

THE HEATH & HAMPSTEAD SOCIETY
Minutes of the 122nd Annual General Meeting held at
St. Stephen's, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead on Wednesday 19 June 2019 at 7.30pm

Members of General Committee present: Lord Hoffmann (President), Martin Humphery (Vice-President), Marc Hutchinson (Chair), Maureen Clark-Darby (Treasurer), Evelyn Ellis (Secretary), John Beyer, David Castle, Tony Ghilchik, Robert Linger, Thomas Radice and John Weston (Members of General Committee)

Apologies were received from Douglas Maxwell. Frank Harding, Vicki Harding and Peter Tausig.

President's Welcome

The President welcomed members to the 122nd Annual General Meeting and extended a particular welcome to Helen Lawrence, the Society's guest speaker.

1. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the 121st Annual General Meeting of the Society held on 13 June 2018 were tabled for approval.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be approved and signed by the President.

2. Election of President

Marc Hutchinson proposed the re-election of Lord Hoffmann as the Society's President.

RESOLVED that Lord Hoffmann be re-elected as President.

3. Chair's Annual Report

The President invited the Chair of the Society to present his Annual Report for 2018-19.

The text of that report is contained in the appendix to these Minutes.

The following questions/matters were raised by members on the report:

1. Abacus School: Since the first planning application has been refused once, is the school allowed to reapply? The Chair confirmed that a new application for a single-entry school was expected.
2. A number of travellers' caravans had recently arrived on the Heath near the old North Fairground - has anything been done to remove them? The Chair confirmed the City had had them removed promptly.
3. The view from Parliament Hill at the statutory viewpoint is increasingly obstructed by trees; and there is a proposed obtrusive high-rise development (possibly 25 stories) at Gospel Oak that will be visible from the Heath. The Chair said he would refer these matters to the relevant Society Sub-Committees.
4. Police presence: should not the old police station be put back to use as a police station? The Chair said this was not going to occur as the building was now owned by the Department of Education, but there was an annexe which it was hoped could be used to accommodate local police. The Society continued to press local government and the Mayor over the lack of local police.

5. There were packs of out-of-control dogs on the Heath brought on by commercial dog-walkers - they ought to have numbers/badges. The Heath Constabulary patrol in vans and the walkers disappear into the woods as the vans approach. The Chair said that the new licensing scheme would seek to control this problem.
6. Ellen Solomons, Chair of the Vale of Health Society, thanked Marc Hutchinson for all the work he was doing on the South Fairground Site planning inquiry.
7. Tesco in the Village was still using large delivery lorries, parking illegally, and causing traffic problems and danger to drivers and pedestrians. The Chair said this was a never-ending problem as Tesco paid the repeated fines but did not alter the delivery arrangements. He agreed deliveries should be made at less busy times. Camden Council seemingly lacked the means and resources to stop the problem.

4. Treasurer's Report

The President invited the Treasurer to present the Society's Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2018, which had been examined by Fisher Phillips LLP, Chartered Accountants, and which were then tabled.

The Treasurer delivered the following report to members.

The major items of difference between the Society's 2018 Financial Statements and those for 2017 are that legacies and donations in 2018 were reduced by 45%. These items can be seen on the face of the Statement of Financial Activity.

Membership was sustainable year on year, standing at over 2,000 members in 2017/2018, of which 510 are life members. Subscription income, including Gift Aid, was up by 7% year on year. This percentage increase is due to timing differences in subscription payments by annual members and an increase in life memberships.

During 2018 the Society's expenditure exceeded income by £2,098; there was a £759 deficit in restricted funds and a deficit of £1,339 in unrestricted funds. There was a small loss on investment for the year, giving a total deficit for 2018 of £2,754.

The Society's running costs were up by 6% year on year. This was due to the ever increasing newsletter costs. This increase will be reversed this year because of the change to a new printing company, Lonsdale. Also the Society has had to pay approximately £2,000 in fees to its auditors who have, not unreasonably, said they can no longer examine our increasingly complicated accounts on a pro bono basis.

The Trustees reviewed the Society's accounting policies and decided no changes to these policies were required.

At 31 December 2018, the Society's capital and reserves were in a satisfactory position, standing at £65,288; £33,655 was held in unrestricted funds and £31,633 in restricted funds.

The subscription rates and free membership cap proposed by the Trustees as recommended by her for 2019 remain the same as those for 2018. In other words, there is to be no increase in subscription rates and no change to the cap.

RESOLVED that the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2018 be adopted.

5. Appointment of Auditors

The President thanked Fisher Phillips LLP, Chartered Accountants, for acting as the Society's auditors for the last financial year. He then proposed their re-appointment as the Society's auditors for the current financial year.

RESOLVED that Fisher Phillips LLP, Chartered Accountants, be re-appointed as the Society's auditors for the current financial year.

6. Subscription Rates

The President noted that the Trustees were not proposing any increase in the subscription rates for the year 2020 and no change to the present limit on free membership. He invited members to resolve to accept that recommendation.

RESOLVED that there should be no increase in the Society's membership subscription rates for 2020, and no change to the present limit on free membership.

7. Election of Officers and other Members of the General Committee

Officers

Following receipt of nominations, the President proposed the election of each of the following Officers, each of whom was elected:

Martin Humphery – Vice-President
Marc Hutchinson – Chair
Maureen Clark-Darby – Treasurer
Evelyn Ellis – Secretary

General Committee Members

There were no other elections to the General Committee. Tony Ghilchik, Frank Harding, Vicki Harding, Robert Linger and John Weston continue the terms for which they were elected. The Chairs of the three Sub-Committees are trustees and members of the General Committee, but they are appointed from time to time by the General Committee and not elected.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm and was followed by a talk by Helen Lawrence on the occasion of the launch of her new book entitled 'How Hampstead Heath was Saved – a story of people power'.

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Chair

Date:

Chair's Report 2019

Today's AGM marks the 122nd anniversary of the founding of the Society. It also marks the fifth anniversary of my chairmanship. I said to my wife, wouldn't it be appropriate for me to reflect on the last five years and the changes in, and achievements of, the Society during that half decade. She said it would not be appropriate as members would think that I was impliedly claiming the achievements for myself, rather in the Trump style, and that even if I attributed these achievements to our hard-working trustees and committee members my speech would have an unwelcome vainglorious flavour.

So I have decided on a compromise. At the end of my report I will very briefly mention some of the Society's endeavours in these last five years - but I will devote my main report to the things in which the Society is currently, or is about to be, engaged, and this is, for the most part, over and above what you will have read in the trustees' statutory report in the financial statements and my 'chair's annual report' in the May newsletter.

We are currently faced with six full-on planning battles and one regrettable, because it was avoidable, licensing battle.

The planning battles are, in no particular order.

1. 55 Fitzroy Park, where an old house with an enormous garden abutting Millfield Lane is proposed to be demolished and replaced by five houses, two of which will have access from Millfield Lane. We have an opinion from leading counsel that this planning application should be refused simply on the ground of its non-compliance with Camden's Local Plan in respect of protected designated open spaces - and we are working with local residents and the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association in pursuing our objections.

2. Abacus school is making a second planning application in order to establish a single form school at the old police station at Downshire Hill. We successfully objected to the first application a couple of years ago and we will be objecting for the same reasons to this application.

3. On the North Fairground Site, at the Vale of Health, a developer with an option to purchase the site wishes to construct there a number of permanent bungalows on wheels. The planning inquiry will be held on 1st October of this year where Ellen Solomons and I will appear for the Vale of Health Society and our Society respectively.

4. The planning inquiry on the South Fairground Site was adjourned to 20 August. On that date the applicant Jita Lukka who has built an illegal chalet, in the bizarre style of a gingerbread house, on the site, will be cross-examined by counsel for Camden, the City, and our Society and the Vale of Health Society. She has belatedly appointed a Queen's Counsel to represent her, but we are still confident that her appeal to the inspector will fail. Incidentally if you search for Jita Lukka on Youtube, you will see some amusing photographic collages and commentary put up, one must assume, by an angry local resident.

5. Queen Mary's House, which is the large conglomerate of low-rise buildings at the top of East Heath road as it comes to Whitestone Pond, is owned by the Royal Free Hospital, which is proposing to sell it off for the development of high-rise luxury flats. It goes without saying that we, and so many local residents, are absolutely opposed to this course of action not only because the new building would be eye-catchingly visible from several parts of the Heath, but also because the existing building, which is in good structural repair, could be easily used for genuinely affordable housing or some other social purpose.

The licensing battle I mentioned relates to the alcohol and film licence currently being sought by Keats House. We and local residents have filed formal objections to this application which, at least on paper, seems to allow an unlimited number of alcohol-sustained events at the House, Library and garden. Camden are proposing a licensing committee hearing on 27 June. However we hope to have that hearing postponed in order to give us the chance to try to agree with the management of Keats House a much amended and uncontroversial form of application.

On the Town side, our Town Subcommittee has been engaged in the project to reopen the garden at Oriel Place in the Village, which is now going ahead. It has also been involved in consultations over traffic, pedestrian crossings in the High Street, and the Third Runway at Heathrow; and it is about to get involved in the current proposals from the Local Government Boundary Commission to re-draw the ward boundaries of certain streets and mews near South End Green so as to move them into the wards of Gospel Oak or Belsize Park. This is not an entirely political or party political matter, because in redrawing the boundaries the Commission is required, under the relevant Act, to have regard, not just of the proper balancing of the numbers of electors in each ward, but also to the need to reflect - and I'm quoting from the statute - the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities, and in particular the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties. Local politicians have previously made submissions to the Commission in support of these changes, which unfortunately misrepresented the role, coverage and membership of the Society, something which is directly relevant to the criteria which I have just mentioned. So the Society will be making a hostile submission to the Commission in this current round of consultation.

The other Town project on which I should comment is the photographic competition for Hampstead Village. The hashtag myHampsteadHeath Instagram competition continues to run, but the reason for the delay in launching the Town photography competition is that a key element of both competitions was the display of the winning entry on a specially designed lift poster at Hampstead underground station. Last year Exterior Media, to whom Transport for London have outsourced the management of all advertising across the Transport for London network, tore up our contract mid-term on the basis that it was, they said, financially unprofitable. This outrageous behaviour disrupted the Heath photographic competition. But we have now reached an understanding with Exterior that our contract with them, at charity rates of course, is not unprofitable and that it is not in their interests to turn local business away especially, as you will know, there are empty poster slots in those lifts. So when we have agreed the new advertising arrangements, we will start the Town photo competition.

On the Heath side of things, the arrival onto the Heath Subcommittee of Prof Jeff Wagge, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, has reinvigorated the quarterly Heath inspection walks with Heath staff; in fact they have been occurring more frequently than quarterly and some of these walks have been described in the newsletter.

The Events Policy for the Heath is in place and we look forward now to the draft policy dealing with the licensing of commercial activities on the Heath, the most controversial of which at present is commercial dog walking. The Society regularly get e-mails from members and non-members reporting incidents with the common theme of commercially walked dogs being out of control. Private walkers and their own dogs have been attacked and the walkers themselves abused and threatened by the commercial dog walkers when they dare to protest. The problem of commercial dog walking gets worse by the month because almost all commercial dog walking is banned from other open spaces in North London, with the result that the commercial dog-walking industry has relocated to the Heath. On an autumn weekday morning last year, I myself counted over 80 dogs, none of them under proper control, on the field below the Kenwood Dairy. Things are getting out of hand and we shall be pressing the City to introduce a strict and restrictive policy when it comes to the licensing of these businesses whose business operations are now spoiling the enjoyment of ordinary Heath visitors. We expect to see this policy in place later this year.

The other important current Heath matter is the proposal to erect, on a sensitive Heath site just outside Kenwood House and above Cohen's Fields, a humanitarian memorial to aid workers killed in the course of duty. We have forcefully opposed this, not because we disapprove of the project as such or the design, but because our primary charitable object is to keep the Heath as a wild and natural space, and so the erection of buildings or sculptures or anything man-made and visibly permanent will be opposed by us. We have met and will continue to meet with Kenwood, English Heritage and representatives of the humanitarian project to dissuade them from putting the sculpture on the Heath.

So much for our current work.

I would like to draw your attention to a couple of future social events.

On 11 September we are hosting a large outdoor party for some 120 Heath staff in order to mark the 30th anniversary of the City taking over the Heath from the London Residuary Body.

The other event is next year's new members' party. At this year's new members' party, we met a long-standing member who unapologetically explained that she had gate-crashed it. When asked why, she explained that, when she had joined the Society, there was no new members' party. This got us thinking. Given that the new members' parties were only instigated some 10 years ago, hundreds of our members who joined prior to that time have never been formally welcomed. So we think that what we will do is to include in each forthcoming new members' party an invitation to a decade of earlier members so that, after say 4 or 5 years, all existing members of the Society will have been properly welcomed, albeit retrospectively.

The membership of the Society has remained static, which is partly the result of the postponement of the intended maildrop which I talked about last year. This did not occur in September as planned for the rather mundane reason that the stationary which we had ordered did not arrive in time, with the result that the stuffing of the envelopes was delayed, with a further consequence that in practice we missed the September window for the maildrop. The point being, that the maildrop should occur at approximately the same time as we send out the annual renewal letters to our annual members. So I can assure you that the maildrop - and it will be a large one - will go ahead in this September.

We have only given away a few free memberships to competition winners and only one under the estate agents' scheme, the latter because of the depressed real estate market. So we have no need to ask you amend the cap on free memberships this coming year.

That concludes the body of my main report.

I said I would, with all the humility at my disposal, offer a summary of key events in the life of the Society over the last five years. They include:

First - the adoption of the Sage software system for our members' database and accounts. This allows us to identify our members by whatever category we decide, whether it be street location, membership category, gift aid status or whatever, and to be able to do this in an instant.

Secondly, the setting up of our new website with its interactive map of the Heath.

Thirdly, the institution of the hashtag myHampsteadHeath photographic competition. This is been successful beyond our expectations with thousands of entries.

Fourthly, the Dams judicial review. We lost the case as you know, but we were right to bring it. The judge found that we had an arguable case but we lost on the narrow point that Parliament, as the judge found, had irrevocably delegated, to the profession of 'dam engineers', the discretion to set the standard of storm safety for commercial reservoirs, including the three largest Ponds on the Heath, and that those engineers were entitled, in their discretion, to impose a standard of absolute safety rather than one of reasonable safety. In this respect the reservoirs legislation is unique in this country because all other risky enterprises, such as nuclear power stations or the Thames Barrier, only have to meet a standard of reasonable safety. Completion of the Dams Project itself has brought some benefits to the Heath in terms of improved ecology and water quality and the opportunity to desilt some of the ponds using heavy equipment which would not normally be available to the City. And the landscape itself has suffered less than we genuinely feared.

Fifthly, we were instrumental in persuading the City to alter the regular timetabling of the meetings of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee so that the considered and agreed deliberations of that committee could be put before the Hampstead Heath

Management Committee in a timely manner which allowed to the latter to see clearly what the collective view of the former was.

Sixthly, on the basis of a confidential arrangement, we were allowed to participate in the drafting of the private Bill for the management of all the City's open spaces, which received the Royal Assent last year. We were able in that regard to include special provisions for the protection of the Heath.

Seventhly and lastly, we have changed the production and printing of the newsletter and given the contract for it to Lonsdale of Wellingborough. This has enabled us to make very significant financial savings and to introduce full colour.

In closing this report I must pay tribute to one of our patrons and former vice-presidents, Gerry Isaaman, who died this month. He was editor of the Ham & High for many years and made it a uniquely profitable local paper with a huge circulation and many famous contributors. It was said of the paper, only half-jokingly, that it was the only local paper which promoted its own foreign policy. Martin Humphrey and I represented the Society at Gerry's funeral last week which was an occasion for many humorous reminiscences. My favourite one was of Gerry's insistence that, even though the Ham & High was a local paper, it must avoid the journalistic clichés of that class of publication, with the result that journalists on the paper were absolutely forbidden to start any news report with the words "Angry residents..." Gerry was a huge supporter of the Society and its campaigns all his life and, even in these last 12 months, was involved with Martin and myself in the project to restore Constable's Tomb in the churchyard of Hampstead Parish Church. I am happy to say that, after a pause, the project is now mostly funded and will be going ahead.

My thanks as Chair go, as in every year, to my fellow trustees and committee members who devote so many hours and so much effort to protecting the Heath and the Village. It is their work and your support as members that sustains the Society's high reputation and makes it the force for the public good which it so clearly is.

Are there any questions?