

DEVON RURAL SKILLS TRUST

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at The Dolphin, Bovey Tracey on Wednesday 27th June 2018 at 7.30pm.

Present:

Jonathan and Frances Ansell, Richard and Beth Finnemore, Dave Dingle, Bob Tildesley, George Pidgeon, Richard Hooker, Nick Dawe, Mitchell Fawcett, Brigitte and Gavin Graham, Chris Stanton, Di Smurthwaite, Rachael Banyard, Jeremy Weiss, Laura Tunstall, John Barber, Frank and Lyn Wells, Chris Baker, Ross Gray, Mike Pearey, Tim Radja, Justin Clifford, Don Gaskins.

Apologies: Mick Godfrey, Alan Cooper and Bruce Baker

1. Minutes from Last Year's AGM

Minutes from last year's meeting were accepted by the membership and will be archived.

2. Chairman's Report

It has been a good year for the Trust with almost entirely fully booked courses. At last year's meeting you will recall the Committee were concerned over course attendance. We believe this upturn is largely down to the course booking system having moved online. It seems attendees like to book and pay online, and it also makes the administration easier for Jeremy to manage. It was very sad that we had to cancel the 2017 Hedging Competition but it was the correct decision based on the effect of Storm Brian on the Saturday. The training scheme continues with selected trainees. We have complied with GDPR (more detail later), have updated the publicity material and have discussed how to improve the membership administration for Nick.

3. Finance - Dave Dingle

Dave Dingle presented the written statement of annual accounts; these were accepted by the membership and signed off by the Chairman. Chris Bond has been removed from the list of trustees due to family commitments. Dave advised he dealt with the banks money laundering protection requirements which proved rather long winded with the on-line account being frozen for several weeks while HSBC decided if we were likely to money launder or not. All is now resolved. The years value for course fees and membership subscriptions are up, whilst the expenditure on trainees is down, due to only having one trainee. The landowner donations were down but that was largely due to the hedging competition being cancelled, losing roughly £700. DRST remains in a financially stable position.

Income: £9376

Expenditure: £7820

Surplus (Deficit): £1556

Total funds brought forward: £52,938

Total funds carried forward were £54,494

4. Practitioners Report - Don Gaskins

Practitioners have been kept fairly busy over the past twelve months with a regular supply of work particularly on the stone walling front. The prolonged wet period over the winter caused disruption to both walling and hedging jobs and Storm Brian meant we had to cancel our Hedging Competition for the first time ever. It has been rearranged for the 13th of October at the same venue – East Fingle Farm Drewsteignton. Let's hope we have a dry day. Practitioners have been active on training days and fortunately we have done quite well with these despite the weather and a lot has been achieved. Thanks to all the effort put in on courses and the training scheme over the years we now have a good pool of practitioners to recommend when we get requests for people to carry out rural skills work. Unfortunately we seem to have lost Maxine – at least for the time being as she shows no sign of coming back from France. Former Trainees Martin Stallard and Jeremy Weiss are involved with the Dartmoor Hill Farm Training Scheme and Martin has recently instructed on a dry stone walling course in Portugal and qualified as a Dry Stone Walling Association instructor. Laura and Chris are also now regular instructors on our own courses which bodes well for the future

We were lucky to have the National Hedgelaying Competition in the South West again this year – albeit at Stourhead in Wiltshire. Devon is still well represented on the NHLS Committee with Roger Parris as Chief Steward, his daughter Lynda as Newsletter Editor and Richard Hooker looking after the website. Mandy and Russell Woodham from Dorset and Clive Bethell from Somerset are also members. The Blackdown Hills Competition was delayed due to bad weather but was finally held at the beginning of April and went off very well with 86 competitors taking part.

The Trust is well represented on the Devon Hedge Group which meets three times a year. Rob Wolton is the chairman and Martin Turner, George Pidgeon and myself are members. There has been a disappointing entry in the Group's Hedging Competition this year despite the fact that it is the most lucrative competition in terms of prize money. Judging for the event is due to take place on the 5th of July. Some of us attended a meeting in North Devon recently where new earth banks are being created to try and reduce flooding in Braunton. Ross Dickenson also laid on a day at his farm in West Dorset to explain the way in which he manages his hedges by coppicing on a 25 year rotation. It has been decided not to have a Devon Hedge Week this year but to try and organise hedge events throughout the year.

Despite the increasing interest in using hedges as a source of woodfuel which could mean more coppicing and possibly hedgelaying work and changes to the way in which our hedges are managed there is increasing concern about potential pollution from the use of woodburning stoves and moves to ban their use in London.

Once again, we have had good contact throughout the year with BHHA, DWT, BSW, NT, Steiner School and other like-minded organisation which is to the mutual benefit of all of us.

Finally I would like to thank Lesley, Nick and Jan for their help in producing and distributing Skills and encourage people to let us have articles for inclusion. The Autumn edition will be the 60th one which Lesley has set up for me as she has been doing the job for 15 years. Many thanks Lesley.

5. Membership - Nick Dawe

The Trust currently has 148 members, it had 195 at its peak, but we always lose a few some around renewal time. The membership total is usually around 150. The trend would suggest a loss of around 50 members a year.

It has been suggested that the membership subscription should move online as the course bookings have, that first time course attendees would then be able to join as they book their first course. This would make it easier join and to automatically renew membership each year.

It was put to the membership that the Trust should remodel the fee subscription, it was agreed that we would. It was suggested that compulsory membership for course booking might be an idea, but the Committee will discuss this issue at the next meeting.

6. Training Scheme - Laura Tunstall

The Trust currently has one trainee, Justin Clifford who have been completing his training days in good time and diligently attending Saturday courses. Mitchell Fawcett will not continue the scheme due to family commitments. Laura has received a few e mails from people who may be interested but there hasn't been any to follow through and join over the past year. The Committee have discussed the issue of the training programme and are happy that it is better to run with fewer numbers each year and only offer a place to somebody who is likely to successfully complete training and make use of their new skills in their future employment.

7. Courses - Jeremy Weiss

2017/18 has seen a wide range of courses delivered predominantly on hedges and walls. The courses have all been fully booked bar one (cobblestoning) and we generally have a reserve list for each one. The Chairman asked that the membership thanked Richard Hooker and Jeremy Weiss in getting the booking system online. Jeremy believes this system is not only easier for booking but also easier for him as bookings officer to deal with.

8. Publicity - Chris Baker and Brigitte Graham

As the courses have been fully booked, not so much publicity has been required. Chris advised he has written a couple of articles that have appeared in the Landsman, with more to come including one by Justin about the training scheme. He will continue to look for other opportunities to spread the DRST word in other periodicals and media opportunities. The Trust has attended several shows including the recent one at Buckfast Abbey where DRST had the largest display area of all attending organisations. The Committee feel that due to social media it is difficult to gauge the value of show attendance with respect to course booking and income generation.

Brigitte gave a short update on the 2017/18 Summer Show activity. She advised the loyal band of demonstrators have turned out for the all the regular shows that DRST has a stand at. It is hard work, doing all the preparations at least two days in advance- from ensuring the display stock is in a fit state, loading it into vehicles to making sure you have enough provisions to last the day. Brigitte was not able to attend the Royal Cornwall and Honiton shows, but from the reports back from the other members who manned the stall, she understood that "wet" was an understatement! The display team are in need of some new "younger" blood, so any new volunteers please contact Brigitte. She also

advised that since the last AGM she has been trying to source some new display boards without joy. It seems that there are none commercially available which are light weight but robust enough to withstand the elements required of an outdoor display.

The Chairman raised with the members the issue of whether to continue attending shows. He advised that DRST gets little financial return, but attendance does fit in with the education ethos of teaching the general public about rural skills. He recommended continued attendance at selected outside events and this was supported by the members.

9. Appointment of Officers 2018/19

As per usual the Committee resigned and with the exception of Chris Bond who has requested to step down the remaining members stood for re-election. They were proposed by Jonathan Ansell, seconded by Rachael Banyard and voted back in by the members. The Chairman advised he asked Richard Hooker to become a virtual of the Committee to be the DRST IT consultant and look after the website. He will work from home and not be expected to attend meetings. Should elements of the IT work be prolonged (ie: setting up new systems) he will be remunerated on presentation of an invoice. Richard agreed to this request.

10. Hedge Competition

Due to Storm Brian and the very inclement weather it brought the competition had to be cancelled, which was unfortunate but definitely the right thing to do. In preparation for the 2017 competition DRST had removed some of the field fencing. In order for Louise the landowner to be able to use her land until this year's competition she needed to erect electric fencing at a cost of £400 which DRST agreed to fund. This year's competition be on will be on Sat 13 Oct again at East Fingle Farm.

11. AOB

1. GDPR: The Chairman advised the members that DRST has complied with the rules on data protection. The Trust's policy on GDPR has been published to members via an article in the Skills Newsletter and a copy of the policy can also be found on the website.
2. Mike Pearey gave a short update about the new RPA grants for farmers and landowners which have the potential to benefit practitioners.
3. The national competition will be in Barton, Cambridgeshire. There is a shortage of Devon style competitors. The competition is on the 27th October. George Pidgeon will include an article for Skills.

12. Meeting Close and Raffle

The Chairman thanked all present for attending and the meeting was formally closed at 2045 when Jonathan Ansell commenced the raffle. The date of the next AGM will be advised in due course.