

Bittern Countryside Community Interest Company

Minutes of the Fourth Annual General Meeting held on Friday 2nd March 2012 at RSPB Leighton Moss Visitor Centre, Silverdale.

1. Present and Apologies

Present: Ann Kitchen (Chairman), Ken Kitchen, Roger Cartwright, Nancy Cartwright, Malcolm Stevens, Ann Gegg, Laura Middleton, Harry Warner, Margaret Bromley-Webb, Jean Watts, Mr & Mrs Hall, Peter Standing, Clare Dixon, Bob Hamnett, Jeanette Smith, Roger Cartwright, Roger Walton, Robin Horner, David Askew (Finance Director) and Mike Smith (Secretary).

Apologies were received from: David Farrant, Ian Henderson, Liza Henderson, Angela Horton, David Emmett, Kate Schofield, Elizabeth Richards, Val Stevens, John Webb, Sandy Felton, Rachel Dufield and Mike Warren.

2. Minutes of the last AGM and matters arising

The minutes were accepted by a show of hands as a true record. (Proposer: Roger Walton; Seconder: Bob Hamnett.)

3. Chairman's Report on Company Activities

The Chairman outlined the Company's activities during the past year. There had been some developments in nature conservation; Butterfly Conservation had taken a lease on Myers Allotment and the Landscape Trust was looking to create two small reserves. No other possible sales of land had been identified. The Cookbook was still selling. The Bittern Countryside web pages were linked to the AONB website. As part of the AONB's low carbon challenge, five Fact Sheets had been produced. A further Fact Sheet on Solar Heating and Woodchip Boilers was awaiting the introduction of the Government's Renewable Heat Incentive scheme for householders. The Solar PV Initiative had successfully equipped the first school in Storth with solar panels with the help of a grant of £7,500 from the Sustainable Development Fund. The amount of income from the feed-in tariff that the Company would receive will depend on the level of payments that the scheme will qualify for, whether the original 45p per kWh or the reduced payment of 21p. It is possible that these payments will be further cut again this year, so the Company is hoping to start another scheme before this happens. Booths supermarket has also donated £500 (payable in April).

The Chairman welcomed the Landscape Trust and other new shareholders.

At the end of the resume she indicated that the two directors to retire this year were Bob Hamnett and Roger Walton. Both wish to be considered for re-election. There were still vacancies for new directors on the Board and she would welcome any member who would like to serve in this capacity. She thanked the current directors for their contributions during the past year.

Laura Middleton asked to what extent the original objectives of the management plan had been covered by the Company. Ann explained that a number of the original objectives, for example to do with the Conservation grazing scheme and land purchase had not so far required the active input of the Company.

4. Community Interest Statement Report

5.

The Finance Director indicated that the Community Interest Statement has to be submitted to the regulator each year together with the company accounts. The report includes a general description of the Company's activities during the past year, consultation that has taken place with stakeholders, director's remuneration (in our case, none) and the transfer of any assets at other than full consideration. A copy of the submission (on a shortened form of CIC34) will be put on the website.

6. Report of the Finance Director and Presentation of Accounts

The Finance Director presented the Company accounts for the year ending 30th September 2011. He explained that the Company was not subject to audit and was therefore not required to use professional accountants. The accounts presented had been prepared in-house and had been checked by an independent examiner who was approved by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The inspection of the accounts had been carried out under the aegis of the Charity Time Bank. Therefore there was thus a considerable saving over previous years.

He commented that the Company had generated very little income from trading and that there was a series of outgoings including employees and public liability insurance premiums, website hosting and depreciation on Computer equipment used by the Company for producing CD-ROMs, this was included in the accounts for the third time and the equipment is now deemed to have only residual value (although still serviceable). Steps were also being taken to transfer the Cookbook website to within the AONB Site and the costs for web hosting would be much less in future years.

He emphasised that it was not in the Company's interest to have a loss year on year and that the aim should be towards long term sustainability. He considered that although there were losses shown in the accounts, the future was more secure than reflected by the figures. The Company had been in receipt of grants in the current financial year for the Solar PV initiative and despite heavy expenditure for this scheme, the Company is solvent. The erection of solar panels on Storth School has involved a transfer of assets to a body that is not the asset lock body of the Company. However since the transferred asset will provide a market rate of return for the company, it has been accepted as compliant with CIC regulations by the Regulator.

The Company will be receiving a regular income from the scheme which would of course be reflected in this coming year's accounts.

Laura Middleton commented that she was concerned that the current programme was different from those originally envisaged in the Business Plan.

Harry Warner asked about whether the Company would be asking members for an annual donation as envisaged in the previous minutes.

In response, the Chairman said that we had not proceeded with the £10 donation as the feedback had been too low. We would however be looking to do some fund-raising this year. We had recently made some unsuccessful applications for grant. In relation to the Business Plan, the Solar PV project was well within the Company's remit and objectives. It has a community focus and is not seen just as a means of generating income. The schools retain ownership of the panels and retain 15% of the feed-in tariff. It is supported by the Sustainable Development Fund as a rolling programme.

7. Approval of Reports and Accounts

The Accounts were approved by a show of hands. (Proposer: Roger Walton; Seconder: Peter Standing.)

8. Re-appointment/Election of Directors

AK indicated that two directors would be standing down this year. They were Roger Walton and Bob Hamnett. Both were prepared to seek re-election. Both candidates were elected by a show of hands. (Proposer: Jean Watts; Seconder: Roger Cartwright).

9. Business Plan Update

Minor changes had been made to the Business Plan and the updated Plan was available on the Web.

10. Any Other Business

Ken Kitchen proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman and directors for their work in the last year. Peter Standing congratulated the Company for its initiative with the solar panel scheme on schools partly aimed to improve awareness of the young. After a break for refreshments, AK gave an illustrated talk entitled 'Nature Reserves of our AONB – Old New and In Progress'. The meeting ended shortly after 9.00 pm.