



AGM Minutes

2009

Minutes of the National Trust Annual General Meeting held at STEAM, the Museum of the Great Western Railway on Saturday 7 November 2009

**National
Trust**

Chairman: Simon Jenkins

Present: Laurie Magnus (Deputy Chairman), members of the Board of Trustees, members of the Council, the Director-General, members of the Senior Management Team, staff and some 600 members of the National Trust.

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1. Welcome and introduction

The **Chairman, Simon Jenkins**, welcomed members to Swindon which had been chosen as the venue for the AGM to allow members to see the Trust's central office and to help 'loosen up' on the formality of a traditional AGM.

He recalled that in his address to last year's AGM, when he took over as Chairman of the National Trust, he had acknowledged that the outlook for 2009 was likely to be very difficult and uncertain due to the 'credit-crunch'. The Board had taken a cautious approach, it had imposed a head-count freeze on staffing, tightened up on expenditure and in anticipation of holiday-makers staying in Britain decided to invest in advertising. The result was a sensational year, the Trust now had 3.7 million members, attendance at properties was up with many properties seeing an increase of 20% and some as high as 50%, more money was being put into reserves than budgeted and all financial returns were very positive. It was not clear whether the excellent results were due to 'staycationing' or the genius of the National Trust. The continuing challenges were to maintain this performance when the economic climate improved and to retain the new supporters.

His first priority was to do something about the presentation of the Trust's properties – both built and open spaces. The Trust needed to engage with its visitors, it had to snap out of the 1960s/1970s way of presenting houses as conservationist museums, and the Trust had started to do so. It was often little things that made a difference: visitors could now play croquet at Chastleton; the fires were being lit in the Great Hall at Petworth; visitors could play billiards at Wightwick and were cooking cookies in the kitchen at Cockermouth. The Trust was beginning to loosen up. National Trust houses had to be houses, not just museums. They were museums, but they were supposed to be houses, and visitors must feel they were visiting someone's house even if it was the National Trust's.

His other main priority was to reduce National Trust bureaucracy and take out tiers of decision-making and delay between the top and the bottom. The next year of public-sector policy was going to be heavily dominated by one issue: can frontline services be protected at a time of recession? Can overheads be taken out, can bureaucracy be taken out, can the compliance culture be reduced, and can frontline management be set free? The National Trust should be at the forefront of tackling these issues; the Board and senior management team had set about this task and were determined to reduce the National Trust's reputation for heavy-handed bureaucracy. The results would be reported back next year.

The achievement of the previous year had put immense pressure on the staff and volunteers. The success would simply not have been possible without the 55,000+ volunteers who supported the staff. The response from both was wonderful, as demonstrated by volunteers at Bodnant with their snowdrop planting. The National Trust utterly depended on its volunteers, but at times was not as welcoming as it could be. Although it could sometimes be difficult to absorb offers of help, volunteer staff were the front line with the public. The Trust had to do everything it possibly could to make them feel welcome, at home and rewarded; the Trust would do so.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held in Liverpool on Saturday 1 November 2008 were approved by the meeting and signed by **the Chairman**.

3. Annual Report and Financial Statements 2008/09

Fiona Reynolds, Director-General, opened her remarks by saying how thrilled she was to welcome everybody to the Trust's home in Swindon. 2009 had been an amazing year for the Trust, in which it had been able to tap into the anti-recessionary mood and provide the simple pleasures that people got from being in beautiful places – children running around at properties, people admiring wonderful architecture and art.

The Trust had consciously embraced a wider agenda, including its focus on food. In the spring the Trust launched a campaign to provide 1,000 new allotments and growing spaces at its properties. The response was absolutely amazing and the number of properties that had put in allotments was increasing daily. At Dinefwr 60 allotments had gone in from scratch during the year, creating a wonderful community asset with barbecues and all kinds of activities going on, as well as the joy of people growing their own food. Through the summer the Trust ran its *Food Glorious Food* campaign, giving away seeds and tomato plants, encouraging people to talk to the gardeners about how to grow food, and to buy fresh, local, seasonal food. The campaign had had a terrific year and next year would be talking about cooking food, local recipes and enjoying the fresh taste of food at Trust properties throughout the country.

The last year had also seen unusual and interesting acquisitions. The Trust received the exceptional gift of three

wonderful hotels, the Historic House Hotels, consisting of three glorious buildings: Hartwell House near Aylesbury; Bodysgallen Hall near Llandudno; and Middlethorpe Hall in York. Seaton Delaval Hall was another ambitious acquisition plan that the Trust launched just over a year ago. Despite the recession, Seaton Delaval had inspired extraordinary excitement for this glorious Vanbrugh house both nationally and, in particular, amongst the local community. The Trust was confident it could complete the acquisition and would let members know once it had done so. At the other end of the spectrum the Trust had been debating the acceptance of a gift of an extraordinary house in Wandsworth, South London, owned by Khadambi Asalache, a Kenyan-born poet and writer, who was also a Treasury civil servant. The house had been decorated over 20 years with the most delicate and beautiful fretwork, which gave it an incredible character, drawing on all kinds of cultural and artistic traditions. The debate had raised interesting questions about the type of properties the Trust might acquire, but following a wide and lengthy debate the trustees had decided in principle to accept the gift, subject to raising the relevant funds. These proposed acquisitions illustrated how the Trust could engage both the wonders of architectural brilliance such as Seaton and the more quirky and unusual, which challenged the definitions of heritage.

Another highlight of the year was the reuniting of the 'Capability' Brown landscape park and house at Croome Court, after the Croome Estate trustees had acquired the house and leased it to the Trust. Although currently empty, the house had opened a few weeks previously and the Trust was now engaging supporters to determine how best to use and present the property. Greenway, Agatha Christie's summer home, had also been reunited with its garden. The spirit of Agatha Christie's long summers spent there had been recaptured following a massive conservation effort to repair and restore the house, generously supported by her grandson, Matthew Prichard, who helped the Trust acquire the contents. After many years there had been a breakthrough with a decision on the location of the new visitor facilities at Stonehenge. The Trust had agreed with English Heritage that the new facilities should be located at Airman's Corner, to the west of the stones, and thereby give Stonehenge and its landscape a chance to exist in the context and setting that it so richly deserved.

In addition to the exciting work in bringing built properties to life, the Trust was also bringing the countryside to life. The Trust's glorious countryside and coastline got too little recognition. The Trust was becoming more confident and ambitious in highlighting what it did in the countryside and the benefits to be derived from the simple, wonderful,

relaxing environment of the Trust's open spaces, such as the Brecon Beacons or Hatfield Forest. One outdoor property that was facing a challenge was the Giant's Causeway, in its attempt to raise funds to build a replacement visitor centre, following a fire which destroyed the old visitor centre in 2000. The Trust had been given the responsibility of providing the world-class visitor facilities that the Giant's Causeway deserved and was seeking to raise a contribution of £2 million towards the overall costs.

Overall the Trust was showing itself to be more confident, more visible and more ambitious, as demonstrated by its bold and audacious advertising, and the television series on Sissinghurst and Bodnant. The increased marketing and advertising was exposing more people to the Trust and giving them the sense of joy and excitement that visiting Trust properties brought.

The Director-General concluded by thanking all the Trust's members, volunteers, supporters and staff without whom the Trust could not operate.

The Chairman formally moved the adoption of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2008/09.

Laurie Magnus, Deputy Chairman, formally seconded the adoption of the Annual Report and Financial Statements and provided a summary of the previous year's performance. Although the results had been adversely affected by a combination of poor weather and the global financial crisis, the Trust had achieved a very creditable performance. Net gain had fallen from 24.6% to 21.5%, but remained above our 20% target. Spend on conservation projects was up from £84 million to £98 million. As a result of the fall in the stock market, the investment portfolio was 20% down at the financial year end, from £916 million to £735 million. More than half this loss had subsequently been recovered and the portfolio now stood at £850 million. Cash distributed to properties had remained level due to the Trust's long-term total return policy.

The financial climate and complex actuarial calculations had generated significant in-year variations to the value of the pension fund deficit, which at the year end stood at £53 million. The situation was being closely monitored by the Trustees, and an arrangement to manage the deficit over a 25-year period had been agreed with the pension fund trustees.

The catering and retail contribution had fallen by 19% due primarily to the bad weather in 2008. The first half of 2009 had seen a remarkable recovery, attributed in part to better weather in the spring but also to the Trust benefiting from British residents staying at home, the 'staycationers'.

Despite early signs of economic recovery, the Board remained cautious and had taken measures to restrict cost growth such as imposing a headcount cap on staff numbers. Whilst the Trust was forecasting an increased net gain for this year, economic pressures remained which were likely to affect the real income of Trust members and supporters and potentially their ability to support the Trust. The Trust had a perpetual liability to maintain its properties and needed to spend over £100 million each year on conservation. Whilst the net gain funded part of this spend, another significant part came from legacies, which even with the economic pressures currently remained strong. The Trust recognised that it could never be complacent about legacies.

Overall the Trust continued to be an astonishing success story; it enjoyed tremendous support from its members and visitors, which was underpinned by the passion, dedication and expertise of its staff and volunteers.

In January a donation for £150,000 was received after an article about the Seaton Delaval appeal had appeared in the *Financial Times*. Generous gifts such as this and the Historic House Hotels did not come to the Trust by luck. They came because the Trust had remained in tune with the vision of its founders – preserving places of historic interest or natural beauty for the benefit of the nation, cherishing its supporters, prudently managing its resources and remaining an independent charity.

With level heads the Trust would come through this recession, as it had endured earlier recessions throughout the last 114 years. **Laurie Magnus** commended the accounts to the meeting.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Laurie and the Trustees and staff, acknowledging their stewardship through such a difficult year. He also paid tribute to the press team who had helped portray the Trust so positively in the media.

The Chairman then invited questions on the Annual Report and Financial Statements from the floor.

The first question was from **Mr Greg Slay from Chichester** who asked what approaches the Trust was taking in tackling food waste throughout its supply chain, restaurants and tearooms, and in particular what consideration was being given to the distribution of food surplus from restaurants and tearooms to local charities, rather than being disposed of through landfill?

Sue Wilkinson, Director of Marketing and Supporter Development, explained that the Trust was already serving local and seasonal food, working with approximately 1,000 local food suppliers, as part of its approach to sustainable

food supplies and to help keep food miles down. In terms of food waste the Trust had introduced a new computerised stock management system to help catering managers keep good control of stock and the amount of food they used. The Trust also prepared on-site most of the food sold at properties, which meant that the Trust made food only for the number of visitors expected on any one day, which helped to reduce food waste. Currently the Trust composted most of its food waste, but the idea of distributing surplus food to local charities was an interesting idea that the Trust could look into.

Mr Anton Buckoke from Bristol sought confirmation that even with the current financial situation and social pressures the Trust accepted that climate change was its single greatest threat. Although last year's AGM had voted in favour of putting the environment at the centre of the Trust's decision-making and the Trust was taking positive internal mitigation measures, the Trust could do more to communicate its concerns and responses. The UK continued to produce high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change was not high on the political agenda and the country was better at climate change rhetoric than action. Did the Trust, as a leading environmental organisation, agree that it should raise the issue to a much higher level, engage the membership to take responsibility and actively seek to enlighten and achieve a bottom-up drive for change?

In response **Peter Nixon, Director of Conservation**, expressed his belief that the Trust was strong on climate-change action and less strong on rhetoric. He unequivocally agreed that climate change was the Trust's single greatest threat and was already impacting on virtually every aspect of Trust properties. The Trust was responding: for example, it had installed 136 different renewable energy systems which were producing about a tenth of the Trust's energy consumption, with further ambitious plans to increase this proportion. The Trust was also engaged in research, with the likes of Durham University at Wallington, into land and farm management to aid the retention of carbon storage in soil. In terms of external advocacy, the Trust was actively involved but it was deeds rather than words that were important. The Trust recognised that it was in a strong position to share its knowledge and experience with the 100 million estimated annual visitors to its open space properties. The Trust was also involved in informing the debate at government and inter-government level, drawing on its practical experience. The Trust had made a submission to the forthcoming International Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, it regularly contributed to the thinking of government departments such as Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

and the Department for the Environment and Climate Change, and had a seat on the government's Rural Climate Change Forum.

Mr Robert Clarke from London welcomed the coverage of work by volunteers in the Annual Report and Accounts and the praise for volunteers from the Chairman, before asking what progress had been made in addressing the concerns raised by the volunteers at last year's volunteer conferences?

Sue Wilkinson, Director of Marketing and Supporter Development, confirmed that staff had been busy addressing the issues raised at the volunteer conferences. The Trust had sought feedback from volunteers on how it could improve communication and help supporter groups, and it would be re-launching the Trust's volunteer magazine *Active* next year. It had trialled web templates for use by supporter groups, and had looked at ways to help supporter groups contact Trust members who weren't currently members of a supporter group. Another concern of volunteers had been induction and training; in response, the Trust would shortly be issuing a new volunteer welcome pack, five new training modules had been developed and a number of room-guide workshops had been run. Better use of volunteers' skills was also being addressed, and a number of properties were using volunteers to coordinate and lead other volunteers. However, it was important to know if these measures were addressing volunteers' concerns, so from this year the volunteer survey was rolled out at property level and about 7,000 responses had already been received. Volunteers would be able to tell the Trust whether they thought the Trust was doing a better job of supporting volunteers.

Mr James Lanceley from Tarporeley asked, via the web chat, whether during this period of economic uncertainty and recession, the Trust could afford to acquire Seaton Delaval Hall?

Fiona Reynolds, Director-General, agreed that the opportunity could not have come at a worse time but the timing had been dictated by Lord Hastings' decision that he could not maintain Seaton Delaval Hall. The Trust took a brave decision to go ahead, and the response and local enthusiasm had been astonishing with an enormous amount of money being raised both locally and nationally. The decision had been exactly the right one to make, and the timing of these types of acquisitions would never be of the Trust's choice.

Mr Rodney Legg from Dorset, a member of Council who would shortly be standing down after 20 years on the Council, asked the Chairman to elaborate on his philosophy

on risk. As a major landowner, of an area equivalent to an old-style English county, the Trust should expect that accidents and fatalities would occur on its land. The Trust encouraged people to visit the countryside with its inherent risks, such as waterways and wind-blown debris from millions of trees, and therefore needed to have a pragmatic approach to risk. It needed to accept the publicity associated with any accidents or litigious claims and needed to support the Chairman's stance in tackling health and safety bureaucrats and the media to help keep the countryside 'open'. The Trust should also consider 're-wilding' the countryside with indigenous iconic wildlife such as the beaver, lynx, European bison and even the wolf.

The Chairman agreed with the sentiments conveyed by Rodney Legg but stressed that the Trust needed to be careful in how it acted and what it said. The Trust was a public body and a charity with a duty of care, it had to be mindful that accidents did occur and needed to sympathise with the victims of these accidents. The Trust, like many other organisations and individuals, shared the view that the compliance culture had gone too far and had therefore entered into discussions with the Health & Safety Executive. The Trust did not want to cover its entire estate in warning notices and safety signs; it wanted to trust its visitors who were responsible people and were expected to look after their own children and themselves.

Ms Pamela Dinsmore from Falmouth submitted her question via the web. She asked why the National Trust was using free labour in terms of volunteers and not paid staff?

Paul Boniface, Director of People and Governance, explained that the Trust had approximately 5,000 regular staff and 55,000 volunteers. The answer was therefore very simple; if the Trust did not have its fantastic volunteering workforce it wouldn't be able to open for business. Furthermore, since the earliest times volunteering had been part of what the Trust was about; it was part of what the Trust did, part of the Trust's ethos. It enabled thousands of people to participate and join in the heritage and conservation of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Paul finished by thanking every person involved in volunteering.

Mr Peter Bate from Somerset, a National Trust tenant, queried the National Trust's rent policy that was pushing thousands of Trust tenants into poverty or driving them from their homes, giving an example of a Gloucester tenant who had had to move out after receiving a 100% rent increase. The Trust's housing policy directed rural surveyors to maximise income through achieving market-level rents in compliance with instructions from the Charity Commissioners, although the Tenants' Association had contradictory advice

from a specialist in housing and charity law. Would the Trust, therefore, change the wording of its housing policy as regards the levels of rent it seeks, from open-market rents to affordable rents, instruct its rural surveyors accordingly and thereby help sustain rural communities and maintain the good name of the Trust?

Peter Nixon, Director of Conservation, explained that the Trust could not alter its policy of using open-market rents as its starting benchmark. The Trust was duty-bound to understand what the open-market rents were, after which it could allow discounts providing that the reason for the discount equated to the Trust's proper purposes. This was very often a local decision which the Trust was seeking to facilitate through greater delegation; it was simply not possible to have a blanket policy. Overall, in comparison with other major estates, the level of Trust rents was not high.

Mr Anthony Quick from Newbury sought clarification on the reported backlog figure of £145 million on page 38 of the Annual Report, down from £156 million in the previous year. Associations helped raise funds to support repairs and renovations at properties but requests for funds were not targeted at specific properties. The Trust's priority should be to reduce this backlog further until it was eliminated, and the Trust should inform Associations of the repair and renovation backlog in their area.

Peter Nixon, Director of Conservation, explained that the term backlog described any work that should have been carried out but had not been. The figure contained within the Annual Report reflected all parts of the Trust's work identified on that basis. Whilst defining backlog was relatively straightforward for buildings, this was not the case for the coast and countryside properties. The Trust therefore tended to focus on the cause of the backlog by identifying the cyclical nature of the work, as either long-term or short-term cyclical, and trying to provide funding against these needs. This approach would eventually eliminate the backlog altogether and was why the information provided by the Trust with regard to fund-raising needs did not primarily relate to backlog but more to the Trust's ongoing needs. However, it was a good point that had been raised and if the Trust could extract from its backlog figures information that would help donations come to the Trust, and do it in a clear and explicable way, then the Trust should.

Ms Elizabeth Sargeant from Stroud drew comparison between the performance of catering and retail. Catering had shown a good in-year performance as a result of a very interesting catering offer with local produce and a distinct character to each of the catering outlets. The retail

performance had not been as good, with many shops very similar all over the country. During a recent group visit to a garden at Lytes Carey, a small National Trust property, everybody enjoyed the shop there. It was different, it had things that other places in the Trust did not have, and everybody bought something from that shop and enjoyed seeing the range on sale. Why couldn't retail have a greater degree of flexibility so that people can have a greater variety of choice and help deliver the same improvement as the Trust had seen with catering?

Sue Wilkinson, Director of Marketing and Supporter Development, welcomed the question, totally agreeing with the point raised. The Trust acknowledged that its shops had all started to look the same, and the retail team had started working to make sure that the shops were much more distinctive and like the properties. About 50% of the products were now locally sourced and were worth over £1 million in sales. It was interesting that it was always the local foods that sold the best: local honey, apple juices, fudge, sweets and things like that. The Trust agreed that its shops needed to be more distinctive and was increasing the number of local ranges to help achieve this.

The Chairman thanked all the speakers for their questions and invited members to vote by a show of hands on the resolution to approve the adoption of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2008/09. There was an overwhelming show of hands in support and no request for a poll. The resolution was passed by a show of hands.

4. Appointment of Auditors

The resolution to appoint PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP of 31 Great George Street, Bristol, BS1 5QD as auditors for the next year was proposed by the **Chairman** and seconded by **Laurie Magnus, Deputy Chairman**. The resolution was passed by a show of hands.

5. Members' Resolution

that the trust fully co-operates with the police to enforce the law regarding sporting activities on Trust land and publishes the dates, times and routes of such licensed activities on the Trust's website at least 14 days in advance.

The resolution was proposed by **Douglas Batchelor from Fareham** who, in addition to being a keen and long-standing National Trust supporter, was also the chief executive of the League Against Cruel Sports. The resolution had been raised

to address concerns that the Trust was lagging behind other large landowners in dealing with the small element of the hunting fraternity who deliberately broke the law. The resolution did not relate to legal pest control or licensed trail hunts or exercising of hounds but rather those activities banned by the Hunting Act. The League Against Cruel Sports had undertaken a review of licensed hunts and identified apparent illegal activity at two-thirds of them, concluding that greater scrutiny of hunts was required to assist law-enforcement agencies. To enable more effective monitoring, more information was required on where the hunts intended to go, lay trails or exercise hounds. Whilst the Trust had made some welcome progress, by requiring hunts to make available details of their activities as a condition of their licence, the resolution sought for hunt information to be made available by the Trust itself via its website. The failure of the Trust to provide this information demeaned the good reputation of the Trust compared to other large land owners. The resolution sought to ensure that the law was obeyed on Trust properties, particularly with regard to hunting, and was commended to the meeting.

The resolution was formally seconded by **Ivor Annetts from Tiverton**, who had also been a member of the Trust for many years and had been observing hunts both before and since the hunting ban had been introduced. The behaviour of hunts did not appear to have changed and was not the newly invented sport of trail hunting; hounds were seen in places where a trail could not possibly have been laid, or in places where it was totally inappropriate to lay a trail. It looked as though crimes were being committed under a National Trust licence on National Trust land and that was a cause for concern. In addition to the horses and hounds, the hunt also brought with them on to National Trust property off-road, four-wheel drive vehicles and quad bikes. Sensitive habitats were being driven over, rutted and churned up, roads were being blocked, and National Trust car parks were filled-up by hunt supporters, denying access to members wanting to visit. The resolution sought to address the concern that the law was being broken on National Trust land under National Trust licences. The Trust was being asked to help members to assist the police in enforcing the law. Members had a right to the information and should know whether the places they were planning to visit would have a hunt meeting sometime that day. The meeting was urged to support and vote for a very reasonable proposal.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, **Laurie Magnus, Deputy Chairman and Trustee**, stated that the Board's position regarding legal compliance was very clear: any activity on National Trust land must comply with the law. Trust staff

and volunteers were expected to co-operate with the police and other law-enforcement agencies, but they could not be expected to be law enforcers in their own right, nor could they anticipate the decisions of the courts in interpreting the law. More information about a diverse range of events on Trust property was becoming available on the Trust's website, but there was a practical limit to the amount of information, particularly regarding that sought by the resolution. Trail hunting was authorised at local level by the issue of a seasonal licence. Those licences allowed trail hunting to take place on specified properties, subject to clear conditions and taking account of particular local concerns such as conservation priorities. The licences did not specify dates or locations, but such information was available to the public on request from the organisers of the trail hunts. It was a term of the Trust's standard licence for organisers to respond to requests for this information, as acknowledged by the proposer of the resolution. The Board believed that this approach was the most practical and best way to provide the information for those interested in taking part in trail hunting or those wishing to avoid it. The Board was also very clear that the Trust would not tolerate any activity which broke the law but did not believe it was practicable to implement this resolution for the reasons outlined.

Mr John Farley from Ludlow explained that although he was a Council member he was expressing his own view that the resolution was unworkable and inappropriate business for the AGM. Rather, the resolution was a cover for prolonging and perpetrating the pro- and anti-hunting debate and should be conducted elsewhere irrespective of which side of the debate was bringing forward the resolution. Such resolutions not only took up lots of time and effort, incurring considerable expense for the Trust, but they were also a very divisive issue that created discord amongst teams of National Trust staff and volunteers who otherwise worked extremely closely together. The Trust could do without those who did not have the real interest of the Trust at heart, causing discord amongst those who did. The meeting was encouraged to vote against the resolution, to show that the resolution was inappropriate and to send a very clear message that the Trust was not to be the battleground for either side of the blood sport lobby, now or in the future.

Ms Celia Mower from Bath was opposed to the many instances of trail hunting going wrong, with the hounds taking up scents and chasing animals that were supposed to be out of bounds. She also believed that there were other more appropriate non-hunting activities that the Trust could encourage such as point-to-point or fell racing.

Ms Janie Clifford from Gloucester thought it was entirely inappropriate for the National Trust to adopt a vigilante role, especially given the Board's new drive to reduce management and bureaucracy.

This view was shared by **Caroline Tisdall from Dorchester**, a Council member, who agreed that the Trust should not, as an independent charity, go above and beyond the law and should be reducing bureaucracy rather than taking on an increased, unnecessary burden.

A web comment from **Paul Phillips of London** was read out in which he expressed concern that the Trust was being subjected to political pressure from 'social adjustment' campaigns. The stewardship of the farming community should be left to those who were best able to exercise dealing with control over wildlife. Hunting was a well-respected country pursuit, fulfilling new benefits for country people and should be encouraged rather than bow to the demands of those who were not well-disposed to cherished country sports.

A member in the audience reiterated that 75% of the people in the country were opposed to a return to hunting. The killing of animals for the sheer pleasure was unacceptable in the twenty-first century. In opposing the resolution, despite what it said, the Trust was encouraging people to break the law and was not therefore an organisation worthy of continued support. The speaker would not be renewing her membership and would transfer her support to the League Against Cruel Sport.

Peter Nixon, Director of Conservation, summed up on behalf of the Board. The Trust would always co-operate properly with the police, and to the best of his knowledge had always done so. With regard to making information about sporting and other recreational activities available to members, the Trust would do this in a practicable way. The Trust issued around 3,500 licences each year for different types of activities, with many licences including a number of individual days. It was simply impractical to put all the information on the Trust's website 14 days in advance for all the activities, but the Trust had made provision for the information to be made available to those who wanted to know. Mention had been made of the approach of other large land owners, such as the Ministry of Defence and the Forestry Commission, both of which were government bodies. The Trust was jealous of its independence, and it was important that the Trust pursued policies that it believed were right for its purposes and constitution rather than what government and other organisations might do.

In response to issues raised during the debate, **Peter Nixon** observed that whilst he had been Director of Conservation

there had been seven AGM or EGM resolutions relating to hunting. The membership needed to question whether hunting resolutions were relevant and should continue to be raised at AGMs.

Mr Douglas Batchelor summed up for the resolution. The decision to raise an AGM resolution had not been taken lightly but a lot of hunt activity took place on Trust land. Some 50,000 hunt people had indicated they intended to break the law, and many refused to accept the trail hunt rules issued by the Masters of Drag Hounds and Bloodhounds Association. The resolution did not seek to ban legal hunting but sought to make available information about the hunts, which coincidentally, would have benefited those members who wished to enjoy the spectacle. Making the information available would also assist those people who wanted to monitor hunt activity as many other large land owners had done. Given that organisations like the Ministry of Defence and the Forestry Commission did not bend over to suit the League – they did what they thought was right – they requested from the hunts the precise route of the trail that they planned to follow, and they passed that information to the League. There was no reason why a hunt carrying out an activity on Trust land should not plan it in advance so that it disrupted as little as possible, avoided roads and railways and other such things. The resolution simply asked that the Trust required of the hunts what the Forestry Commission and Ministry of Defence already required of them.

The Chairman requested a show of hands and, despite overwhelming opposition in the meeting to the resolution, called for a ballot so that the views of the wider membership could be expressed. Members were asked to complete the green ballot paper headed 'Ballot paper for the Members' resolution on sporting activities' and hand it in at the end of the meeting

6. Elections to Council

Evelyn Taylor, The Secretary, announced the results of the postal ballot for the election of members of the Council in the order that the candidates appeared on the voting paper as follows:

Charles Gerald Thompson	7,903	
Valerie Humphrey	25,115	Elected
Alan Herbert Oliver	6,557	
Tim Watkinson	20,705	Elected
Kate E Dickson	25,356	Elected
Sheila Mortimer	7,987	
John M Burton	22,697	Elected
Vanessa Richards	14,024	
Dr Carole Fry	12,374	
Sir Henry Keswick	20,160	Elected
Christopher Boyle	26,567	Elected
Liz Gibney	10,283	
Janet Watson	8,853	
Laurie Magnus	23,459	Elected
Clare Broom	21,889	Elected
Sophie Andreae	22,528	Elected
Robin Page	27,792	Elected
Sharon Elizabeth Brown	8,809	
Charles Collins	24,593	Elected
Roseanne Williams	14,015	

The Chairman congratulated those who had been elected to the Council and thanked all 20 who had stood.

7. Bringing properties to life

The Chairman introduced a short film presented by Dan Snow, illustrating the Trust's approach to bringing properties to life. This was followed by a presentation from Liz Roberts, the Regional Director for the West Midlands.

The Chairman highlighted the need for the Trust to think about how it could loosen up using Croft Castle in the West Midlands, where visitors were occasionally offered sherry by room stewards from the decanters on display, as an example of where properties were already doing this,

Liz Roberts, Regional Director for the West Midlands, was expecting her sherry bill to rise. The West Midlands was looking at ways to have fun, to loosen up, under the heading of atmospheres. Atmosphere was a difficult thing to pin down – what was it that made a place special, what gave it that feel? A first step was to remove barriers, removing the ropes wherever possible and to have fun activities related to the property. Examples included a dance interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* at Coughton Court; teaching boys the

butler's secrets at Barrington or a weekend tea dance at Upton. A lot of thought was going into the presentation of Upton. This was a fabulous place with a fantastic collection of art, where the interiors were now presented as though set for a millionaire's weekend house party from the Thirties. The overall approach was to feel more relaxed, to allow visitors to sink into the big deep leather sofas, to lounge by the swimming pool, or leaf through the beautiful family albums or answer the telephones.

Many properties were adopting a similar approach. At Wightwick visitors were allowed to play snooker, and the lingering scent of cigar smoke was re-created in the Billiard Room to enhance the atmosphere. Outdoor properties, such as Clent Hills just outside Birmingham, were hosting high-tech treasure hunts, known as geocachers. Visitors at Hanbury could dress up in period costumes resembling those seen in the family portraits of Thomas and Mary Vernon. Children could cook in the kitchen at Attingham.

At Wightwick the interpretation had been helped by Birmingham's poet laureate and a traditional northern Indian dancer. A history project, set up to reach audiences in the ethnically diverse West Midlands, had uncovered an extraordinary story about two beautiful Indian princesses who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, came from the kingdom of Cooch Behar and married two of the Mander brothers at Wightwick. At Attingham, instead of just showing a polished blank table as a very beautiful piece of furniture, it had been set for a Georgian dinner by candlelight. There were two great things about that. It was a real plus for conservation because too much daylight in the room had been wrecking a very beautiful carpet, but it was also a rather cold, dull room. Now it had a fantastic atmosphere; it was great for conservation and great for the wow factor too.

The properties in the West Midlands knew that sometimes people did not want organised activities' what they wanted was space to have fun and freedom. What really mattered was that visitors got what they wanted out of their visit, and the West Midlands would promise to provide that.

8. Conclusion

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking attendees and reminded members to vote as they left the hall, with the results to be announced at 2.30pm.

9. Result of the Ballots

Resolution 3

That the Trust fully co-operates with the police to enforce the law regarding sporting activities on Trust land and publishes the dates, times and routes of such licensed activities on the Trust's website at least 14 days in advance:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstain</i>
Specified	14,279	14,769	2,123
Discretionary	0	6,566	
Total votes	14,279	21,335	2,123

Resolution not carried

