

Essex Wildlife Trust Annual General Meeting – Online Minutes

10.00am Saturday 23 August 2025

The **Chair, James Wren**, opened the 66th Annual General Meeting of Essex Wildlife Trust and formally welcomed all members, guests, and attendees.

He introduced himself, noting that he had taken on the role of Chair at the end of the previous year, having joined the Board of Trustees in 2020. He reflected on his longstanding connection to Essex and his personal and professional passion for nature, developed from an early age and reinforced through a career spanning organisations including the Scout Association, the Zoological Society of London, and the Royal Horticultural Society.

The Chair expressed that it was a privilege to support the work of the Trust and its dedicated staff, volunteers, trustees, members, and partners. He emphasised the increasing importance of the Trust's work, noting that nature is essential to human wellbeing and planetary health, and requires urgent protection and restoration. He acknowledged the Trust's strong track record in conservation, including species recovery and habitat restoration, and highlighted its ambition to achieve even greater impact in the years ahead.

Members were thanked for their continued support, enthusiasm, and commitment to the Trust's work.

The Chair then outlined the structure of the meeting, advising that the President, Professor Jules Pretty, would chair the formal AGM proceedings.

The **President, Professor Jules Pretty**, welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for their continued support and engagement with the Trust.

He reflected on themes from the previous AGM, emphasising the importance of developing a deeper relationship with nature—not only to support conservation outcomes but also to enhance people's understanding and wellbeing.

The President introduced the central theme of his address: **abundance**. He contrasted this with the concept of scarcity that underpins modern economic thinking, noting that while scarcity drives competition and value, it can limit outcomes. In contrast, nature demonstrates regenerative abundance, where engagement does not diminish what exists.

He highlighted that abundant nature delivers multiple benefits, including improved health and wellbeing, stronger communities, and ecosystem services such as flood management and carbon capture.

The President drew attention to the Trust's **"30 for 30" initiative**, encouraging members to take practical actions for nature recovery across their homes, communities, and wider systems. He emphasised the importance of offering flexible actions to enable broad participation and encouraged members to take one additional action each year and to engage others in the conversation.

He also highlighted the publication of the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Essex**, noting its significance as an ambitious and forward-looking framework for coordinated environmental action across the county.

In closing, the President encouraged a shift in perspective—from viewing nature through a lens of scarcity to one of abundance. He illustrated this through the return of sparrows to his local area, highlighting the importance of common species as indicators of a healthy natural environment.

He concluded by expressing optimism that, through collective effort, the Trust and its members can continue to make meaningful progress in restoring nature and strengthening its role in people's lives.

Ordinary Business

1. Consideration of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 28 September 2024

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 28 September 2024 were presented to members. The minutes had been made available on the Trust's website in advance of the meeting. Members were asked to approve the minutes as a fair representation of the meeting.

Outcome:

Automated polling was added to proxy votes and the following votes were counted:

53 votes For, 5 Abstentions, and 0 Against

The motion to approve the minutes was **carried unanimously**.

2. Matters Arising

The Chair confirmed that there were **no matters arising** from the minutes of the previous AGM. Members were reminded that any questions could be submitted via the designated Q&A function and would be addressed following the meeting.

3. Consideration of the Impact Report of the Board of Trustees for 2024

The Impact Report for 2024 was presented and made available online, with hard copies accessible upon request.

Key highlights from the report included:

- Acquisition of Fir Tree Wood, marking the first new nature reserve in several years
- Significant conservation achievements, including:
 - Record orchid monitoring and conservation activity
 - Successful beach-nesting bird protection initiatives
 - Extensive pond restoration projects
- Delivery of impactful citizen science campaigns
- Continued management and enhancement of nature reserves across Essex

The report emphasised the critical role of people—members, volunteers, staff, and supporters—in achieving these outcomes.

Members were asked to formally receive the Impact Report.

Outcome:

The motion to receive the Impact Report was **carried**.

4. Consideration of the Financial Statements for 2024, incorporating the Auditor's Report, by Director of Finance and Systems, Andy Ray

Andy Ray, Director of Finance and Systems, presented a summary of the financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2024.

Financial Summary

- Total income: **£9.9 million** (increase from £9.2 million in 2023)
- Total expenditure: **£9.7 million** (reduction of £800,000)
- Overall surplus: **£1.3 million**, including realised gains of £1.1 million
- Operating surplus: **£200,000**, compared to a £1.4 million loss in 2023
- Unrestricted operating deficit: **£1.2 million**
- Cash reserves increased to **£1.7 million**

Key financial considerations included:

- Reduced costs from discontinuation of non-core, loss-making activities
- Variability in grant, donation, and legacy income
- Continued investment in delivering the Strategic Plan 2030
- Anticipated planned operating losses over the next two years

Members noted that while short-term losses were planned, corrective action is required to address underlying unrestricted deficits.

Automated polling was added to proxy votes and the following votes were counted:

60 votes For, 2 Abstentions, and 0 Against

The motion was carried, and the members agreed to receive the Impact Report and the Financial Statements for year ended 31 December 2024

4a. Recommendation of Appointment of Auditors to the Members

Members were asked to approve the appointment of Moore Kingston Smith as auditors for the next financial year.

Outcome:

The motion was **carried**.

4b. Auditor's Remuneration – Proposal that this is decided by Trustees

Members were asked to authorise the Board of Trustees to determine the remuneration of the auditors.

Outcome:

The motion was **carried**.

Automated polling was added to proxy votes and the following votes were counted:

59 votes For, 3 Abstentions, and 1 Against

The motion was carried, and members agreed to appoint Moore Kingston Smith as auditors and authorise the Board of Trustees to determine their remuneration.

5. Election of Trustees

Biographies of all candidates were made available in advance via the AGM webpage.

Members were asked to approve both:

- The **re-appointment of existing trustees**
- The **appointment of new trustees**

Trustees Standing for Re-election:

- **60 votes For, 2 Abstentions, and 0 Against**

The motion was carried, and it was agreed to re-appoint **Sarah Balser** as trustee.

- **59 votes For, 2 Abstentions, and 1 Against**

The motion was carried, and it was agreed to re-appoint **Catherine Hawkins** as trustee.

- **57 votes For, 2 Abstentions, and 2 Against**

The motion was carried, and it was agreed to re-appoint **Charles Joynson** as trustee.

New Trustees Standing for Election:

- **58 votes For, 2 Abstentions, and 1 Against**

The motion was carried, and it was agreed to appoint **Paul Roberts** as trustee/treasurer.

- **57 votes For, 2 Abstentions, and 1 Against**

The motion was carried, and it was agreed to appoint **Tim Young** as trustee.

Special Business

6. Appointment of Scrutineer – Penny Carter

Members were asked to approve the re-appointment of Penny Carter as Independent Scrutineer for a further 12-month term.

Outcome:

Automated polling was added to proxy votes and the following votes were counted:

55 votes For, 31 Abstentions, and 1 Against

The motion was carried, and Penny Carter was accepted as scrutineer for a further year.

Informal Business

7. Your questions, answered by the CEO

A Q&A session was held where pre-submitted questions were addressed by the Chief Executive. Key themes included:

- **Local Wildlife Sites & Conservation Work:**

Reduced direct Trust involvement due to funding constraints; continued partnership work through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

- **Geographical Coverage (North Essex):**
Fewer visitor centres due to financial viability constraints; ambition to expand where opportunities arise.
 - **Format of AGM (Online vs In-person):**
Hybrid approaches being explored; cost remains a key limiting factor.
 - **Infrastructure Projects (e.g. Norwich to Tilbury proposals):**
Trust position supports clean energy transition while ensuring biodiversity protection.
 - **Social Media Strategy:**
Transition away from X (Twitter); focus on strengthening other platforms with limited resources.
 - **Trail Hunting Concerns:**
Confirmed not permitted on Trust land; further information requested from the member.
 - **Rewilding vs Species Conservation:**
The Trust will continue to pursue a balanced approach combining both landscape-scale restoration and targeted species recovery.
- All submitted questions will be published with responses on the Trust website following the meeting.

8. Wilder Essex Awards

The following awards were presented:

- **Wilder Communities Award:**
Jenny Gifford and the Greener Gardens Group
 - **Wilder Schools Award:**
Mayflower Primary School, Harwich
 - **Green Leader Award:**
John Meehan (Essex County Council)
 - **Wilder Business Award:**
Ellison's Solicitors
 - **Ray Marsh Award (Volunteer of the Year):**
Peter Dimmick – recognised for over 50 years of service
- The awards celebrate individuals, communities, schools, and organisations contributing to wildlife conservation across Essex.

9. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business raised.

Members were invited to:

- Participate in future campaigns and advocacy for nature
- Engage in Trust events and activities
- Continue supporting the Trust's conservation efforts

Rich Yates closed the meeting by thanking James and Jules for Chairing the meeting, Andy and Jeremy for presenting, staff Karen Kendon and Deb Hart behind the scenes for organising, and Mi-voice for hosting.

More importantly, Rich thanked members, trustees, Local Groups, volunteers, supporters, corporate members, partners, legators, and funders for their continued support of Essex Wildlife Trust. Without them none of the Trust's work would be possible.

While the challenges facing nature remain significant, today's discussions have shown the real progress we are making together. From our conservation work to the dedication of our volunteers, staff and partners, it is clear that our collective efforts are making a difference.

None of this would be possible without our members, whose support, enthusiasm and commitment are at the heart of everything we do.

Rich encouraged everyone to stay involved—whether through supporting our work, taking action locally, or championing nature in your communities.