the annual report and accounts be accepted.

Mr Moore reported that there was concern over the fees being charged by MHA Macintyre Hudson, so the account was put out for tender. Both applicants had impressed, but it was proposed to appoint Kreston Reeves for the current year. This was proposed to the meeting by Michael Moore, seconded by Barrie Gore and accepted unanimously.

8. Election of Honorary Officers

Recorded nominations were made in advance of the meeting.

8.1 Patron: Sir Robert Worcester was not subject to re-election.

8.2 President: The election of Graham Clarke was approved unanimously on a show of hands following a proposal by John Wotton and seconding by Christine Drury.

8.3 Vice presidents: Amanda Cottrell, Tracey Crouch, Christine Drury, Damian Green and Richard Knox-Johnston were approved unanimously on a show of hands following a proposal by Barrie Gore and seconding by Graham Horner. Val Loseby was approved unanimously on a show of hands as a returning nomination. This was proposed by John Wotton and seconded by Christine Drury.

8.4 Chairman: The election of John Wotton was approved unanimously.

8.5 Vice chairman: There were no nominations and the role will remain vacant for another year.

8.6: Board members willing to be re-elected: Peter Blandon, Margaret Borland, Nigel Britten, David Morrish and Henny Shotter were approved unanimously following a proposal by John Wotton and seconding by Christine Drury. Richard King, Julian Glenister and David Wood were approved unanimously as general board members following a proposal by Graham Horner and seconding by Nigel Britten.

Richard Kinzler was a new nomination proposed by John Wotton and seconded by Henny Shotter. This was approved unanimously.

8.7 Treasurer: The election of Michael Moore was approved unanimously on a show of hands following a proposal by John Wotton and seconding by Henny Shotter.

8.8 Auditors: The appointment of Kreston Reeves as auditors was approved unanimously following a proposal by Michael Moore and seconding by Barrie Gore (see above).

9. Any Other Business

We remembered four friends and colleagues who had been lost over the past year – Brian Lloyd, Tim Reader, Gary Thomas and Graham Warren. They would be missed.

Dr Newport presented Adam Ellis with a gift for his technical help with setting up the AGM.

10. Lee Dance, head of water resources at South East Water:

Can Nature Based Solutions help with our Water Challenges?

Giving a thought-provoking talk, Mr Dance detailed how the South East would be needing an extra three billion litres of water in the coming years – at the same time we needed to restore the balance regarding the environment.

There would be a drive to reduce demand, while there was a target to halve leakage by 2050 but it still wasn't clear how that would be done.

The South East would need to be self-sufficient in water – it couldn't just be moved around, said Mr Dance.

Graham Horner, speaking from the floor, said that regions not being prepared to help each other out went against logic and smacked of a dog-in-the-manger attitude. Was the issue political rather than practical?

Mr Dance said the question was whether one big scheme could provide the water required or if lots of smaller schemes would provide the best solution. There was an acceptance that there needed to be a reset.

Mr Horner also asked if a way of meeting the increased 3bn-litre demand had been identified.

Responding, Mr Dance suggested a middle road was likely; it was too soon to say at the moment and there was a nervousness to commit.

Geoff Orton then asked about the viability of desalination plants.

The answer came that performance based on current technology was holding back the building of desalination plants, while they were extremely expensive. Locations would be on the coast and, with large populations inland, substantial infrastructure would be required.

Henny Shotter highlighted the fact that rivers didn't get the water supply they used to; for example, it was blocked by buildings. She asked if aquifers could be recharged by treating rainwater on-site.

Mr Dance replied that water injected back into the chalk tended to dissipate and be lost.

Barrie Gore then said that water companies put conditions on supply relating to planning permissions – why could rainwater not be stored?

Mr Dance said there had been lots of lobbying by water companies – we were not seeing such storage enough. A building design code had been set up by water companies and Kent County Council, but it was not mandatory.

Vivienne Collins then noted that we were experiencing excessive winter rainfall coupled with heavy run-off during the summer – how could we stop losing that water?

Mr Dance replied that a mix of resources was needed to capture that water using more conjunctive systems.

11. Close followed by lunch