

**Northumberland & Newcastle Society**  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2019**  
**Tuesday 21 May 2019**

Present:

Cllr P Allen, Prof. & Mrs Allsop, Mr Apedaile, Mr & Mrs Atkinson, Mr D Biesterfield, Mis EM Bryson, Mr Burns, Mr & Mrs Cowan, Mrs Craig, Canon & Mrs Dodd, Mr Fleming, Mr G Gill, Mr J Gill, Mr & Mrs Gittins, Mr Grant, Mr Hammond, Mrs Havis, Mr & Mrs Houston, Mr & Mrs Joicey, Mr Lunn, Mr Magnay, Mr Maidwell, Mr & Mrs Matthews, Mr Moore, Y Robson, Mrs K Pears, Ms Perry, Dr & Mrs Purves, Mr Railton, Mrs Robinson, Mrs Salmon, Mr & Mrs Sayers, Mr & Mrs Sher, Mrs Thoburn, Prof & Mrs Thompson, Mr & Mrs Watson, Mr White, Mr Wickens.

Also, in attendance was the President of the Society, the Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne, Cllr David Down, accompanied by the Lady Mayoress, Mrs B Down.

**Chairman:** Canon Peter Dodd

At 7.00pm Peter opened the AGM, welcomed those attending and gave thanks to Lord Ridley for his kind hospitality.

He welcomed the President, Cllr David Down, current Lord Mayor and said he is delighted Cllr Down is now a member of the Society.

Peter said that there had been plans to set out proposals to update the constitution of the Society this evening, but unfortunately our vice chairman Toby Hedworth QC who is leading on this, has had to give apologies. It is likely that we will hold an EGM – with the correct amount of notice – in the not too distant future.

**Apologies for absence:** 28 names were placed before the Chairman.

**Minutes of the last AGM held on 11 June 2018** were taken as read and signed by Canon Dodd as a true record.

**Report from the Honorary Treasurer Mrs F Thoburn and adoption of the 2018 accounts.**

Fiona gave a brief overview of the accounts, abbreviated copies of which were available at the meeting. The annual income for the year was £28,926, being £49,391 less monies raised specifically for the NEPG. This was compared to £21,548 last year. This year's figures also included a legacy of £10,000 which we were very grateful to receive from Don Brownlow. He was one of the original NEPG members.

The expenditure for the year was £23,181, being £36,325 less monies expended for the NEPG, as against £22,121 last year. Most expenses were in line with last year with perhaps the exception of sundry expenses. This can be explained by:

- The Society paid for a structural survey of the Kielder Viaduct amounting to £1,860.
- Since the retirement of Simon Bevan, we have incurred an independent examiner's fee of £200.00.

Therefore, if one strips out the restricted fund monies and the legacy, the overall deficit for the year was £4,255 as opposed to £362 last year. The society held funds of £27,157, of which £8,952 was held on behalf of the NEPG and £2,475 on behalf of the Middleton Burn Action Group. Additionally, £20,251 has been invested in COIF Charities Ethical Investment Fund.

Fiona made a plea for all members to sign a Gift Aid declaration. For those who haven't and would be happy to, please contact the office and a form will be sent to you.

On the proposal of Mrs Dodd and seconded by Mr Maidwell, the accounts for 2018 were formally adopted.

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The Treasurer then set out the proposed new subscription rates which were proposed by Mr Wickens and seconded by Mr Grant.

**Annual Report from Chairman Dr Geoffrey Purves**

Geoffrey gave his last AGM report as Chairman and said it was a great honour to have been Chairman these past eleven years. Geoffrey referred to the Treasurer's proposal to increase subscription levels and said it has been a difficult subject but we are continually faced with the reality of inflation so we should view the changes positively and as a necessity to underpin the continuing good management of our finances which will enable the Society to flourish and undertake our programme of activities.

Geoffrey said that we are a Society of two parts

1. We run a successful, varied and interesting range of events that are both informative and socially enjoyable
2. We are also not afraid to take on campaigns – such as our current work on wind farms. NEPG has been able to make such an impact with Northumberland County Council – but much work remains to be done.

Our main Committees – County, Tyneside, Events, NEPG, and their respective Chairmen -Tim, Nigel, Richard, Lester, and Editorial have all had busy years and our magazine City & County continues to provide a first-class communication tool.

Geoffrey thanked our 'catering team' Frank, Keith and Adam for their marvellous hospitality at our social events, and also thanked Frank for his focus and attention to detail in the management committee.

As well as subscriptions the Society also relies on donations. Geoffrey said this year we were exceptionally fortunate to receive a legacy of £10,000 from the late Don Brownlow and he asked all members to remember the Society in their wills.

An annual sum of £4000 was received from the Sir James Knott Trust for the production of the magazine. Regrettably, after many years, they have reviewed their donation and decided that 2018 was the last year for this sum. We anticipate a further £2000 from the Trust in December, but then the funding will end.

We are also grateful for the following generous and much appreciated donations:

£250 from the Fenwick Trust

£1000 from the WA Handley Trust

£500 from the Wm Leech Trust

And we raised around £2000 through the Gift Aid scheme. Our sincere thanks go to Fiona for her hard work.

Geoffrey gave a summary of other business:

Following her annual appraisal, the Trustees amended Jackie's job title from Administrator to Manager Jackie is making an application to the Community Foundation for operational costs including a new multicopier/printer and to cover the cost of the website.

In light of the news from the Sir James Knott Trust it is more important than ever to consider new sources of funding, as well as reviewing our subscription rates which have remained static for nearly a decade.

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Events - 448 members attended our events which yielded a surplus of over £896.00.

Membership – in June 2018 it was 549 members, today it is standing at 548. It is a fact of life that with a generally older age profile of our membership, finding new members inevitably remains a challenge.

Geoffrey then shared some highlights of his 11 years as chairman.

- He said how special it has always been to come here to Blagdon Hall and enjoy the hospitality of Viscount Ridley. He clearly remembers Viscount Ridley's father taking him and other members on a walk through the quarry garden where he proudly pointed out some of the trees and shrubs he had collected from around the world – he was very fond of his garden.
- Geoffrey hopes that members have enjoyed the annual Lecture Series he introduced with guest speakers at our AGM, giving fascinating accounts of life in Northumberland as seen from various sectors of our civic society – politics, local government, the Church, academia, the rural economy, and today he is delighted that Andrew Joicey is going to talk to us about wind farm development in Northumberland. Our distinguished speakers have included the Ven Geoff Miller, Lords Shipley, Vinson and Beith – and others – and most of these lectures are on our website.
- The wind farm campaign achieved a high point when a group of Peers, led by Baroness Quin, successfully tabled a short debate in the House of Lords to bring our concerns to the attention of the Government
- We have established a good working relationship with Newcastle University and enjoyed wide spread publicity by being named as joint sponsors for two lectures in their Public Insight Lecture series – we are pushing at an open door for similar events in the future and there are proposals underway for the next high-profile lecturer.
- In conclusion, Geoffrey thanked the members for appointing him as Chairman and said it has been a privilege to serve the Society. He hopes during his watch we have made progress and that he hands on to his successor a well-respected Society.

Geoffrey said he values the richness of our membership profile. It is full of members with a wide experience of life – and with a diverse range of skills and professions – varied in tastes, talented and inquisitive – a demanding membership to satisfy.

But these qualities are exactly the reason why the Northumberland and Newcastle Society continues to play a part and to be respected in our region. To maintain that reputation, we must move on – change is healthy – and he supports and endorses the proposal to appoint John Matthews as the next Chairman.

On the proposal of Mr Maidwell and seconded by Mrs Dodd, the Chairman's and Committee reports were adopted.

**Election of the Vice Presidents**

On the proposal of Mr Matthews and seconded by Mr Sher, the following Vice Presidents were unanimously re-elected:

Peter Atkinson

Lord Beith

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Philip Deakin  
Canon PC Dodd  
Robin Dower  
Douglas Hoblyn  
The Duchess of Northumberland  
Sir Nigel Sherlock  
Lord Shipley  
Lord Stevens \*  
Lord Vinson

*[\*since the AGM, Lord Stevens has indicated he wishes to retire. This will be formally acknowledged at the 2020 AGM]*

**Election of Officers**

The Chair announced the retirement of Geoffrey Purves and proposed the election of John Matthews as incoming Chairman.

On the proposal of Mr Wickens and seconded by Mrs Havis, John Matthews was elected Chairman.

On the proposal of Mr Sher and seconded by Mr Wickens, Toby Hedworth QC was re-elected as Vice Chairman, and Fiona Thoburn was re-elected as Honorary Treasurer.

**Election of Committees**

**County Committee**

On the proposal of Mr Sher and seconded by Mr Wickens, the following existing members were unanimously re-elected:

Nigel Jenkins - Chair  
Iain Elliott  
Prof Richard Allsop  
Annie Lloyd  
Steve Lloyd  
Jim Railton

**Tyneside Committee**

On the proposal of Mrs Dodd and seconded by Mrs Havis, the following existing members were unanimously re-elected:

Tim Wickens (Chair)  
Keith Whitfield (Vice Chair)  
John Matthews  
Judith Robinson  
Jean Baty  
Alan Grant

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Bev Bagnall  
Tony Stephenson  
Len Netts  
Toby Hedworth  
Charles Fleming

Ron Baston is retiring and Canon Dodd gave thanks for his contribution to the Committee.

**Northumberland Environmental Policy Group (NEPG)**

On the proposal of Mr Grant and seconded by Mr Maidwell the following were re-elected:

Lester Sher - Chair  
Andrew Joicey  
David Biesterfield  
Martin Straker

**Events Committee**

On the proposal of Mr Maidwell and seconded by Mrs R Dodd the following were re-elected:

Richard Appleby - Chair  
Bryan Stanley  
Anne Havis  
Frank White  
Virginia Armstrong (co-opted)

Miss Elizabeth Bryson is retiring and Canon Dodd gave thanks for her valuable contribution over many years of service.

**Editorial Committee**

On the proposal of Mr Maidwell and seconded by Mrs Dodd the following were re-elected:

Nigel Jenkins (Chair)  
Suzanne Stanley  
Virginia Armstrong

**Management Committee**

As set out in the Society's memorandum and articles of association, the Management Committee will comprise:

Elected Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Committees  
Honorary Treasurer  
Directors of the Society  
Mr Frank White

**Election of Directors (Trustees)**

On the proposal of Mr Sher and seconded by Mr Grant, John Matthews was elected as a Director (Trustee)

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As set out in the Society's memorandum and articles of association one third of the Directors shall retire. For the 2019 AGM Toby Hedworth QC retires and it was proposed by Mr Matthews and seconded by Mr Wickens that he be re-elected and this was unanimously agreed by all present with no objections.

It was proposed by Mr Matthews and seconded by Mrs Dodd that the following Directors be re elected  
Geoffrey Purves  
Virginia Armstrong

**Presentation of Honorary Life Membership to David Biesterfield of the NEPG**

Canon Dodd gave tribute to Mr Biesterfield

The Northumberland Environmental Policy Group (NEPG) was established early in 2012 when a meeting took place between Geoffrey Purves, Bill Short, Lester Sher, Peter Dodd and Don Brownlow representing a loose confederation of separate windfarm action groups across Northumberland.

Geoffrey had the foresight to offer this fledgling group a home within the N&N from which they might raise funds and pursue an agenda of influencing NCC's evolving policy for wind energy.

From the beginning the group was fully integrated into the workings of the Society, given an official subcommittee status, with a seat at the management committee, membership of the County Com and most importantly access to the facilities of the offices of the Society.

David Biesterfield from the outset has been a prominent member of the committee of NEPG, bringing his considerable professional experience of law and his love of the countryside to bear on the successive representations The Society has made verbally and formally to the multiple phases of consultation with Northumberland County Council.

As early as 2013 he was procuring Leading Counsels' opinion to assist NCC in their evolving strategy. By early 2015 The Society with David's assistance had succeeded in developing together with NCC a criterion-based iteration of wind energy policy that we all felt comfortable with and which NCC acknowledged had emerged in part because of the Society's contribution.

Following the Written Ministerial Statements of August 2015, the emerging Draft plans of NCC were thrown into disarray and the requirement to "consider identifying suitable areas" for wind energy preoccupied the officers of NCC and policy makers.

During this subsequent period of almost 4 years David has provided unending guidance to the Society, procuring expert planning and legal opinion, leading negotiations with the officers and elected members of NCC and formulating increasingly complex written representations to NCC.

His insights and detailed understanding of the nuances of policy have allowed the Society a level of expert instruction and hence expert opinion that would simply have been impossible without his guidance.

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In the same vein his command of the issues has allowed the Society to hold officers and elected members accountable and led to the iteration of compelling learned and highly structured constructive representations. David has truly been a champion for Northumberland, our voice is more eloquent and better informed for his contribution.

David said he was truly surprised and pleased to receive this accolade. He cares deeply about the county and thanked all supporters, especially Don Brownlow, whose in-depth knowledge and enthusiasm was still very much missed. He also thanked Lester for his leadership and Jackie for her coordination and support. It all remains an uphill struggle.

Lester gave thanks and presented David with Life Membership of the Society.

**Any other business**

Canon Dodd gave a tribute to Geoffrey Purves *[to follow]*

Lester presented Geoffrey with a gift of an Annual Pass to Kew Gardens and a case of wine.

Cllr David Down, the Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Newcastle and President of the Society said that he was delighted to attend the AGM. It is final evening as Lord Mayor and being President of the Society is just one of the many ceremonial positions held by the Mayor. He is pleased this is now firmly on the list of the Mayor's duties and he has been asked to write a report about the N&N which he hopes will help to raise the profile of the Society. During the past year he has visited a wide variety of important heritage buildings, many of which would no longer be here if it were not for the N&N. He thanked Geoffrey for his outstanding contribution as chairman and presented him with a bottle of locally brewed 'Lord Mayor's' beer.

**Questions and comments from the floor**

Q: In light of the drop in Sir James Knott Trust (SJKT) funding, should the proposed new subs rates have been even higher?

A: Fiona – We were not to know about this when the figures were prepared. Agreed that subs will be on the agenda at every AGM, even if just to agree rates will remain the same.

Why did SJKN pull out?

A: Jackie - There has been a new secretary appointed who has reviewed the Trust's funding procedures. They did not actually say but Jackie felt it may be because we have healthy reserves. They recommended we made an application to Community Foundation.

Q: Has the Life Membership category been withdrawn?

A: Fiona - Yes

Q: Can we open up the Committees to more women? We must demonstrate and ensure fairness and equality

A: John – We can but try – we are relying on volunteers after all.

Q: Please can you give us the postcodes for event venues

A: Jackie – we usually do but will double check for all events.

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Q: How long the Mayor has been the President?

A: Jackie said she would try to find out.

The AGM 2019 was closed without any further questions and Canon Dodd asked the new Chairman to say a few words.

John Matthews said it was an honour to and a surprise to be nominated and now elected as chairman. He added his personal thanks to Geoffrey for the sterling work and dedication he has given to the Society. There are several challenges to face but with the members' support, John said he felt sure that the N&N will continue to meet its objectives in protecting historic buildings and enhancing our landscape for future generations.

The recent creation of the North of Tyne Combined Authority with regards to planning issues will be subject to debate and we have already been in contact with the new Mayor to set up a meeting.

John then introduced the guest speaker, Andrew Joicey.

Andrew gave a talk about the concerns of windfarm development in Northumberland

Lester gave thanks and presented Andrew with a bottle of malt whisky.