

AGM 2024 Questions from Members

Question	Member	Answer
<p>1. What happened to Andrew Impey and why weren't we told of his departure in the magazine or told anything about his replacement Rich Yates?</p>	<p>Darren Parker</p>	<p>Thank you, Darren. It's an important question.</p> <p>Andrew wrote a letter to members that was published in the first magazine of the year back in March which outlined his reasons for moving on. We can certainly send you a copy if you missed this – and apologies if you did.</p> <p>He was the Chief Executive for almost nine years and needed to dedicate more time to his family, but we are grateful to him for those nine years of service.</p>
<p>2. Last year we were promised that the "in person" members day would return in 2024, yet here we are online again. Why is this and why is no explanation given in the magazine?</p>	<p>Darren Parker</p>	<p>This is a very fair point, Darren.</p> <p>It was our intention to have an in-person AGM this year – however, we had to take some very difficult decisions, as many charities have, based on the need to make financial savings, which included some redundancies, withdrawal from some activities, lots of cost-saving measures, and of course the change in leadership, as well as the reduction in staff capacity through things like the redundancies. I wrote to volunteers about some of these challenges earlier in the year – and perhaps there would have been some value in sharing these circumstances with members.</p> <p>This year, our compromise was to have a series of in-person walks to celebrate our 65th birthday after this AGM, so that members, staff, and the public can all celebrate together, but we will be working on an in-person AGM for 2025 from next week onwards.</p>



<p>3. What is the plan for the future of Abbots Hall Farm; when will this farm be reopened to members or to the public?</p>	<p>John Hall</p>	<p>Thank you, John.</p> <p>As our former CEO, John was integral to the early achievements at Abbots and much of the pioneering work we have done here.</p> <p>Abbots Hall Farm will be re-opened to the public within the next two years.</p> <p>One new aspect will be the opening of the new England Coast Path route that will run through the southern half of the reserve. The opening of the Coast Path will be the very latest that we will open the site publicly, and the aim is to provide other circuits for visitors to follow with good views over the developing landscape of the old farm.</p> <p>The nature conservation plans for the farm are being formulated in detail at the moment, following consultation with a wide range of experts in the county during 2023.</p> <p>Alongside Biodiversity Net Gain proposals and open woodland creation, we are developing ideas for flower-rich meadows, scrub mosaics for Nightingales and Turtle Doves, wood-pasture habitats, and wetland expansion.</p> <p>Insect conservation is a prominent part of the new plans, and we are intending that many rare bees, wasps and flies, and other pollinators will benefit.</p> <p>Abbots Hall will also become a centre for scientific research and monitoring of nature conservation interventions, including both citizen and university-based science, so it retains its position as a ‘world-class site for pioneering projects’, celebrating examples in the recent past such as nature-friendly farming and the Nature Nursery, as well as pioneering in new ways.</p>
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		The site will also continue to be a focus for marine and coastal work, like saltmarsh restoration, and build on the foundations of the great work of the managed realignment of 2002 (the 25th anniversary of which can be celebrated in 2027) and the exemplary reduction in the use of harmful chemicals in the landscape.
4. I would like an update on developments at Abbots Hall Farm	Jonney Aldridge	Hopefully we have covered this with the above answer, Jonney.
5. Is the nature reserve Iron Latch still run by Essex Wildlife Trust or has it been completely taken over by Colchester Council? I'm worried that it could be built on if taken on by the council in this 'greenbelt/greybelt debate' climate.	Louise Ismail	<p>Thank you, Louise. Iron Latch is very dear to me.</p> <p>The Trust still owns and manages the Iron Latch Nature Reserve, which lies adjacent to the 'New Iron Latch Wood' site which we believe is now in the ownership of Colchester City Council as part of a Section 106 planning agreement with a developer.</p> <p>The Trust's Nature Reserve is not under any direct threat. However, increasing residential housing will continue to put pressure on this nature reserve, as with many of our other reserves around the County.</p> <p>We will continue to work in partnership with local authorities to ensure that they develop their Local Plans with the enhancement of biodiversity as a top priority.</p> <p>As members, one of the ways that you can help – as well as remaining vigilant about your own local green spaces – is to respond to the Essex Local Nature recovery Strategy (LNRS) consultation and push for joined-up thinking on site protection and new places for wildlife to be created.</p>
6. Why does the Southend and Rochford group and their talks and walks not appear on the main website?	Graham Mee	Thank you, Graham.

		<p>This is likely to be because the Southend, Rochford and Castle Point Local Group are newly re-established, which is great news. Our Local Groups are very important to us.</p> <p>However, I shall work with Graham Cook, Gary, and the rest of the Local Group to ensure this is resolved within the next few days.</p>
<p>7. Will you please start sending out local group newsletters to all the local members who have email so that local group meetings and other activities have a chance of being better attended. The amount of space allowed to local groups in the magazine is not sufficient for this purpose.</p>	<p>Pamela Freer</p>	<p>I have committed recently into looking into this – so I will. The transition to including Local Group news and events in the magazine was intended to bring Local Groups into the heart of the organisation and for everything to feel more integrated – as well as save time, money, and reduce the environmental impact.</p> <p>I think we have come a long way with Local Groups being integral to the Trust over the past two years, but there are still things we want to improve, so I will look into this.</p> <p>Enabling Local Groups to email members has been a step in the right direction, but I know you need more tools available to you in order to communicate with members.</p>
<p>8. As a member of EWT and a keen follower of the progress of the (Private Members) Climate and Nature Bill, hopefully working its way through Parliament at the moment. I would really be very interested to hear how EWT are, or are planning to support this bill.</p>	<p>Jacqueline Bier</p>	<p>Thanks for submitting this question, Jacqueline. Lobbying and advocacy are important parts of what we do and we try our best to have influence nationally as well as locally and regionally.</p> <p>The Bill had its first reading on 21 March and we had been following its progress. However, because it was a Private Members’ Bill it wasn’t carried over into this new Parliament and therefore has to be reintroduced in some form.</p> <p>There have been several new Private Members’ Bills tabled in the current Parliament. One of these, which is sponsored by Lord Krebs, is the Environmental Targets Bill.</p>

		<p>The Wildlife Trusts may collectively make a response to this Bill, and we at Essex Wildlife Trust are also discussing the implications of this Bill with our colleagues in other Wildlife Trusts, so it's a case of watch this space.</p>
<p>9. Tendring District Council planning department are increasingly acting unprofessionally in not requiring proper reports for protected species. This is resulting in information that could save protected species from being adversely affected by development not being collected and in turn protected wildlife being damaged. What can be done by Essex Wildlife Trust to help protect our wildlife from a council that is acting unprofessionally?</p>	<p>Councillor Richard Everett</p>	<p>Thank you, Richard. Planning is such a critical issue in our county and we need to do everything we can to ensure that the right developments happen in the right place.</p> <p>We are engaging regularly with Tendring District Council on a number of key planning matters, including the protection of the internationally important Stour & Orwell Estuaries Special Protection Area (SPA).</p> <p>There are other planning matters that mean that we are in regular contact with certain Planning Officers, and we are also aiming to meet with Tendring Planning Officers before the end of the year to discuss nature recovery in the district, in the round.</p>
<p>10. Home to numerous invertebrates and rare and endangered species, as well as large expanses of national priority acid grassland, the MOD owned Middlewick Ranges is an extraordinary valuable wildlife site in South Colchester. And yet Middlewick remains in Colchester City Council's local plan for housing development and is currently on the market for sale. What further steps does the wildlife trust propose to take to protect Middlewick from development?</p>	<p>Edward Barratt</p>	<p>Thank you for raising Middlewick Ranges, Edward.</p> <p>We are actively campaigning with other nature conservation organisations, along with the Friends of Middlewick, to have the housing allocation completely removed from the Colchester City Local Plan. We are working as we speak on some new efforts to stop this proposed development from ever happening.</p> <p>We met planning officers, and the councillor portfolio holder on the environment, in-person in May, following detailed correspondence with them over the last year. Since then we have also written a joint letter with our campaign partners to the landowners – the MoD – to make it clear that their position is, in our view, not defensible, as it</p>

		<p>conflicts with their own Biodiversity Strategy. With the a response still not received we are now seeking other ways to engage with them and the UK government.</p> <p>We will also be sending another letter to the Colchester City Council in the next week and seeking a further in-person meeting with them, highlighting further key evidence, which we believe makes the case for saving Middlewick incontestable and demonstrates the fatal flaws in the proposed mitigation plans.</p> <p>We are also engaging the two local MPs and local Councillors, with a keen interest in the protection of the site, and will be having in-person meetings with them over the next few weeks and months.</p> <p>We are also tracking the changing Local Plan timetable in order to time further interventions to have maximum impact.</p>
<p>11. As a retired member of reserves staff and having been concerned during the last few years at the dwindling numbers of staff left to maintain our Nature Reserves, I would be pleased to hear positive plans for the future to maintain these important holdings.</p>	<p>Joan Pinch</p>	<p>Thank you, Joan.</p> <p>The challenge of managing large land holdings in the face of rising costs is an issue for all conservation charities.</p> <p>What we are looking to do over the next few years is to make the most of the opportunities presented by green finance, such as Biodiversity Net Gain, in order to realise the full income generating potential of our sites so that we can cover the cost of managing them properly, and ideally get to the point where each reserve is financially sustainable.</p> <p>This obviously depends on many factors, but we will do our best to ensure that staffing our nature reserves remains a top priority.</p>

<p>12. It would be helpful if local centres advertised events more widely, and advertised events on the member's email</p>	<p>David Stevenson</p>	<p>Thank you, David.</p> <p>This does happen in many centres, but perhaps not routinely, so this is certainly something we can look at.</p>
<p>13. The Prime Minister spoke on the 24 September about the increased costs of laying new network cables underground instead of more pylons ie if the public wants cheaper electricity, it must accept the pylons. Essex has some large offshore wind farms that are providing electricity from renewable energy. That electricity could be delivered to a wider area if the appropriate network was upgraded. (In Walton on the Naze the electricity is cheap and/or free at peak generating periods). Does Essex Wildlife Trust have information/an opinion on: (a) The relative cost (per mile) of pylons v underground or undersea cable? And (b) An opinion or policy on pylons and their intrusion into the countryside?</p>	<p>Dr Josie Close</p>	<p>Thanks, Josie. This is very topical.</p> <p>The Trust is focused on protecting wildlife in both the marine environment and on land, and we are actively engaged in, and responding to, the proposed cabling routes in order to ensure that habitats and species are protected, including those on our own nature reserves. We have been working closely with our neighbouring Wildlife Trusts in this regard.</p> <p>We do not have a specific position on the relative costs, but we would generally support whichever approach best protects, and ideally, enhances wildlife conservation.</p> <p>Similarly in terms of landscape impact and intrusion, we focus on ensuring that any route chosen minimises the impact on wildlife, that all statutory and Local Wildlife Sites, ancient woodlands and veteran trees, remain protected and undamaged, and that there are both robust and meaningful mitigation plans and clear, measurable biodiversity gains where development is deemed unavoidable. In terms of Biodiversity Net Gain, the Trust will push for 20% gain.</p>
<p>14. I and tens of thousands of others are worried about the planned 112miles of pylons from Norwich to Tilbury. They will march across farmland, woodland, and hedgerows and your remit to protect Essex wildlife will be made many times harder. National Grid say that around 1.8 million trees and 6 million hedge plants will be stripped out to allow for construction, access and</p>	<p>Penny Lang</p>	<p>Hopefully we have covered this with the above answer, Penny.</p> <p>You can read our position statement on Norwich to Tilbury to find out more.</p>

<p>pylon-height clearance. All this is not only desperately destructive, but will interrupt on a grand scale the miles and miles of wildlife corridors (see attachment) established by our small animals over decades if not centuries. Some footpaths will be diverted or closed, causing yet more disorientation. What is the Trust doing to prevent this damage?</p>		
<p>15. Is 'rewilding' instead of managed cultivation now the policy of Essex Wildlife Trust? On a recent visit to Fingringhoe we noticed it had largely become a brambled wilderness where previously views over the estuary could clearly be seen and enjoyed</p>	<p>Jillian Farmer</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Jillian. As I'm sure you know, Fingringhoe was our first ever nature reserve and is a shining example of what can be achieved in 65 years.</p> <p>The Trust, alongside the other wildlife trusts across the UK, supports rewilding and wilding approaches as essential contributors to achieving nature recovery and '30 by 30'. However, rewilding and wilding sit alongside more traditional – what might be also termed cultural – conservation management, like coppicing and mowing, and other, newer, evidence-based nature recovery techniques like species reintroductions, head-starting or nest protection of ground-nesting birds, invasive species control and targeted mob grazing.</p> <p>Fingringhoe, as a place of early successional scrub and grassland habitats developing on an abandoned quarry site, is, in essence, an already successfully rewilded site. However, its management now is to retain its early successional mosaic variety, which makes it so wildlife-rich and ideal for key species like the Nightingale and Turtle Dove. Therefore, it is managed by both regular traditional management and newer intervention techniques, with visitor access and enjoyment fully in mind.</p> <p>Bramble has grown well this year in the damp conditions and not all areas will be cut every year, and some areas will be left to develop as important cover for nesting birds and food for other species. Other areas of bramble will be cleared or kept under close control more</p>

		<p>frequently to ensure the open mosaic of grassland and bare ground is retained.</p> <p>Footnote: Rewilding or wilding – which can take a variety of forms, and which can be at different scales – involves allowing natural processes to be the main driver of change and adaptation. The extent to which natural processes are then managed or constrained determines the level of ‘wilding’ and this can adapt to the history and size of the site, amongst other things.</p>
<p>16. Is EWT going to support the Badger Trust in its challenge of Natural England on the legality of the badger cull?</p>	<p>Jan Bigg</p>	<p>Thank you for raising this, Jan. Essex Wildlife Trust does not support a cull of badgers and will not allow culling on its land. All Wildlife Trusts around the UK have been united in opposing the cull since the very start.</p> <p>Badgers remain free of the disease in Essex and this county is not currently included in a Bovine Tb risk zone.</p> <p>The Trust put out a position statement in 2021 Badger cull: position statement Essex Wildlife Trust (essexwt.org.uk). This remains our position, although the latest UK Government culling figures have changed and over 230,000 badgers have now been culled (as at 2023).</p> <p>The Trust has no plans to directly participate in any specific legal challenge at this point, but we support efforts to stop the cull and ensure the UK Government bases its control of Bovine TB on sound scientific research and better methods of testing cattle.</p>
<p>17. Please would the Chair comment on the following points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I could not support the motion to accept the Financial Statements as they are not available 	<p>Ian Robinson</p>	<p>Apologies for the delay in finalising the full Financial Statements, Ian. These are now available – and were available in short form via the Impact Report – but ordinarily we would have shared these a couple of weeks in advance.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the motion to accept the Impact statement was bracketed together with the motion to accept the Financial Statement I could not accept that either • Accordingly I could not accept the motion to re-elect Bob Holmes 		<p>This year we changed our auditors for the first time in several years in order to have our finances looked at through a fresh lens.</p> <p>As a result, we feel we have had a very detailed and thorough audit, but because this was a transitional year from the old audit firm to the new audit firm, the delay was unavoidable. Next year will be back to normal.</p>
<p>18. With the Epping Forest Masterplan to build nearly 1,000 houses and a school and flats on farmland and common land next to the Essex Way in South Epping, is there anyone I can communicate with to limit the impact on wildlife?</p>	<p>Carol Hills</p>	<p>Thanks for the question, Carol.</p> <p>Epping Forest District Council, as part of its commitment to protecting biodiversity and green space, including Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), should be your first point of call. You could contact your local Councillor, and their Epping Forest <i>Countrycare</i> Service.</p> <p>In this case, the City of London Corporation at Epping Forest would also be worth contacting – as the Masterplan I think you refer to abuts ancient green lanes that form part of the Forest. The Masterplan – which involves also providing alternative natural green space – could have implications for the recreational pressure on Epping Forest SAC, as well as Harlow Woods SSSI. So Natural England (NE) has also been involved in mitigation discussions and again NE could be contacted with your specific concerns.</p> <p>Our Planning Officer and Director of Conservation regularly review the Local Plans. If you have any particular details of concern, please do email our main Trust email address and this will be forwarded to them both.</p>
<p>19. Can it be made clearer to visitors that the nature discovery centres are nature reserves and not for just for dog walkers, cyclists etc.</p>	<p>Lynne Henderson</p>	<p>Thank you, Lynne. Our centres do organise many events focused on their importance for wildlife and as nature reserves, such as the very popular bat walks at Hanningfield for example. Some of our Nature</p>

		Discovery Parks and nature reserves are also accessible to dog walkers depending on the unique restrictions and considerations at each site. We will be redoubling our efforts to make sure all visitors are well served, appropriate to each site and to inspire their interest in our natural world.
20. Much prefer on-line AGM although realise that not everyone finds on-line so easy. On-line means not travelling and so less use of time and fossil fuels. Be interesting to compare participation for on-line and in person. I know some organisations find on-line gets better participation.	Jane Giffould	<p>Thank you, Jane. This is a really interesting and helpful counterpoint to the commonly presented benefits of an in-person event.</p> <p>There are some clear advantages to an online event, as well as disadvantages. We want to get to the point where we have an annual event that is as environmentally friendly as possible while also maximising attendance and participation. It may be that the best format for this changes over time.</p> <p>We will certainly review this year's combination of an online AGM in the morning followed by an in-person event in the afternoon to see how popular it has been with members. For next year, we are determined to host an in-person event, but it may also be possible to stream it live in order to maximise access, particularly for members with additional considerations in terms of transport or mobility.</p>
21. The resources assigned to updating local group events on the website in a timely way appear to be inadequate. Are there plans to increase them such that local groups' events will be displayed promptly please?	Sue McClellan	<p>Thank you, Sue – and thanks for all your wonderful work for the Chelmsford Local Group.</p> <p>As part of necessary cost-saving measures this year we have a reduced Communications Team, so the answer is unlikely to relate to more staff resource and may instead be more about making the underlying systems and processes more efficient. Clearly this is an issue we need to address though, so we will work with Local Groups to explore solutions.</p>