



The countryside charity

Kent

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2022

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 4 NOVEMBER 2022

AT LENHAM COMMUNITY CENTRE

1. Attendance and apologies for absence

Both charities were considered together. Fifty-two members were present, and 25 sent apologies (+ 25 proxy votes).

2. Minutes of 2021 AGM

The minutes of the annual general meeting held on November 19 2021 were presented and accepted unanimously.

3. Chairman's Welcome

Chairman John Wotton welcomed all present.

4. Annual Report

Hilary Newport, Director, said that it had been another busy year. As this was Hilary's 20th AGM, she took the opportunity of reviewing her tenure – and made special note of all the friends of the charity who had passed away over the years and had done so much for the branch.

Mention was made of the Ivor Reed legacy. The major challenges faced by proposals by Imperial College to build 4,000 dwellings in the AONB at Wye; the campaign we led at Farthingloe and the Western Heights – which took the charity to the Supreme Court; the lead we took on air quality mitigation at Newington; and the objections made to the proposed lorry park at junction 11 of the M20 at the foot of the AONB – which led to Hilary being invited to speak at a Transport Select Committee.

The Kent branch of the Campaign to protect Rural England exists to protect the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the Kent countryside

CPRE Kent Queen's Head House, Ashford Road, Charing, Kent TN27 0AD
www.cprekent.org.uk Phone 01233 714540 Email info@cprekent.org.uk

Registered charity (number 1092012), limited company registered in England (number 4335730)

In terms of planning policy, the Director has seen through the Kent & Medway Structure Plan; the South East Regional Plan; the publication of the first NPPF; plans for the wholesale amendment of the planning system through the Planning White Paper; and the coalition led by national office in response to the 'mutant algorithm'.

We are now awaiting the publication of a new NPPF, the next stages of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. Recently the government's target of 300,000 new homes per year had fallen out of favour but then been reinstated; the fracking moratorium has been lifted (and then reinstated); growth zones and protection of the Green Belt are being reviewed and biodiversity is under threat with the proposed revocation of EU laws.

CPRE continues to campaign for the right homes to be built in the right places. However, for every campaign success it is dispiriting when we have losses. As ever, we dig into our success by continuing to campaign from parish to Parliament.

The value of our charity and the work we do is act as a rebalancing agent in response to the large-scale lobbying undertaken by the development industry.

Going forward, work on the Lower Thames Crossing continues. A new NSIP application was submitted to the planning inspector on October 31, 2022.

5. Chairman's Report

Chairman John Wotton spoke of the scope of work undertaken over the past year and the achievements made against the backdrop of political (and economic) uncertainty. We should not underestimate the sheer amount of work it takes to make an impact.

Specifically, he cited the work undertaken for the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan by the two of the chairs of the Tunbridge Wells district committee – Elizabeth Akenhead and Margaret Borland.

It was noted that CPRE was the only organisation that was represented at every one of the Local Plan hearing days – and the only organisation taking a balanced view (rather than promoting/objecting to individual sites). It is clear that other campaign groups are not willing or able to take on this role, with many only garnering support at the planning application stage (when it's often too late to engage with the principle of development).

The Chairman raised three concerns in this regard:

1. It's difficult to measure our successes
2. Our work on Local Plans is often invisible
3. Active members are too thin on the ground – making it challenging to understand local issues

It was noted that only half the parish councils in Tunbridge Wells are represented on the CPRE district committee. To address this issue, the charity is embarking on a communications/PR campaign to attract new members.

At national office, Crispin Truman (Chief Executive) has moved on to pastures new. A replacement is being sought. Tom Fyans has stepped into the role on an interim basis.

Communications between national office and the branches is set to improve with the advent of the new National Assembly. Henny Shotter represented Kent at the inaugural meeting.

With cooperation and communication being vital, we were pleased to host a visit by the national office team in June 2022 and are grateful to our President, Robert Worcester, for hosting a dinner at Allington Castle.

As we move forward, CPRE Kent must become a 'movement' rather than a network.

A number of trustees have come to the end of their five-year term of office – we thank Richard King, Henny Shotter and David Wood. Thanks go also to Margaret Borland, who is standing down.

David Wood will remain on the Board and the environment committee.

Four nominations have been received for Trustees – Christine Drury, Graham Horner, Val Loseby and Paul Buckley.

Looking to 2023, other Trustees will be coming to the end of their five-year term (including John Wotton himself) – a plea was made to make yourself know if you wish to take on the role of Trustee.

Thanks also go to our Vice President, Amanda Cottrell, (in attendance) and to our former President Graham Clarke, who stood down in April 2022 due to ill-health.

In closing, the Chairman gave his thanks to all the staff at the Charing office for their continued hard work and dedication.

6. Questions

Amanda Cottrell suggested that the charity should give talks to our target audience at U3A, Rotary Clubs and the WI – all are very willing to be involved in their communities.

John Wotton agreed this would fit in well with our planned recruitment campaign.

A member said it was important that parish councils joined CPRE, as well as individual members. It was also important to underline our reliance in terms of the countryside as well as green spaces.

Hilary Newport advised that she would be liaising with KALC about collaborative working opportunities, with specific reference to Local Plans. It was noted that Susan Pittman had managed to sign up all but two parish councils in Sevenoaks.

Social media was a good way of spreading the word about petitions and reaching an audience beyond our membership, said one member.

Hilary Newport agreed, citing that we had indeed a wider reach on Facebook and Twitter than members of CPRE Kent.

When the district committees were set up by Bob Baxter, Sevenoaks was the last to sign up – and that was 30 years ago. With ageing committee members, there is concern about succession. Perhaps the district committees should be relaunched to attract new members, suggested Susan Pittman.

John Wotton noted this would fit in well with our planned recruitment campaign.

Another member said that the Net magazine reached 400,000 Kent households across each of its 10 publications per year. Space is set aside for local clubs *etc* – CPRE Kent would be a perfect fit for this.

John Wotton welcomed this offer.

The Living Land event at the Kent showground attracts 3,000 school children each year. Volunteers are needed to help out with the event in May 2023, said another member.

John Wotton encouraged volunteers to come forward.

A member from Biddenden said that the Wealden Literary Festival takes place on the last full weekend of June each year. The next event is 24-25 June 2023. The event includes a full range of nature-based activities.

John Wotton noted this suggestion.

Retirement gifts were presented to Richard King and Henny Shotter.

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 £194,000, while expenditure was £312,000 (80 per cent of this comprises salaries and the cost of running the Charing office). There was a net loss for the year of £118,000.

Questions: it was queried how much money was held at the bank (bearing in mind the £85,000 protected limit). It was advised that for this reason the charity holds numerous bank accounts.

The appointment of Kreston Reeves LLP as auditor was approved unanimously following a proposal by Michael Moore and seconding by John Wotton.

8. Election of Honorary Officers

Recorded nominations were made in advance of the meeting:

8.1 Patron: Sir Robert Worcester – not subject to election.

8.2 President: there were no nominations, the role will remain vacant for a year.

8.3 Vice Presidents: Amanda Cottrell, Tracey Crouch, Christine Drury, Damian Green, Richard King and Richard Knox-Johnston were approved unanimously on a show of hands following a proposal by Michael Moore seconded by Ann Ridley.

8.4 Chairman: the election of John Wotton was approved unanimously, following a proposal by Michael Moore and seconding by Barrie Gore.

8.5 Vice Chairman: there were no nominations; the role will remain vacant for another year.

8.6 Treasurer: the election of Michael Moore was approved unanimously on a show of hands following a proposal by John Wotton and seconding by Peter from Biddenden.

8.7: Board members willing to be re-elected: Peter Blandon, Nigel Britten. David Morrish (district committee and specialist group members) and Julian Glenister (general member).

Returning nominations: Val Loseby (general member) and Christine Dury (district committee and specialist group member)

New nominations: Paul Buckley (general member) and Graham Horner (district committee and specialist group member).

All were approved unanimously following a proposal by Henny Shotter and seconding by Nigel Britten.

9. Amendment to Articles of Association

Unanimously approved – to allow remote AGMs, reduce quorum from 25 to 15 and to allow proxy votes to count towards quorum – following a proposal by John Wotton seconded by Graham Horner.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. James Smith, from Loddington Farm:

Mr Smith from Loddington Farm gave a thought-provoking talk on how his fruit farm was transitioning to one that was more consumer-facing and embracing rewilding as a reaction to the nature crisis, climate change and the pressure under which farmers were put by the supermarkets – which results in falling profits as prices are squeezed.

Mr Smith hosts a monthly podcast Farming for Change and recommended the books Wilding, by Isabella Tree, and The Farming Ladder, by George Henderson.

Afterwards there was a lively discussion about the role of the NFU in terms of land lost for development; how low-quality agricultural land could be brought back into productive use by farming with soils and nature in mind; how the general population had become distanced (and lacked understanding) of the farming community; whether rewilding was profitable – promises couldn't be

made, but the project could be trialled on small parts of the farm; the key was to seek to reduce costs (less fertiliser), increase output (stacking enterprises) and seek a local market (selling direct to customers, rather than via supermarkets). Since the Second World War, the country had become locked into a cycle of maximising productivity and keeping labour costs down, so food could be sold cheaply – which meant nature had been lost along the way.

12. Meeting closed at 12.30pm; lunch followed.