

Minutes of the fifth Annual General Meeting of members of The Big Apple Association Ltd, held at the Trumpet Inn, HR8 2RA at 7pm on Wednesday 19th March 2025

Present:

Members:

Ollie Blanchflower, Richard Denman, Jackie Denman, Isabel Dunn, Sam Everitt, Mary Fielding, Jake Herbst, Katia Herbst, David Hewitt, Charlie Kimberley, Kevin Malia, David Murdoch, Grace Orton, John Orton. Brian Robbins, Fran Robbins, Annie Skittery, James Skittery, Charlie Smart, Sally Smart, Norman Stanier, Annie Stanier, Bev Stokes, Russell Sutcliffe, Steve Swaithe (in the Chair), Gill Swaithe, Irene Tomkinson, Patrick Tomkinson.

Non-members:

Charles Martell (Guest speaker), Lyn Sugden

After the AGM was closed, we were joined by Kieran Terry and Matt Smith from the team at Hellens to hear Charles Martell's talk about the importance of the perry pears, seeking support from the Big Apple Association for a comprehensive approach to their identification.

AGENDA

1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

Steve Swaithe, Chairman of the Big Apple Association Ltd, welcomed everyone to the AGM and thanked the Trumpet Inn for hosting the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence were received from:

Pam Harris, Liv Manning, James Marsden, Fran Robinson, Sally Webster

3. Note of proxy votes received and accepted as valid

One proxy vote had been received from Pam Harris, with her vote vested in the Chair.

4. To receive and approve the Minutes of the AGM held on Wednesday 20th March 2024

The Minutes of the previous AGM had been circulated in advance. There being no questions, they were approved by the meeting.

5. To receive and adopt the Annual Return and the Annual Accounts for The Big Apple Association Ltd for the period ended 31st December 2024

David Murdoch, Treasurer, presented the draft Annual Accounts for 2024. These had been circulated in advance, and a summary was shared on screen. David noted that a small excess of expenditure over income (£17) had been made over the course of the year. This had been carefully managed by distributing surplus funds to local social and community activities in order to avoid unnecessary payment of Corporation Tax. Jim Glanville was thanked for his watchful eye over preparation of the accounts.

A question was asked about the rise in event expenditure for 2025 over 2024. The Treasurer did not have the breakdown to hand but suggested that this could be explained in some part by the change of format for Blossomtime, requiring extra expenditure, for example on ticket production, transport expenses etc... The Treasurer offered to provide further details if required.

Jackie Denman, Secretary, shared key points from the Annual Return to the Financial Conduct Authority which, in effect, took the place of an Annual Report for a Community Benefit Society. Jackie thanked all the volunteers and event organisers for their huge contribution to a successful event programme in 2024. She referred to the benefits of a new setting for the Cider and Perry Trials and subsequent Blossomtime activity at Dragon Orchard, Putley, as an example of the new ways in which familiar venues had been used.

The Cider and Perry Trials had received around 160 entries, and entrants had reaped the benefit of the new location at Dragon Orchard, blessed with sunshine. Special mention was given to the winners of overall Cider and Perry Champions, respectively Henhope Cider and Alistair Smith, and to James Marsden who was awarded Best Product in Show.

The new approach reinforced the importance of the outdoor experience of Big Apple to everyone concerned. For the public weekend of Blossomtime, an ambitious new arrangement was introduced, with three venues of Putley Parish Hall, Court Farm Barn, Aylton, and Dragon Orchard benefitting from being linked by a new tractor and trailer service. The Skittery family and their team were thanked for their valued support with this.

We were as ever grateful for the offer of a space at the Malvern Autumn Show to share news of our activities with potential visitors, both new and familiar.

Once again, we gave advertising support at Harvestime to the Daffodil Line bus, a service which helps visitors to enjoy the event while reducing car traffic in Much Marcle. We had another successful Harvestime. Highlights included the introduction at Woodredding Farm of tastings of 'Five local cheeses, four ciders and a perry', a curated tasting of Herefordshire perries led by Adam Wells, author of 'Perry: a drinker's guide', together with well supported talks by agronomist Matt Greep and orchardist Martin Hayes. Sadly, Avenue Cottage were unable to open on this occasion due to Nick Pope's long awaited surgery.

Marcher Apple Network, Hereford Museum of Cider, the National Perry Pear Collection, Russell Sutcliffe and numerous local orchard owners and cooks were thanked for their invaluable help in mounting our apple display and tastings.

6. To report on the system adopted for the application of any profits

An invitation had been circulated through local networks in early November 2024, inviting applications from local community organisations for up to £250 to support projects for "social or community purposes within the seven parishes". The deadline for applications was 17th December 2024, in order for Directors to meet to consider applications, notify successful applicants and transfer funds prior to the end of the financial year on 31st December 2024. On this occasion, Directors were able to allocate a sum of money to each of the six applications received. Hopefully, awareness of this opportunity will increase in future years.

Appointment of Directors

The longest serving of the Directors (currently Steve Swaithe, Norman Stanier, Jackie Denman, David Murdoch) is required to retire from office at each AGM. On this occasion, David Murdoch will retire. Remaining Directors continue in office and retiring Directors are eligible for re-election. David Murdoch has indicated that he is willing to serve another term.

7. To invite and declare any nominations of Members willing to be considered for election as a Director of the Society

A nomination for David Murdoch to stand for re-election was received from David Hewitt, seconded by Katia Herbst.

8. To re-elect David Murdoch as a Director of the Society

David Murdoch was duly re-elected by an overwhelming majority of members present.

9. To consider any further nominations for election as a Director of the Society.

Steve Swaithe put forward the name of Annie Skittery as an additional Director of the Society, which would bring the total to five. The proposal was seconded by Jake Herbst, and received overwhelming support from members present.

10. In addition to the Directors, the following are members of the Operations Committee and are willing to remain in office: Annie Skittery (Chair); Isabel Dunn; David Hewitt; Graham Skittery; Charlie Smart; Sally Webster; Mary Fielding; Charlie Kimberley.

We have also welcomed Olivia Manning, who joined us during the year, having kindly offered to 'learn the ropes' in order to take over the running of the Big Apple Cider and Perry Trials.

New members would be welcome to join the OC and can be co-opted at any time.

Steve Swaithe commented in particular on the important contribution made by the new and younger members of our Committee.

11. In accordance with Section 84 of the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, a resolution not to undertake a full professional audit of the Society for the year ending 31st December 2025.

The resolution was passed on a show of hands.

12. Any other business

There was none.

13. Date of next Annual General Meeting was announced as Wednesday 18th March 2026.

Following the conclusion of the formal business, our Vice Chairman Norman Stanier was invited to read a poem by F.W. Harvey, a Gloucestershire boy and contemporary of the Dymock Poets. The poem is included, untitled, in 'Perry Pears' published by the National Fruit and Cider Institute in 1963. It provides a homage to perry pears and their important relationship with the area bordering the River Severn – a fitting introduction to Charles Martell, local champion of all things Gloucestershire and longtime friend to the Big Apple.

Charles Martell is known for his dedication to all things that make his own county of Gloucestershire distinctive and we are fortunate that the common boundary with Herefordshire lies so close to our area of benefit. Charles spoke with great authority and consideration about the importance of the perry pear collection at Hellens Manor, and the future possibilities that might help its formal identification and within which the Big Apple might play its part.