



**Kent**  
Wildlife Trust

**65<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the  
Members of Kent Wildlife Trust**

Company No: 00633098

Held in person at Tyland Barn, Chatham Road, Sandling ME14 3BD  
and online via Zoom Webinar

on

Saturday 15 July 2023 at 1pm.

**CEO's Report – Looking Forwards**  
**Evan Bowen-Jones**

Thank you, Charles, Rachel, thank you Chris and thank you to you all for coming along today, we really appreciate your support. I know that on a Saturday one could be beekeeping or watching the tennis, it's a big ask so we really do appreciate it. I'm going to be brief, I think Chris has done his usual fantastic job and covered half the things I would say anyway in terms of a lot of our current threats are the same threats we faced last year – I don't think the political situation has changed a huge amount and there will be a re-instigation of the defend nature campaign that you will be seeing over the next few weeks. This is because we are unfortunately in the situation where some really key pieces of legislation could be pulled very quickly by the current government so keep your eyes peeled for that.

In the meantime, however I will focus on the positives. The structure of the KWT Group is well established, we have our trading arm KWE which is increasingly taking commercial income through the KWT Group in a tax efficient manner that is returning more money to the Charity. This is part of our strategy of diversification of income which is a critical to the Charity being able to be more ambitious with dwindling amounts of traditional money available to us.

Although Wilder Carbon is very much impact-focussed it's about changing the game to enable genuine nature-based action to restore large scale habitats, lock up carbon and bring wildlife back. It's also something that will return money to the parent Charity too. It also enables us to operate in a national space where we can influence things in a way we can't just as a county Wildlife Trust.

Our internal consultancy is now firmly set up as independent with a more national remit so that it can scale. It is very much mission aligned, to enable us to work with partners who it would be difficult for the Charity to work with directly, on the basis that, for example as I've

said in other AGMs, we do have a huge amount of housing which is coming our way in Kent whether we like it or not, and that which we can't stop we need to make sure is delivered in the best possible way. Biodiversity Net Gain is a massive opportunity for us to try and make sure there is a genuine gain for wildlife on houses that are put up, so mission-aligned commercial consultancy is something we need to be doing and be doing better. Equally, we should retain the right in the Charity to object to bad planning decisions and the Group structure allows us to do that. The consultancy has been rebranded as Adonis Blue and will be playing an increasing role in making sure these things are being done properly.

As a Group, our strategy refresh is to recognise that we have been through a tough period with Covid but have been quite successful with our original strategy which was put together in 2019 when I first came into post, and now is all about doing more. Using the Group structure to have even more impact because we recognise that we are at such a critical point in time.

It's a strange July day, not very summery here, but you will have seen in the news that in southern Europe we have serious heatwave conditions. Sardinia is meant to hit 48 degrees today. The 3<sup>rd</sup> of July was the hottest day for the planet on record, which was then broken the day afterwards on 4<sup>th</sup> July. So, although we are not seeing it as much today, the change that is upon us is a fearsome one. As Chris says, in this county, 1.5 degrees does not mean 1.5 degrees, it means 3-4 degrees. The projection is that we might hit that by the end of this decade. We have to do things at pace, and we have to change the game overall, so a lot of what we're doing is recognising that we are privileged as a Trust.

There are 46 Wildlife Trusts across the country, we are one of the biggest and we have great flexibility under the Chairmanship of Chris, and I'm delighted that he has been re-elected for the next couple of years. The fantastic trustees that we have assembled (including some really senior Civil Service experience that Nick now brings to the table), means we can really try and make a difference across the broader agenda and make sure that nature is valued for its ability to support human society going forwards under what are going to be very difficult conditions. I and our team all believe that nature should be conserved anyway, but this is the way to do it. So, our mechanism in the strategy, which I hope many of you have seen, is all about defending and restoring nature, collaborating with others to do more of the same and to strengthen and grow us to be able to have a greater impact too. You can read about our operating principles at your leisure – it's on our website and will be communicated more clearly as we put out our new website. You will see this strategy through the entirety of all our communications as it becomes the fundamental framework against which everything revolves.

The really exciting bit for me here, and this has been through a great deal of scrutiny with the trustees, is that we are now committed to doubling our landholdings by 2030, working with others, farming communities and landowners in particular to make sure that 30% of Kent is genuinely managed well for nature – it's not a tokenistic political target. We will find ways to do this. And we will do that through making sure these nature-based solutions give us up to 120-year pots of money to manage a greater area, working with others across the county for nature. If we are successful in the next few years, we will have large amounts of money covering off our core costs for managing those areas. The way in which we will do

this in an efficient manner that maximises those areas for wildlife, biodiversity and bio abundance is by rolling out the wilding approach. The bison is the glamorous end of that but it's to deliberately to push the boundaries whilst we roll out the principles of wilding across different sizes of landholdings – much like the example of Nashenden which Chris gave you earlier with the pigs. We can do it at different levels, but we need to be changing the policy and advocacy landscape to enable us to do more.

Land acquisition is critical – we aim to take our current landholdings from 0.9% to 1.8% by 2030.

Keystone species - we have just secured multi-year funding for pine martens across the south of England, and we have also secured funding for red billed chough which are going out this week. This enables us to scale our impact and enables us to also push the wilding approach nationally with a group of other Wildlife Trusts and beyond, which is something you'll start to see being formalised - something like a UK wilding coalition and I hope that we will be running the secretariat for that to make sure the barriers to doing this stuff are dismantled through government.

At a lower level but trying to tackle some of the critical issues that face our wildlife as we go forward, if we're going to build these bigger landscapes they need to be connected. At the moment if you travel along the major roads in Kent there are very few crossing points for wildlife, and this is actually part of an international epidemic of fragmentation.

The brilliant thing about the bison project is not actually the bison but what it enables us to tackle. So the bison bridges (which we are still looking for money for because they are very expensive) is a way of demonstrating on the ground what it means to connect up an area. The bison are in 50h at the moment. With four bridges in place people will be able to walk across the footpaths over the top, the bison will go underneath, and we will have those bison out into 220h. The next bit is to get them across the minor road into the rest of the Blean landscape into the RSPB and Woodland Trust landholdings and eventually across the motorway into South Blean. That will be a totally unique, genuine largescale landscape project that brings in huge economic benefits to the Canterbury area which has already been rated as one of the best places to live in the UK because of this project. Our reach on this project so far is 9 billion people - it's a huge opportunity for advocacy. Hopefully, next Tuesday BBC breakfast we will be reporting live on the anniversary of this project - there is still a huge amount we can still do.

Turtle doves are another iconic species– as Chris has mentioned, there will be more work done on them over the next year and a lot of what we do should benefit birds like turtle dove and enable them to strengthen from a position where we thought they might go extinct recently. We think we can probably save them in this county.

Land acquisition-wise, massive thanks to everyone who helped us to secure Covet Wood. We signed the documents yesterday thanks to the fantastic appeal we ran with all of you. It's a really nice one to have got in the bag, it's a brilliant area and I look forward to taking some of you around the wood in due course.

And that's what this ambition gets us over time – we have a raft of keystone species, land holdings being managed for nature increasing across the county to 2030, which locks up carbon, boosts biodiversity and bio abundance, and we should be able to do the same on the sea bed working with partners like the Crown Estate which is something we will be working hard on and I should be able to talk to you about it next year. Thank you very much.