



APRS
The Association for the
Protection of Rural Scotland

Annual General Meeting

Held by Zoom video conference on Thursday 26 May 2022 at 10.30
Draft Minutes

Present: Mike Barnacle, David Batty, Jane Bower, Duncan Campbell, Hugh Crawford, John Esslemont, Catherine Gemmell-Simpson, Ann Glen, Julia Hume, Beryl Leatherland, Kerry Mackendrick, Andrew McMillan, Joanna McFarlane (member and *Education Manager*), Nikki Sinclair (member, *Green Belts Alliance Manager and National Parks Project Manager*) Walter Simpson (*Vice-President*), Charles Strang, John Thomson (*Chairman*), Bridget Wilcox, Brian Wood. In attendance: John Mayhew (*Director*), Nina Sobeca (*Administrator*)

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed all members to the meeting. He particularly welcomed President Patricia Macdonald, who was attending her first AGM.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Mary Armstrong, Jim Clark, Kathleen Dalyell, Andy Dorin, Patrick Ford, John Gerrard, Sue Hamilton, Ian Jarvie, Alastair Macbeth, Ann McIntosh, Charles Millar, Dennis Mollison, Isobel Nicolson, Eddie Palmer, Flora Selwyn, Rebecca Simpson (*Vice-Chair*), Peter de Vink.

2. Minutes of 2021 AGM

The Minutes were proposed by Jane Bower, seconded by Ann Glen and approved subject to the following amendment by Duncan Campbell:

- Section 5, para 2: All references to Local Place Plans should read *LPPs* and not *LLPs*

3. Report and Financial Statements 2021

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 previous few weeks. He then handed over to the Treasurer to present the accounts for last year. The Treasurer was pleased to report that the finances of APRS are broadly in good shape. The total APRS income for 2021 was £214k and total expenditure £141k, resulting in a substantial surplus of £73k. This had resulted in a total increase in funds over the year from £173k to £246k. However 72% of expenditure was on projects with restricted funds, so it is important also to look more closely at the status of the 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 £44k and expenditure of £40k, resulting in a small surplus of £4k. Also £3k which had been temporarily designated to the Green Belts Alliance project had been transferred back into unrestricted funds.

Unrestricted funds increased over the year from £45k to £52k. This welcome situation resulted from three sources:

- 1) 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
- 2) A substantial grant of £20,000 from the People's Postcode Trust to unrestricted funds
- 3) Continued success in core funding, specifically donations from existing funders the McMillan Trust and the Whitley Animal Protection Trust, and the second year of a three-year funding agreement from the Craignish Trust

The Treasurer expressed gratitude 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. The biggest project for APRS continues to be the Deposit Return System campaign, which received £140k funding during the year from corporate donor Tomra; they ask 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 fund our part-time Education and Community Manager, expert political and media consultancy, all the significant costs of running such a high-profile campaign and substantial contributions to unrestricted funds.

The Executive Committee accepted funding from Tomra on three conditions: 1) the campaign strategy would be agreed solely by APRS with no influence from Tomra 2) they accept that we might not succeed (although in the event we did) 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.

£158k remained in the DRS project budget at the end of 2021, which together with further funding promised towards the end of 2022 will enable us to keep the project running until at least the end of 2023, including funding the part-time Campaign Manager whom APRS is about to recruit, and making continued contributions towards unrestricted funds.

The National Parks Strategy Project, carried out jointly with the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, received the first of three payments of £10k under a three-year funding agreement concluded with an anonymous charitable trust, following five previous years of funding from the same trust; again there is nothing suspicious about this arrangement, they simply 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.

The Treasurer further reported that, although APRS only actually received the first £10k of this funding during 2021, our independent examiners informed us that it was correct practice to show the full £30k in the 2021 accounts, given that the trust concerned has made a firm commitment to three years of funding.

The Green Belts Alliance project did not receive any funding during 2021, but was able to run satisfactorily throughout the year following the substantial funding from the Susan Guy Trust received at the end of 2020, as well as making a contribution towards unrestricted funds.

These are the fifth set of financial statements prepared by our independent examiners Whitelaw Wells, whom the Treasurer thanked for their efficiency and helpfulness in doing so.

Mike Barnacle asked if the cost of the Edinburgh office lease was quite high, and whether APRS might therefore consider relocating, or whether there is advantage to being based in the capital. The Director replied that there were significant benefits to the current office, due to its proximity to the station and Parliament. The lease costs around £5,000 per annum – it was signed in 2019 and runs till 2024, when he feels might be a good time to carry out a review. The Treasurer commented that the current cost was quite reasonable for central Edinburgh in his opinion. The Chairman also felt there were considerable benefits from sharing the office with Scottish Environment LINK in the sense of wider discussions relevant to the APRS remit. Walter Simpson agreed that the office was in an ideal location and not expensive. As the lease runs until 2024 there will be a new management team by then and the office lease should be a decision for them at that time.

The Report and Financial Statements were proposed by the Treasurer, seconded by Walter Simpson and approved.

4. Presentation of 2021 Annual Review

The Director gave a brief presentation about the work of APRS in 2021. In particular he drew members' attention to the campaign victory following the announcement of the designation of at least one new National Park by the end of the parliamentary session. The joint campaign with the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) had been a long one so it was particularly pleasing to announce its success. APRS and SCNP remained fully engaged and pro-active regarding the next steps in the process.

The main focus of APRS efforts in relation to Green Belts recently had been contributing to the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which will govern planning in Scotland until 2045. APRS has been campaigning for stronger protection for Green Belts under this draft legislation and this could be seen as another victory given that stronger wording has been included in the draft NPF4. However, we must continue to campaign for this to remain in NPF4 until its approval by Parliament.

In relation to the *Have You Got The Bottle?* campaign, APRS is keeping up the pressure for Scotland's Deposit Return System (DRS) to be rolled out as planned. To this end it held a campaign stunt in front of the parliament in July 2021 which was well covered in the media. Unfortunately however despite considerable efforts, APRS had been unsuccessful in preventing a further delay to the introduction of DRS, which is now scheduled for August 2023. We must therefore keep up the pressure and plan to employ a Campaign Manager to help with this work.

As part of the campaign Jo McFarlane has been heavily engaged on education and community work in the run up to the launch of DRS, and could be seen at various public events and school visits round the country, including a stall at Dynamic Earth which had been part of the COP26 line-up.

The website had undergone substantial redevelopment, and we are very active on social media, largely thanks to Jo McFarlane.

On the eve of COP26 APRS issued a briefing on the climate emergency and the role of Scotland's rural landscapes, which received good feedback from at least three Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Finally the Director gave an 'almost' farewell, as he retires at the end of this year. The Director commented that it had been an amazing journey working for APRS and one which he had thoroughly enjoyed.

Mike Barnacle congratulated the Director for his impressive 14 years at APRS.

Kerry Mackendrick asked whether Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has ever formally asked to be upgraded to a National Park? The Director said he was not aware of this but said that it is not too late. There is a current rapid consultation, then there will be a longer one to decide criteria. After that there will be an opportunity for nominations. What hasn't been decided yet however is who can bid and what the process will be, so there is time for any part of Scotland to make its case. Kerry felt it unlikely that Clyde Muirshiel will make a case, but he wondered any extra protection could be given to Regional Parks in the National Park legislation. The Director responded that in 2021 the Scottish Green Party had issued a report 'More and better National and Regional Parks' in which they committed themselves to improving the current situation. The Chairman urged everyone to make their points during the ongoing government consultations.

Andy Dorin commented that there is a lack of a strategic approach to the role of Regional and National Parks and the challenges faced during the covid pandemic. Everything from wildfires to dirty camping to landscape protection management has been left unaddressed at the national level. Neither the Scottish Government nor NatureScot has taken a strategic look at the issues.

The Chairman agreed with this; the pandemic has highlighted so many issues of countryside management which have largely been neglected due to mergers and financial constraints. NatureScot has had its resources reduced, which seems unfortunate in this context.

Kerry Mackendrick believes that there is an opportunity to link Regional and National Parks with the importance of sport, such as the recent rowing regatta at Castle Semple, which had been a large sporting event with 68 races which demonstrated the importance of Regional Parks.

Members congratulated APRS on a successful 2021.

5. Appointment of independent examiner

Catherine Gemmell-Simpson proposed that Whitelaw Wells be re-appointed as independent examiner. This was seconded by John Esslemont and approved.

6. Election of Office-Bearers

The Chairman reported that President Patricia Macdonald had served two years of her first three-year term. The Chairman thanked Vice-President Walter Simpson, who had completed one year of his second three-year term. John Thomson had completed his first three-year term as Chairman and is willing to stand for a second three-year term. Rebecca Simpson had completed her first three-year term as Vice-Chair and is willing to stand again for a second three-year term. Finally the Executive Committee proposed that Kenny Graham, Honorary Treasurer, should continue for a further year. The elections of John Thomson as Chairman, Rebecca Simpson as Vice-Chair and Kenny Graham as Treasurer were proposed by Walter Simpson, seconded by Duncan Campbell and approved.

7. Election of Council

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-Simpson; Graham Lang; Charles Millar; Victoria Presly; Charles Strang; Bridget Wilcox. For information, the Chairman commented that the maximum number of individual Members of Council is 30, so there are still several potential vacancies. The

election of these Members was proposed by Beryl Leatherland, seconded by Jane Bower and approved.

8. Election of Executive Committee

The Chairman reported that the current Members of the Executive Committee are listed on page 9 of the Report and Financial Statements. Judith Crabb and John Esslemont continue as Trustees, as they have each completed two years of their first three-year term. Duncan Campbell and Catherine Gemmell continue as Trustees, as they have each completed one year of their second three-year term. Victoria Presly had completed her first three-year term and was standing for election for a second three-year term. Andy Dorin was standing for election for a first three-year term. The election of Victoria Presly for a second three-year term and of Andy Dorin for a first three-year term was proposed by Bridget Wilcox, seconded by Charles Strang and approved.

9. Any Other Competent Business

Jane Bower raised the issue of rural housing, referring to a joint letter from the National Farmers Union Scotland, the Scottish Association of Landlords and Scottish Land and Estates to the Deputy First Minister. She had forwarded this letter to the Director and Chairman and wondered if APRS was planning to address this issue. The letter in question deals with the current Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill which proposes to make permanent the current greater protection for housing tenants facing eviction which was introduced as an emergency measure during the pandemic. The three organisations which signed the letter oppose this measure for two reasons: they claim that it will result in landlords selling formerly tenanted property and thereby decrease the availability of rented housing; and because it could reduce the value of their members' property. Jane feels this will have a drastic effect on the availability of rural housing for renters.

The Director said he did not feel able to comment in any detail at present, having not had sufficient time to investigate it, but offered to raise it for discussion at the next Executive Committee meeting as a starting point. APRS has not been active hitherto on rural housing policy, yet this could fall within its remit, given its broad statutory objects.

Mike Barnacle commented that in his experience in Kinross-shire – where Perth and Kinross Council has a policy that a percentage of housing should be affordable – developers get round this by negotiating a commuted sum with the planners to avoid providing social housing. This money goes into a central pot and affordable housing doesn't get built in rural villages. So affordable housing policy is not being delivered. The Council had also set up an Area Committee for Kinross-shire, which had advocated a new Regional Park for the Ochil Hills and an extension of the Fife Regional Park to include Loch Leven. He believes this has considerable public support in Kinross-shire. The committee wrote to NatureScot about this, but its reply stated that any further work on Regional Parks and management of local landscapes depended on the outcome of the next six-month comprehensive spending review.

Kerry Mackendrick commented that the restoration of derelict rural houses should be encouraged and that this should form part of the current discussions around NPF4. The Director agreed with this view.

The Chairman reported that Council Member Mary Armstrong had phoned him to raise an issue at the AGM, namely her concern about the amount of land that is now being bought for commercial afforestation, very often with the benefit of

carbon credits. She believes the funding regime for forestry should be reviewed. The Chairman believed that this might be an area which APRS would need to address more in future.

Before formally closing the business of the AGM, the Chairman gave formal thanks to the Director for all of his efforts over the last 14 years. It is very hard to imagine APRS without John – he has come to embody all that APRS stands for in terms of knowledge, broad-mindedness of approach, good sense and commitment to the cause. There were times in the past when the very existence of APRS had hung by a thread and yet it did survive. APRS has come a huge distance during John's tenure as Director. This has been demonstrated by the fact that in all three key APRS campaigns of the last five years, it has achieved a considerable degree of success; on that basis we could argue that we are the most successful environmental organisation in Scotland relative to our size! Moreover John's previous work with the National Trust for Scotland and his period as Chair of Scottish Environment Link had bestowed upon APRS a respected place within the wider NGO firmament. John has also built a happy and talented team of staff which has been key to the success of APRS. He has also managed to keep happy a disparate and demanding set of Trustees and Council Members. He will be a hard act to follow. Members collectively thanked John immensely for his contribution to APRS.

The Chairman closed the meeting and handed over to the President, Patricia Macdonald, who gave an illustrated presentation on rural landscape issues in Scotland, expanding on her article in the spring newsletter.