

The Gower Society

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016

This is the summary of the business conducted at the Annual General Meeting on 7th May 2016.

Treasurer's report.

The treasurer, in summarising the circulated accounts, pointed out the income had increased marginally on last year and expenditure, due partly to sums expended in 2014 on grants and the Ilston solar array inquiry had decreased. The value of the investments had reduced but within market trend generally.

Gerald Thomas & Co were duly appointed again to carry out an examination of the accounts for 2016

Chairman's report

The chairman assured members once again that the recent full change in the officers, notwithstanding the previous officers' longevity in office and outstanding contribution, was a natural progression, and indeed progress, as the new order would come with new ideas and different ways, for, without change, any organisation would "wither on the vine".

He referred to the engagement last year of the new secretary, a new president, a candidate for membership secretary, an assistant to the website manager, a replacement editor of the newsletter, two new committee members last year (who had made significant and mature contributions) and two additional committee members to be appointed at the meeting as well as co-opted members to subcommittees who, because of outside commitments, were unable to be full committee members.

However, he pointed out that the talks had floundered and there was an insufficient number of walk leaders.

He then outlined the extensive work carried out by the subcommittees.

The youth action group had undertaken a range of activities for under 18 year olds, ranging from bug hunting to orienteering and camping overnight to vegetable growing, as well as making grants to schools and offering bursary for written work.

The finance committee, which had been strengthened by a co-opted member, a director of finance in their own work, continued to be advised by an independent financial adviser. A financial procedures manual had been produced. He thanked the treasurer.

The rural communities subcommittee had dealt with the approval of financial grants (up to £4,000) for local activities and causes ranging from bird ringing to wall restoration and footpaths maintenance to village-green pumps. They also had dealt with the restoration and rerouting of public footpaths as well as kick-starting moves towards restoring the footpath across the breached sea wall at Cwm Ivy by a contribution towards the costs of an expert's survey on the structural credibility of the wall and the alternative ways of bridging the breach.

The projects subcommittee which dealt with grants over £4,000 and on projects initiated and/or overseen by the Society which had included wall restoration, church repairs, the purchase of trees and repairs to the Worms Head watch station.

The planning subcommittee searched all planning applications (2,500) and had scrutinised 214, in respect of which the Society had only objected to 36 (1.5% of total applications). The Society had made representations to public planning inquiries and to the Welsh Government's Marsden Panel reviewing designated landscapes, and had produced two aerial surveys. The chairman had meetings with the local planning authority's development, conservation and design manager. The Society had given evidence through a landscape surveyor and a landscape architect in its successful opposition to an appeal refusing planning permission for a solar array in the AONB. It made written representations in advance of the hearing that had taken place in 2016 for consent to construct 16 wind turbines on common land in the north of the Lordship of Gower.

The communications subcommittee had liaised with the press, radio and television. It was responsible for the production of the newsletter and the Society had formulated a communications policy.

Lastly, the publications group had again produced the annual journal, a high-calibre publication, and had considered other publications in the name of the Society.

The Society had representatives on a number of local bodies, as well as the Wales Alliance of National Parks.

The Chairman concluded in urging members to deal with the public's negative perception of the Society, believing it was against development or any change. Apart from calling for evidence in support of such a false perception, members were urged to point out the work of the youth action group, the Society's financial assistance to schools and events totalling some £70,000 a year, and the Society's objection to only 1.5% of all planning applications (a total of only 36). Above all, the Chairman reminded members of the statutory designation of the Gower Peninsular as an AONB in 1956, with the statutory purpose of "conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area". In support, he pointed out the report of the Marsden Review that "where conservation and recreation conflict, priority be given to conservation" and the Swansea Local Planning Authority's policy that "the primary objective is the conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty" with any "development that would have a material adverse effect on the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage would not be permitted". The Chairman again acknowledged change is inevitable, but not at the expense of conservation.

Committee members.

Lynne Lock, who had done outstanding service as chairman of the youth action group, and Peter Padley were retiring but Peter Padley, together with two new members, Janet Hellewell and Glyn Morgan were all duly appointed.

Honorary life members.

For "distinguished service to Gower", three honorary life members were duly appointed, namely: Peter Hutchison for his significant contributions to the youth action group, the Society's main committee and the previous website; Peter Muxworthy for his exceptionally longstanding service as treasurer to the Gower Show, Horton Village

Hall, Horton & Poreynon lifeboat, the Scout movement and Dunvant RFC as well as a Swansea JP for 34 years and chairman of its Bench; Glyn Morgan for leading over several years, on behalf of local farmers, their opposition to the granting of planning permission and common land consents for the wind farm at Mynydd y Gwair.

Constitution.

With a view to applying for the new status which had been created by the Charities Act 2011, as a “Charitable Incorporated Organisation”, the main committee recommended for approval a new constitution which had been drafted by solicitors, based on the model of the Charity Commission, but with amendments and additions which the committee, after a number of meetings and with the input of the president, had made.

The Chairman explained that the Society, as in the case of most members’ associations, was not a legal entity and consequently was unable to own land, to employ or to bring claims and, more importantly, the committee members would be personally liable for any claims brought against the Society. The new status would relieve members of such liability as the Society would then be recognised as a legal entity.

As a consequence, committee members would be replaced by trustees of which there would have to be a minimum of five and a maximum of ten, but who could delegate management functions to a committee of between ten and twenty individuals. The duties of trustees are outlined by the Charity Commission and also in the new constitution. The trustees would be responsible for matters of policy and finance, as well as for the committee whose actions they could overrule.

The draft new constitution was duly approved and the committee authorised to proceed with the creation and change to the new status. Seven trustees were elected.