



APRS
The Association for the
Protection of Rural Scotland

Annual General Meeting

Held by Zoom video conference on Thursday 20 May 2021 at 10.30
Draft Minutes

Present: Mike Barnacle, David Batty, Jane Bower, Jim and Janet Clark, Judith Crabb, Hugh Crawford, John Esslemont, Catherine Gemmell, John Gerrard, Rebecca Hughes (*Vice-Chair*), Beryl Leatherland, Andrew McMillan, Joanna McFarlane (member and *Education Manager*) Walter Simpson (*Vice-President*), Charles Strang, John Thomson (*Chairman*), Bridget Wilcox, Brian Wood. In attendance: John Mayhew (*Director*), Nina Sobecka (*Administrator*)

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed all APRS members to the meeting. He commented that this was the second virtual APRS AGM after last year's and hoped that it would be the last. Before starting the Chairman asked members to pause briefly to remember Karol Swanson, who sadly died earlier this month while a serving Member of APRS Council. Originally from New York City, Karol was also a member of our Executive Committee from 2014 to 2020 and a highly experienced and reliable APRS planning volunteer, who gave much valuable and balanced advice over the years to many APRS members and other local residents across rural Scotland. She would be greatly missed.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Duncan Campbell, Kathleen Dalyell, Andy Dorin, Patrick Ford, Kenny Graham (*Treasurer*) and Patricia Macdonald (*President*).

3. Minutes of 2020 AGM

The Minutes were proposed by Beryl Leatherland, seconded by Jane Bower and approved.

4. Report and Financial Statements 2020

The Chairman explained that to save postage only a summary of the accounts had been issued along with the AGM notice, but the full document had been on the website for the last few weeks. The Treasurer had given his apologies for the meeting so the Chairman handed over to the Director to present the Report and Financial Statements for 2020.

The Director was pleased to report that the finances of APRS are broadly in good shape. The total income for 2020 was £204k and total expenditure £142k, resulting in a substantial surplus of £62k, so total funds increased over the year from £112k to £173k. However, 79% of our expenditure was on projects with restricted funds, so it is important also to look more closely at the status of our core unrestricted funds, which are crucial to APRS continuing to operate

effectively into the future. Fortunately, the picture here is positive too, with unrestricted income of £34k and expenditure of £29k, resulting in an increase of unrestricted funds over the year from £40k to £45k.

This welcome situation resulted from three sources:

- contributions from restricted project funds to unrestricted funds, in recognition of the Director's and Administrator's time spent on the projects and associated overheads
- two grants directly related to Covid-19: £10,000 from the Scottish Government's Coronavirus Business Support Fund via the City of Edinburgh Council; and around £2,800 from the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme; the Administrator had agreed to take furlough leave for nine weeks followed by 50% furlough leave for a further nine weeks
- continued success in core funding, specifically donations from existing funders the McMillan Trust and the Whitley Animal Protection Trust, and the first year of a new three-year funding agreement from the Craignish Trust

APRS is grateful to all of these funders, and also for the smaller amounts generously donated by members and other supporters each year. Core expenditure is kept under very tight control, consisting largely of staff salaries and rent.

Our biggest project, the Deposit Return System campaign, received £140k funding during the year from corporate donor Tomra; they asked to be anonymous in the accounts, but their funding is public knowledge and our relationship with them is described openly on the *Have You Got The Bottle?* website. Their donations funded our full-time Campaign Manager until she went on maternity leave in May then our part-time Education Manager from October, expert political and media consultancy, all the significant costs of running such a high-profile campaign and substantial contributions to unrestricted funds.

The APRS Executive Committee had accepted funding from Tomra on three conditions: 1) the campaign strategy would be agreed solely by APRS with no influence from Tomra; 2) they accepted that our campaign might not succeed; and 3) if we did succeed, we would have no influence over which machines were bought to implement the DRS; this arrangement has operated satisfactorily. This was the last donation from Tomra, but £107k remained in the DRS project budget at year end, which will enable us to keep it running for the whole of 2021 and into 2022, including continued contributions towards unrestricted funds.

Our National Parks Strategy Project, carried out jointly with the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, received the second of two payments of £10k under a two-year funding agreement concluded with an anonymous charitable trust, following a previous three-year funding agreement with the same trust. Their reason for requesting anonymity is simply that they wish to avoid their name being too widely known for fear of large numbers of speculative applications. This project also makes a contribution towards unrestricted funds. At the very end of the year the Susan Guy Trust made an unprecedentedly large donation of £20k towards our Green Belts Alliance project, enough to keep it running at its current level of operation for another two or three years, as well as making a contribution towards unrestricted funds.

We continue to fundraise actively for our three projects and for core funding. These were the fourth set of financial statements prepared by our independent examiners Whitelaw Wells, whom the Director thanked for their efficiency and helpfulness.

In response to a question from Bridget Wilcox, the Director responded that the logic behind funding from the Whitley Animal Protection Trust was that litter, particularly broken glass, was dangerous to domestic and wild animals, so the Trust supported APRS efforts to reduce litter.

Mike Barnacle asked whether APRS was holding money in the right place in relation to investments. Walter Simpson asked whether all APRS funds were held in a single bank account; the Director confirmed this. Walter Simpson suggested that as the Financial Services Compensation Scheme only protected £85,000 it would be prudent to open a second account with a separate bank and to transfer some of the funds; Mike Barnacle supported this proposal. Jane Bower warned that from her recent experience it may not be easy to open a new account. Beryl Leatherland reported that Scottish Environment LINK had recently split their funds between several accounts for the same reason. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next Executive Committee meeting in June.

The Report and Financial Statements were proposed by John Thomson, seconded by Walter Simpson and approved.

5. Presentation of 2020 Annual Review

The Director gave a brief presentation about the work of APRS in 2020. In particular he drew members' attention to the launch of our new education resources following the appointment of our Education Manager Jo McFarlane, media coverage of the National Parks campaign, engagement with preparatory work towards National Planning Framework 4, ongoing APRS Green Belts Alliance work, advocacy related to election manifestos and recent planning cases. Further details can be found in the APRS Annual Review.

Mike Barnacle praised the article on Local Development Plans in the latest newsletter and raised the potential contribution of Local Place Plans (LPPs). The Director agreed that they could be an opportunity as long as they come from communities themselves rather than from a top-down approach. Hugh Crawford queried where funding would come from for LPPs and what would happen if competing LPPs were developed. The Vice-Chair commented that LLPs in East Lothian were being funded by area partnerships. Beryl Leatherland stated that local authorities are not obliged to take LLPs into account which is worrying given the amount of work which communities could put into developing them. Hugh Crawford commented that Reporters need better training in rural and urban design. Mike Barnacle stated that LLPs need substantial resourcing, for example Perth and Kinross Council has argued that the proposed £15,000 per plan is insufficient and that £25,000 was more realistic. The working group he is on had stated that local authority planning committees should be required to take LLPs into consideration otherwise they are just a paper exercise. The Vice-Chair commented on the issue of local democracy that was so apparent in the NPF4 planning consultation and suggested that APRS should contact Architecture and Design Scotland which had been working on these issues.

Jane Bower reported that Paul Wheelhouse, ex-SNP Minister, had been supportive regarding more National Parks (NPs) and had suggested that campaigners should push for a cross-party initiative on this. She also commented that Mairi Gougeon, new Rural Affairs Secretary, may well be receptive to the idea of more NPs. The Vice-Chair reported that the successful SNP candidate for East Lothian had expressed public support for a NP for the Lammermuirs.

In response to a query from Andrew McMillan on spaceports, the Director commented that there were too many developments to get involved in each

application, so APRS had focussed on the issue that decisions on these should not be left to local authorities but should be looked at in the context of a national strategic plan.

Beryl Leatherland commented on the issue of damage to peat and habitats by the Sutherland spaceport and reported that two engine testing sites had been proposed in the Firth of Forth without considering impacts on the surrounding Special Protection Area.

6. Appointment of independent examiner

The Vice-Chair proposed that Whitelaw Wells (WW) be re-appointed as independent examiner. This was seconded by Judith Crabb and approved. A watching brief would however be kept on the payroll service provided by WW, which had been unsatisfactory at times during 2020.

7. Resolution – General Meetings

The Director explained that the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator had recently issued clear advice that charities should make changes to their governing documents to allow for virtual meetings. It was therefore proposed to add the following sentence to Article of Association 5.1: 'General meetings may be held either in person, by video conferencing or by other electronic means'.

8. Resolution – Council Meetings

For the same reason it was proposed to add the following sentence to Article of Association 11.1: 'Council meetings may be held either in person, by video conferencing or by other electronic means'.

9. Resolution – Executive Committee meetings

For the same reason it was proposed to add the following sentence to Article of Association 12.5: 'Executive Committee meetings may be held either in person, by video conferencing or by other electronic means'.

Items 7 to 9 were taken together, proposed by John Esslemont, seconded by Rebecca Hughes and approved.

10. Resolution – Membership Classes and Subscriptions

The Director reported that the Executive Committee was proposing a number of amendments to the Articles of Association, the effect of which would be to transfer responsibility for determining membership classes and subscription rates from General Meetings to the Executive Committee. The revised Articles had been on the website for the last couple of weeks with the proposed new wording shown in red. This is quite normal amongst other organisations and will allow greater flexibility as online direct debit function and membership recruitment drive are developed. Jo McFarlane highlighted the need to increase awareness of APRS and its work; it is in a good position post-Covid representing as it does the need to protect Scotland's rural landscapes for everyone to enjoy. It was therefore a good time to make membership more accessible both online and face-to-face with the upcoming launch of DRS in Scotland in 2022.

Brian Wood queried whether it was possible for the AGM to delegate the setting of membership subscriptions to the Executive Committee. The Director was confident that the proposed changes would be acceptable and reported that trustee Victoria Presly, a qualified solicitor, had checked the proposed changes and confirmed that they are satisfactory in her view. Catherine Gemmell requested that in any further review of the constitution particular consideration should be made to using more inclusive language.

This resolution was proposed by Catherine Gemmell, seconded by Judith Crabb and approved.

11. Election of Office-Bearers

The Chairman reported that President Patricia Macdonald had served one year of her first three-year term. The Chairman thanked Vice-President Walter Simpson, who had completed his first three-year term; the Executive Committee had proposed that he should be elected for a second three-year term. John Thomson continued as Chairman, having completed two years of his first three-year term. Rebecca Hughes continued as Vice-Chair, having completed two years of her first three-year term. Finally the Executive Committee had proposed that Kenny Graham, Honorary Treasurer, should continue for a further year. The elections of Walter Simpson as Vice-President and of Kenny Graham as Treasurer were proposed by Rebecca Hughes, seconded by John Thomson and approved.

12. Election of Council

The Chairman noted that, as already reported, Karol Swanson had sadly died recently whilst serving as a Member of Council, and also that Michael Gascoigne was retiring from Council due to ill health. The following 13 Members of Council wished to be re-elected: Mary Armstrong; Mike Barnacle; Camping and Caravanning Club (David Batty); Duncan Campbell; Judith Crabb; Andy Dorin; John Esslemont; Catherine Gemmell; Graham Lang; Charles Millar; Victoria Presly; Charles Strang; Bridget Wilcox. The election of these Members was proposed by Jane Bower, seconded by Beryl Leatherland and approved.

13. Election of Executive Committee.

The Chairman reported that the current Members of the Executive Committee were listed on page 8 of the Report and Financial Statements. Duncan Campbell and Catherine Gemmell had each completed their first three-year term and were both standing for re-election for a second three-year term. Victoria Presly continued as a Trustee, having completed two years of her first three-year term. Judith Crabb and John Esslemont continued as Trustees, having each completed one year of their first three-year term. The election of Duncan Campbell and Catherine Gemmell for second three-year terms was proposed by Bridget Wilcox, seconded by Mike Barnacle and approved.

14. Any Other Competent Business

Mike Barnacle commented that there was a real opportunity to push more National Parks forward given the backing of all opposition parties, particularly the Greens who had entered talks over possible co-operation with the SNP.

Bridget Wilcox suggested asking Claudia Beamish to support the National Park campaign. The Chairman agreed that ex-politicians such as Claudia and Paul Wheelhouse should be borne in mind. Catherine Gemmell proposed inviting them onto APRS Council and it was agreed that this would be considered.

The Vice-Chair wondered if APRS could advertise the superlatives of Scotland's landscapes by using some of the President's aerial photography on the website, perhaps with an audio overview. It was agreed that Patricia Macdonald would be approached about this.

Charles Strang asked how APRS was planning to celebrate its centenary in 2026. It was agreed that this would be considered in the near future.

The Chairman thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.