

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Renewable Heritage Trust held on 31 January 2015 at Howsham Mill

Present: Trustees Mel Fox (c), Dave Mann, Chris Fawdington, Val Hood, Martin Phillips, Amy Beer, John Rennel and 8 friends.

1. Apologies Paul Lister, Jen Wakefield

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last AGM held on 1 February 2014 were accepted.

3. Matters arising not covered in the agenda

None

4. Trustees' annual report

Mel Fox said she would cover the highs and lows in the year starting 1 August 2013, the start of the RHT reporting year. The building was officially opened in December 2013 and has been well-used in its first year. Craft courses have been at 80% capacity on average, though some were cancelled due to lack of interest and we have learnt from this. Courses for the first half of next year have been planned accordingly.

It has been more difficult to attract school groups to visit than expected. There have been a number of reasons for this. The old curriculum was rather prescriptive with little time for fun. There have been big changes in the curriculum and subject areas and the trust will respond to this. So far about 500 school children have visited. There will be more emphasis on consulting teachers to find out what they want and how can provide it. In response to a question about school children camping on the island, Mel said that pupils from one school had done this, though the school must accept liability and complete a risk assessment. To add to the value of school visit, Jen Wakefield our education officer, will soon complete a forest schools course.

The Christmas Craft Fair again proved popular. We welcome community groups wanting to make use of the mill. Mel would like university student volunteers to help on the island.

The mill has won two national awards from English Heritage and The Heritage Alliance and Stephen Pickering, the main contractor, won an award from the York Guild of Builders.

Volunteer guides have proved invaluable over the year though we now only have two and more are invited to join as well as other volunteers.

The hydro systems have had problems due to incompetent contractors, but with favourable river levels electricity generation has been good and there has been no flooding since February 2013. A second screw is planned; all the permissions are in place. Hopefully this can be installed during summer 2015.

5. Treasurer's Report

Chris gave an overview of the financial position of both RHT and our sister company HPC, responsible for electricity sales. In future he hopes to put the reports online so that they can be read before the AGM. It has been a stable year following the large cash flow last financial year during the phase 2 restoration. The trust is in a strong financial position with a capital asset in the building professionally valued at £350,000. This will not be depreciated unlike other assets that have been written down to zero. There is good liquidity at present with a surplus of £32,000 carried forward. Chris is setting up a sinking fund to cover repairs and replacement in the future and to fund the education officer post once HLF funding finishes at the end of December 2015.

We will be looking for funding for the second screw and the Charity Bank, with whom we have been in contact for some years, seems keen to lend. The trust needs to be confident of its financial position. A second screw would more than double electricity sales.

Chris ended by thanking John for his help in managing the accounts.

6. Wildlife on the island

Amy gave a presentation of wildlife on the island, including footage from camera traps set up during July 2014. The trust has bought four cameras and wants to expand wildlife observation and recording on the island. Paul Lister has almost finished building an observation hide at the top of the island. Amy invited ideas for achieving this from the meeting.

7. Election of trustees

Under the RHT constitution, trustees are elected for a three year term and then stand down or can be re-elected. Martin Phillips and Paul Lister were nominated by Mel and seconded by Amy and John respectively. Both were elected unanimously.

The three office holders, Mel Fox chair, Martin Phillips secretary and Chris Fawdington treasurer, were re-elected unanimously

8. Any other business

Mel read out a short summary from Jen. The courses have been a success with 80% plus uptake, positive feedback and repeat bookings. This is thanks to excellent course providers. They have been booked again for 2015 courses, with some new subjects and themes. There will also be a cinema club and some evening classes this year.

Bruce Skinner raised the point that if there were more volunteer guides the mill could be open on Saturday as well. It was agreed this was desirable but impossible at present.

In response to a question about the courses losing money, it was explained that these are subsidised by RHT, though it has been decided to increase the cost to the participant from this year.

One member of the audience said not enough people knew about the mill. This is true despite all our efforts to publicise it.

Martin said that the mill is now registered on two websites advertising buildings for hire for filming etc. So far there has been no interest.

9. Dates for the diary

Courses and events are listed on the website.

10. Date of next meeting

It was decided to retain the new cycle of reporting and the next AGM will be held on Saturday 30 January 2016 at the mill.