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| **Minutes of the Annual Meeting & Social Evening**  **Thursday 23 January 2025**  **Great North Museum: Hancock** |  |

There were 68 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 2023- 31st July 2024**

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.

Irena Peel (IP), Finance Trustee outlined the financial statements and summarised accounts as set out on the NHSN website.

Overall income for the year to 31st July 2024 was £293k, £24k (9%) higher than the previous year.

Breaking down the total income compared to previous year, donations and legacies were £20k higher, charitable activities £3k higher  (this includes courses, publications, Gosforth Nature Reserve etc), and investment income was £1k higher, mainly due to interest receivable.

Total expenditure at £444k was £78k higher than last year, the main reasons being:-

* Gosforth Nature Reserve (GNR) - decking for the new tern platform
* Partnerships and consultancy - professional fees associated with the move to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) from unincorporated charity
* Staff costs - cost of living increase plus 2 new fulltime funded posts from Aug 23 for Gosforth Wild Web

Gain on investment this year of £29k, compared to the £24k loss in the previous year

Overall, the increase in sales, and gain on investments, were offset by the increased expenditure to give a deficit of £122k (same as last year)

Cash position was £175k , slightly lower than £178 k at 31July 23

Free reserves (accessible reserves for the charity) are now £164k, which equates to about 6 months of unrestricted expenditure.  This is now in line with the charity's reserves policy based on current spend levels.

We withdrew £197k investments and invested that in delivery of the NHSN plan Action for NE Nature.  Investment valuation decreased from £418k on 1/8/23 to £371k at 31/7/24

As a result of the trading deficit, and gain on investments, funds carried forward were reduced from £848k at the start of the year to £726k.

The approval of the financial statements and annual report was proposed by Gordon Port and seconded by Annie Tindley. The financial statements and annual report were unanimously approved.

GP thanked IP for all her help and time with financial work.

1. **Elections**

Four trustees were co-opted to the Board last year: Irena Peel, Yulia Dzenkovska, Neil Emery, and Andrew Sinclair. GP proposed that they were elected in block if members did not object to this approach. No objections. Gordon Port proposed, and member Trevor Clarke seconded. These four trustees are appointed to the Board.

This year three trustees were standing down: Jonathan Hewitt, Brian Kram and Rob Carr. Jonathan has assisted enormously with the work for NHSN to become a CIO, Brian with all his financial support and Rob with help with signposting fundraising, contacts and water related issues at GNR.

We owe them all an enormous debt of gratitude for their service in their many different ways on the Board of Trustees and formal thanks were noted.

1. **Election of Independent Examiners Azets**

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

1. **Celebrating achievements of 2024 and a look ahead to 2025**

James Common, Senior Naturalist highlighted thanks to members support, and volunteer and staff teams who delivered an exceptional amount of positive work across the charity in 2024, NHSN’s 195th year!

James Common highlighted the results of the three regional citizen science projects and work at Gosforth Nature Reserve (GNR).

Julian Thomas, GNR Volunteer Ranger gave an update of GNR educational activities.

Hollie Muir and Emily Anderson, Assistant Naturalists celebrated Gosforth’s Wild Web work.

Amelia Jenkins and Lekshmi, Student Naturalists outlined NHSN engagement with young people including the first NHSN Field Skills Programme.

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

Clare Freeman, Director looked ahead to 2025, highlighting the work of the Newcastle’s Nature Network project, nurturing young naturalists thanks to donors support and the refresh of the organisational plan. Ellie Davison, Urban Naturalist supported by the Reece Foundation outlined work to progress the Ouse Burn Way vision and opportunities to get involved

Clare requested any loose change to be donated for nature activity bags to fund bags for 10 children. A thank you to all members who kindly donated, to help more local children experience nature.

1. **Questions and Matters from Members**

GP welcomed questions from members:

* Was membership increasing? Anna Ward, Finance and Office Manager confirmed that membership was on a steady increase, but expected slowing with cost of living crisis
* A young naturalist member asked about a black ladybird with red spots, GP confirmed he could chat after the formal meeting, always good to chat about bugs
* Member shared their memories of the GNR lake being much larger and were there any plans to increase the size of the lake. GP confirmed that the diversity of habitat of open habitat, reedbed and scrub would be maintained.
* Member asked if the land around GNR is protected. GP confirmed that it was not protected, hence NHSN’s active involvement in supporting the Ouse Burn Way vision and other collaborative initiatives.

1. **Close of meeting**

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