

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2023

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 10 2023 AT LENHAM COMMUNITY CENTRE

1. Apologies for Absence

Both organisations were considered together. Thirty-six members were present and seven members sent apologies.

2. Minutes of 2022 AGM

The minutes of the annual general meeting held on November 4 2022 were presented and accepted unanimously.

3. Chairman's Welcome

John Wotton, Chairman, welcomed all present, saying that he would be in the chair for just another quarter of an hour or so.

4. Annual Report

Hilary Newport, Director, told the meeting that the proposed Lower Thames Crossing – the largest road project in the country since the building of the M25 – had been a huge project for us. CPRE Kent was calling for a better approach to transport in general.

The company behind the proposed London Resort theme park on the Swanscombe peninsula – an astonishing wildlife site – had just gone into administration.

The onslaught of so-called garden villages such as Lenham Heathlands and Otterpool Park continued, although that at Tudeley was now looking shaky in light of the government inspector's comments.

Other schemes with which we had been involved included plans for a 120-bed hotel, spa and surfing lagoon on the protected open space and community asset of Betteshanger Country Park; National Grid's Sea Link scheme that would destroy much of Minster Marshes in Thanet; Cleve Hill Solar Park, where construction had started but we were concerned about the safety implications of on-site iron-lithium batteries; and Chapel Down winery in the Kent Downs AONB for which permission had been given. At the latter site, CPRE Kent had considered a judicial

review, but it was concluded that a positive result was too unlikely for us to justify risking funds.

The issue of nutrient neutrality meant that many proposed housing developments in the Stour catchment could not be granted planning permission but others outside the catchment were being passed when they should not have been. The refusal by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, of a new estate of 165 homes in the High Weald National Landscape (formerly AONB) at Turnden, near Cranbrook, had caused a furore among the housing industry. It had been reported subsequently that Mr Gove was “rethinking” his refusal.

More broadly, there was the constant cycle of Local Plans being refreshed and renewed, while we had been involved in national planning policy. CPRE had led the National Planning Alliance.

The Chairman thanked the Director and said much had been achieved but with only a small number of people – we should be proud of all who contributed. We were not alone as a charity in trying to get more volunteers.

He noted that planning seemed to exist for the benefit of planning professionals, while there was not much cause for optimism in government, for example there was no mention of the environment in the King’s Speech. However, we kept trying to make the government act responsibly, with particular reference to water, land classification, community engagement and transport.

The Chairman spoke of his gratitude to the board of trustees and gave special thanks to Treasurer Michael Moore.

Finally, the Chairman noted the sad passing of former Thanet district chairman David Morrish.

5. Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer Michael Moore went through the summary accounts briefly – all present had a copy of them and they were also available on the CPRE Kent website. The Treasurer referred specifically to a trading deficit of £88,000 and the charity’s fixed assets of £5.8 million.

6. Auditors: Michael Moore proposed, and Amanda Cottrell seconded, the appointment of Kreston Reeves as auditors. This was approved unanimously.

7. Honorary Officers

(Honorary Officers do not need to be elected)

7.1 Patron: Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL remained in office as patron.

7.2 President: There was no nomination for President.

7.3 Vice Presidents: Amanda Cottrell OBE DL, Rt Hon Damian Green, Richard King and Richard Knox-Johnston remained in office.

8. Election of Members of the Board

8.1 Treasurer: Nigel Britten proposed, and David Wood seconded, that Michael Moore be re-elected as treasurer. This was approved unanimously.

8.2 District Committee and Specialist Group Members: Amanda Cottrell OBE DL proposed, and David Wood seconded, the following as district committee and specialist group members: Nigel Britten, Christine Drury, Graham Horner and Peter Lorenzo. All were approved unanimously.

8.3 General Members: Christine Drury proposed, and David Wood seconded, the following as general members: Paul Buckley, Julian Glenister and Val Loseby. All were approved unanimously.

At this point, John Wotton stood down as Chairman.

8.4: New nomination: John Wotton nominated, and Michael Moore seconded, Ben Moorhead DL as new Chairman. This was approved unanimously.

The new Chairman accepted the nomination and gave a short speech in which he paid tribute to the former Chairman and introduced himself as a retired solicitor and committed conservationist, having, for example, chaired the Wye Future Group.

He thanked the former Chairman and all those in the charity who were putting their faith in him.

He said that the threats to Kent were many and large, while he was looking to double CPRE Kent membership and noted the need to grow the team so we would not be overwhelmed by development schemes.

The Chairman referred to two 'buzz statements' – 'kindness to the countryside' and 'win for wildlife'.

9: General Q&A on Annual Report and Accounts: The Director and the Treasurer took questions from the floor.

10. CPRE Chief Executive Roger Mortlock: The Road to 2026:

In his keynote speech, the Chief Executive said CPRE was essentially about land use and land-use change.

Among a range of subjects, he spoke of the great success of CPRE's Rooftop Revolution campaign calling for solar panels to be installed on rooftops rather than on open countryside; the need to have influence on the likely new Labour government and CPRE's proud role as defender of the Green Belt.

11. Close followed by lunch