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| **Minutes of the Annual Meeting and Social Evening**  **Thursday 18 January 2024**  **Great North Museum: Hancock** |  |

There were 82 members in attendance.

1. **Welcome by Chair, Gordon Port**

NHSN Chair, Gordon Port (GP) welcomed everybody to the meeting. GP introduced the formal business of the meeting, which would then be followed by presentations.

1. **Consideration of the financial statements and annual report for the period 1st August 2022- 31st July 2023**

GP reminded members that a summary of the financial statements was included in the Annual Review sent to members before Xmas. The full financial statements and annual report had been made available on the NHSN website and on request from the NHSN office. GP summarised the Chair’s review as set out in the Annual Report. GP noted that we expect to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting in mid-2024 to approve the transfer of NHSN from a Charity to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Brian Kram, Hon Treasurer (BK) outlined the financial statements and summarised accounts as set out on the NHSN website.

During the year subscription income (including Gift Aid) increased from £93K to £113K. Grant income for the year was £63K, a reduction from £110K of the previous year. Investment income showed a decrease to £13K from £16K the previous year. This reflected the reduced levels of investments.

Total expenditure exceeded that of the previous year, as per planned budget. The main reasons were increased salary costs associated with the delivery of our Organisational Plan. Consequently, the operating deficit for 2022/23 was £98K compared to a deficit in 2021/22 of £50K. Cash at bank and in hand rose from £90K to £178K. This was mostly achieved by the planned sale of shares from our portfolio, increasing free reserves from £64K to £211K, to comply with our policy on reserves.

£200k was withdrawn from our Share Portfolio and invested in the delivery of the NHSN plan, *Action for North East Nature* and also to increase the level of free reserves. The Share Portfolio was also impacted by a loss of £24K. As a result, our investment valuation decreased from £634K to £418K. As a result of the trading deficit and the realised/unrealised losses on investments, total funds carried forward at the end of the year decreased from £970K to £848K

The approval of the financial statements and annual report was proposed by GP and seconded by Annie Tindley. The financial statements and annual report were unanimously approved. A member asked if NHSN were happy with the reserves of £900k which seemed High. GP responded that NHSN strategy is to invest the reserves in line with the organisational plan.

GP thanked BK for all his help and time with financial work.

1. **Elections**

GP outlined that members of Council, the trustees of NHSN, normally serve three years before then being entitled to stand for re-election. A new trustee, Lisa Gill was proposed, seconded by Rinke Vinkenoog.

The following two trustees were standing for re-election: Sammy Mason and Rob Carr. GP proposed the re-election of Sammy Mason, seconded by Louise Hislop and Rob Carr, seconded by Michael Turner. The meeting unanimously approved.

This year four trustees were standing down: Chris Redfern, Michael Turner, Brian Kram and Alexandra Healey. These trustees have given a total of 59 years support!

We owe them all an enormous debt of gratitude for their service in their many different ways on Council. Our thanks to them was formally recorded and gifts presented.

When recruiting new trustees, we look for people who support the charity's cause, who have specific expertise or skills useful for the governance of NHSN, that are under-represented among existing trustees. We conduct annual assessment of our trustee’s skills.

For 2024, applications are encouraged from candidates with:

* Legal expertise
* Financial management and accounting
* Marketing and communications

The NHSN welcomes applications from any eligible member. NHSN is committed to equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices and positively encourages applications from every sector of the community. In line with good practice, we are trying to address the age and gender balance of the board and lack of ethnic diversity.

1. **Election of Independent Examiners Azets (formerly Tait Walker?**

GP proposed that Azets to be re-elected as Independent Financial Examiners and Brian Kram seconded. The meeting unanimously approved

1. **Celebrating achievements of 2023 and a look ahead to 2024**

Clare Freeman, Director, reiterated GP’s thanks to the staff and volunteer teams who have delivered an exceptional amount of positive work across the charity.

Clare outlined some key achievements from 2023, including the increase in engaging with more and a wider range of people, as outlined in the annual review leaflet members received in December. 2023 saw the highest level of investment NHSN has made in projects. Last year our highest level of grant income ever secured £288,912. In particular two NLHF grants – spread over two and three years

Charlotte Rankin, Invertebrate Group Co-ordinator highlighted the results of the three regional citizen science projects.

Ray Kidd, GNR Volunteer gave an update of GNR wildlife sightings and work on the reserve.

Amber Tatman Nature Ranger and Aimee Shovlar, Student Naturalist outlined NHSN engagement with young people including the Plan A for North East Nature project

Annie Tindley, Vice-Chair outlined collaborations and partnerships with organisations throughout the NE and thanked all the funders who supported NHSN.

Julie Ross, Senior Nature Ranger looked ahead to 2024, highlighting the work of the Gosforth’s Wild Web project and the centenary of GNR.

Clare shared the work made possible by a kind donation from Tony Tynan’s family, introduced links with the Ouse Burn Way work, and plans for NHSN for 2024, including development of citizen science projects to widen engagement, further work at GNR and new partnerships.

Clare thanked members again for all their support, looking forward to another exciting year ahead thanks to such an impressive collective effort.

1. **Questions and Matters from Members**

Richard Young asked if NHSN was aware of the closure of New Networks for Nature and had any ideas to support. CF confirmed that NHSN was aware of this unfortunate closure but as a national initiative this would be beyond the remit of NHSN to organise on a national scale. The social and cultural aspects of natural history in the North East are celebrated in events and projects such as Nature’s Cure in Times of Need: New Voices for North East Nature.

1. **Close of meeting**

GP thanked participants, members, volunteers and staff for all their support.