

BLACKBURN & DISTRICT BIRD CLUB

Minutes of the twenty-fifth Annual General Meeting held on Monday 2nd November 2015 at St. Silas's Church Hall, Blackburn.

The Chairman welcomed the members present to the meeting.

1) **The minutes** of the last Annual General Meeting were agreed.

2) **The Chairman's Report.**

Indoor meetings. The Chairman congratulated Brian Taylor for producing an excellent programme of speakers for our indoor meetings and at the same time striving to keep the costs down. The talks were always enjoyable and appreciated by the membership.

Field Meetings. The Chairman thanked Anne Wilkinson, John Collins and Jonathon Fry for continuing to plan and organize an interesting program of walks, and those members who attended.

Bird Report. The Chairman said that Jonathan Fry was to be congratulated on his second Bird Report, which was even better than his first. It was obvious that a great deal of work had been put into it and the Club greatly appreciated his efforts.

Garden Bird Watch. The Chairman thanked Jonathan Fry for coordinating the Garden Bird Watch and he was pleased that more members had taken part this year. The next watch would take place on 30th and 31st January 2016.

Wetland Survey. The Chairman thanked Tim and Janet Davie for contributing their survey results for inclusion in the Bird Report.

Raffle. The Chairman thanked Kath Entwistle who organized the raffle and all those members who contributed. It was a valuable source of income and something to look forward to at the end of each meeting.

Book and DVD Library. The Chairman thanked John Collins who ran this combined service and said that additional travel bird guides had been purchased in view of the continuing interest from members.

Refreshments. The Chairman thanked Pauline and Colin Hey for looking after refreshments, and all the helpers without whom we could not provide the service.

Web Site. The Chairman thanked Anne and Keith Wilkinson for running the web site.

3) **Membership Report.** Anne Wilkinson the Membership Secretary said that last year we had gained four new members but lost eight giving a total of 86 . She said the Committee was very conscious of the continuing downward trend and the urgent need to recruit new members, especially younger people. A lot of work had been taking place behind the scenes and she believed we were making progress. Firstly, Jonathan Fry had been doing some sterling work on our Facebook page to raise the Club's profile and to attract potential members. She said she was pleased to announce that we had just signed up our first new member recruited via Facebook which proved the power of social media. But we needed more of our membership to join Facebook and to share our page with their friends; that way our profile would be spread to a wider and wider audience. She urged the meeting to join in the campaign– Facebook was not difficult at all and any young member of the family would set it up in no time. Secondly she said that Dave Hilliard had come up with the idea of a Club leaflet which had now been produced and printed at little cost to the Club. The leaflet was designed to publicize the Club and to attract potential new members. It would be distributed to suitable venues and all members would be asked to take a few to pass on to friends and family who might be interested. Anne appealed to all members to help the recruitment drive in any way they could because the stark reality was that without new people the Club would wither and die.

4) **Treasurers Report.** The Chairman had temporarily taken over the Club accounts following the loss of

Eddie Hart and the lack of a replacement coming forward. It had been very difficult to take over mid term with no handover, but the accounts had been balanced and signed off. Income was down because it had not been possible to access the computer codes for claiming Gift Aid and it had been forfeited. Expenditure was up on last year due to the resurrection of the Bird Report, the purchase of more guide books and increased postage. There were no questions about the account and balance sheet which had been distributed to all members present.

5) Appointment of Officers and Committee. Dave Hilliard was nominated as Vice Chairman and elected and Pam Wignall was nominated as Membership Secretary and elected. All other Officers and Committee members were reappointed.

6) Appointment of Auditor. David Stephenson was appointed Auditor and thanked for his assistance in preparing the accounts.

7) Any Other Business.

The Chairman said that he had already explained in his letter to all members in late August that the Club had run into serious difficulties. The main one being the loss of three important Officers of the Committee and the lack of volunteers to replace them. Other problems were the increasing scrutiny from the Charity Commission and our difficulties in recruiting new members. The Committee had spent a lot of time trying to address these issues and as Anne had already explained a lot of work was going into a major recruitment drive behind the scenes. This still left the matter of the Committee and the Charity Commission.

The Chairman said he was pleased to see tonight that we had one volunteer, Pam Wignall, elected to take on the Membership Secretary job, and she was already shadowing Anne ready to take over fully next year. In addition Dave Hilliard who was already on the Committee was elected Vice-Chairman, which would be a big help to the Chairman and an opportunity for him to ready himself for maybe taking over in the future. He thanked both Pam and David for coming forward. But he went on to say that unfortunately the Club still had no-one for Treasurer despite numerous appeals. The Chairman was willing to look after the books this year and he said he was making one last plea for someone to come forward to shadow him and eventually take over. He said he was also proposing to make the job a whole lot easier, which brought him to the question of the Charity Commission.

The Chairman said that to be a charity, an organization must only have charitable purposes for the public benefit and those benefits must be identifiable. By 2017 all Charities must produce accounts detailing all their charitable fundraising and activities. In the early days, this club could have conformed with this because garden parties and car boot sales etc were held to raise money and big donations were made to places such as Brockholes and local animal rescue centres. But the truth was that we had not done any charitable work for a long long time and there did not seem to be an appetite amongst members to do so. We were happy as a club to exist purely to enjoy indoor meetings, go out bird watching and socialize with like-minded people. As such we really should not now be entitled to claim back taxpayers money in the form of Gift Aid.

The Chairman said that after deliberation of all the facts the Committee had decided to recommend by a majority of 8-1 that we should de-register as a charity now and avoid Charity Commission scrutiny in 2 years time. The added advantage would be that the Treasurer job would be far less onerous and someone might now come forward to volunteer. He added that the Club had enough funds to cushion it against the loss for several years.

One member, Janine Monaghan asked if the Club could reapply for charitable status in the future if circumstances allowed but the Chairman confirmed that it could not. A vote was taken and the membership present agreed the proposal by 28 votes with 2 against.