

55th Annual General Meeting of the River Stour Trust

Wednesday 16th November 2023

Those present - in person

Trustees: P. Brewerton (Chairman of Council), S. Durham, M. Gardner, J. Lunn, J. Rogers.

Members: J. Argent, R. Brown, S. Brown, C. Burrows, A. Butcher, P. Chaplin, A. Clark. M. Cresswell, G. Gardner, C. Hitchings, D. Howlett, P. Johnson, D. Kirkman, J. Parkinson, C. Parsons, G. Simmons, R. Simmons, R. Stoneham, P. Thompson, C. Turk.

Those present - online

Trustees: R. Blay

Members: C. Daines, K. Daines, S. Miles, J. Mills

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first in person AGM since Covid although the facility for online attendance also meant members in attendance online. Everyone was informed that the meeting was being recorded.

Apologies

B. Andrews, M. Brown, T. Drawbridge, R. Drawbridge, H. Gallo, R. Hardy, L. Hoey, J. Ingram. R. Ingram, S. Perkins, J. Perkins, D. Stevenson.

2. Minutes of the last AGM held on 2nd November 2022

**PROPOSED JR, SECONDED SD 'that the minutes offer as a true account of that meeting'
CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

3. Matters arising from those Minutes

Other than those occurring later in the agenda, there were no matters arising from the Minutes.

- a) Membership Benefits - This was researched after the last AGM and requires an understanding of the finer points of law as it relates to charities and benefits to members. There is a consideration of Gift Aid status as there's a statutory requirement, under Gift Aid, for payments to be gifts. To qualify for Gift Aid, charity subscription payments must be for membership only. They must not give members personal use of the charity's facilities or services. However, there are rules within the Gift Aid legislation that allow charities to provide donors with token benefits in recognition of their gifts (within specified limits). Complete records of all the discounts received by its members must be maintained to retain Gift Aid status.

It is understood that other organisations, such as the National Trust, are able to offer additional benefits to their volunteers. To copy their model requires a differential between being a member of a charity and a volunteer who gives of their time/ expertise (who may or may not be a member). If that premise is correct (that the RST could give their volunteers privileges), the RST would need to identify those who did in fact give of their time over and above being a member.

It may be appropriate for proper legal opinion to be sought so that there wouldn't be any doubt about the efficacy of the decision.

- b) Grants & Funding - an individual to undertake fundraising is sought as existing Trustees cannot currently fulfil this role. Anyone with knowledge of a suitable person to please get in touch.

- c) John Constable - this was craned back into the water in April 2023. She has sadly not been in service because a power cut and subsequent bilge pump failure led to severe water ingress and damage. Our insurers have agreed the claim for its repair.

4. Chairman's Annual Report for 2022

PB addressed the meeting as Chair of Council and referred to the Trustees' Report within the 2022 Annual Accounts (as below).

We ran Sudbury to the Sea again, although participant numbers were still down on pre-covid levels. This was very much appreciated by the canoeing community and brought some much-needed income.

We continue to operate as an agent for the Environment Agency for the sale of river licences.

We successfully negotiated with the Dedham Mill Management Company over the lease on Dedham lock and a lease was signed in September 2022. A project team has been appointed to oversee the work of replacing the gates and piling the lock island. It is to be noted that because of the delay in obtaining the lease and the inflation since Covid there is now a significant shortfall in funds to achieve this aim.

We are continuing to seek new sources of grants and funding for our restoration projects, and also for general maintenance work.

We continued to be represented on the River Stour Users Group and the Quay Lane Trust, although neither of these bodies met face to face.

Increased canoe, kayak, paddleboard and wild swimming activity particularly but not exclusively in the Dedham area placed further restrictions on our ability to run boat trips especially at weekends. Weed growth and silting have also made life difficult for our crews.

Boats were safely brought ashore at the end of the season and put into winter storage at a new venue in Little Cornard, for Sudbury boats, and our usual storage venue for the Dedham Vale boats.

Our Stour lighter John Constable was craned ashore for essential maintenance and will be refloated in spring 2023.

We are grateful to all our volunteers for their time and efforts, whether boat crews, boat maintenance, garden maintenance, tearoom, jetty maintenance and all the other tasks that are necessary to keep the Trust running.

We are also grateful to our hardworking employees without whom the Trust would not be able to operate.

5. Treasurer's Report

There was a query regarding the Boat Operating Expenses total of £63,000 (page 13) as this seemed exceptionally high. There was uncertainty as to what this figure comprised. **ACTION:** To be followed up with our Accountant.

There was a request for better communication with volunteers regarding funds raised from the activities for which they participate. The perceived lack of transparency was not deliberate, and it was made clear that there was no insinuation of doubt or distrust regarding the Trustees management. Volunteers were simply interested in knowing how their voluntary contribution was helping the aims of the Trust. It was suggested that quarterly reports could be provided to the committees, perhaps with comparisons to the previous year. **ACTION:** Committees to request reports.

Our Annual Return was successfully submitted to Companies House, but the Charity Commission submission was delayed as a result of changes to accessing their online services. We had been reassured that the public register would show that we had filed on time.

PROPOSED M. Mandry, SECONDED J. Lunn 'that the 2022 Annual Accounts are adopted.'
CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

6. Resolution/s for Adoption - None.

7. Re-appointment of Independent Examiner for the Accounts

PROPOSED P. Brewerton, SECONDED S. Durham 'to re-appoint Burdett King Accountancy as Independent Examiner for the coming year.' CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

8. Election of Council Members

In accordance with our Articles, the following members of Council were retiring and offering themselves for re-election this year: Paul Brewerton, Jim Lunn and Stephen Durham.

J. Rogers took the Chair and suggested a single vote to cover all candidates. The vote count from those in attendance, alongside the proxy votes, meant all Trustees were re-elected.

In accordance with our Articles, the following member had been nominated and offered themselves for election: Graham Gardner.

The vote count from those in attendance, alongside the proxy votes, meant election as a Trustee was confirmed.

P. Brewerton said applications for new Trustees would be welcome should anyone like to get in touch after the AGM.

9. Open Forum

Everyone was thanked for their attendance. The Trust was grateful for the efforts and involvement of its dedicated members and volunteers.

The meeting concluded.