

THE HEATH & HAMPSTEAD SOCIETY
Minutes of the 119th Annual General Meeting held at
St. Stephen's, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead on Thursday 2 June 2016 at 7.30pm

Members of General Committee present: Lord Hoffmann (President), Martin Humphery (Vice-President), Marc Hutchinson (Chair), Maureen Clark-Darby (Treasurer), Nigel Steward (Secretary), John Beyer, David Castle, Tony Ghilchik, Frank Harding, Gordon Maclean, Douglas Maxwell, Thomas Radice, Peter Tausig and John Weston (Members of General Committee)

Apologies were received from Jessica Learmond-Criqui, Robert Linger and Peter Noble.

President's Welcome

The President welcomed members to the 119th Annual General Meeting and extended a particular welcome to the Society's guest speaker, Matthew Maran.

1. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the 118th Annual General Meeting of the Society held on 20 June 2015 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 2015-2016.

The Chair said that members of the Society might be wondering why they receive no fewer than three annual reports from the Society, namely: the Trustees' Report which complied with guidance from the Charity Commission and the applicable SORP and which was contained with the Society's accounts; the Chair's report in the May Newsletter; and this verbal annual report at the AGM.

Rather than repeat or summarise what he wrote in the May Newsletter, the Chair said he would draw attention to three more general matters which did not appear in the formal reports.

The new editor of the Newsletter, Martin Webster, had said to the Chair that, as a life member of the Society, he had not appreciated the amount of work done by the Trustees and sub-committee members in getting to grips with so many current issues and problems. This set the Chair thinking about how much time is annually and collectively spent by the Society's Trustees and 34 subcommittee members on Society business.

Just taking the time spent in committee meetings and representation on the Kenwood Landscape Forum, the Ponds Project Stakeholder Group, and the Ponds Community Working Group, he estimated that the aggregate was well over 1,600 hours. If you then added in all the hours spent by the individuals or groups working on the Society's projects and affairs, planning for and holding new members' and Christmas parties, the Glass in Hand, Springett and other lectures, meetings with the City of London (including regular relationship meetings with the Heath Superintendent), Camden Council, Civic Voice and the London Forum and many other

organisations, the total number of hours ran into many thousands. So on the members' behalf the Chair wanted not only to welcome those new subcommittee members who had joined this year and whose names were in his report in the May Newsletter, but to thank all his fellow Trustees and the existing subcommittee members for the time and commitment they give to making the Society's continuing success what it was.

He wished to pay special tribute to two subcommittee members who had served in that and other capacities since the 1980s and who were still active with us today: Margaret Rodgers and Janis Hardiman.

The Chair's second general point concerned the Society's relations with the City of London Corporation. During his time as a trustee, he could say that the lowest point in these relations was when the Society commenced the judicial review in respect of the Dams Project. Following the judge's decision that, contrary to the Society's case, it was legally open to the City's dam engineer to require a standard of absolute safety with respect to dam maintenance, the Society accepted that the only rational course of action open to it was to work with the City on its two ponds project consultative committees to ensure that the works did not go further than the ones for which planning approval had been given; that as little damage, temporary or permanent, as possible was done to the Heath landscape; and that the inconvenience to Heath users during the works was minimised. To that end, the Chair, Lynda Cook and Tony Ghilchik had represented the Society at monthly and quarterly meetings of the working groups for the last 18 months, and would continue to do so until the engineering works ceased in October of this year.

The City had been very open with the members of those working groups and responsive to their suggestions and complaints. And, at the personal level, relations between the Heath management and staff on the one hand, and the Society's representatives on the other, were now greatly improved.

Perhaps as a consequence of this, the Society was invited to be involved with the confidential drafting of the City's Open Spaces Bill, which was currently making its way through Parliament. There was a long piece in the May Newsletter about this Bill and why, in its final form, the Society supported it. It was a particular aspect of the Society's four months of negotiation – by the Chair, John Beyer and Thomas Radice of the Heath Sub-Committee – that increased confidence that, contrary to newspaper reports and social media commentary, the City did not have any sinister or hidden agenda behind the Bill. And that aspect was the readiness of the City to understand the Society's concerns and to accept its amendments to the draft Bill. In fact, the Society encountered almost no resistance to the changes which it requested.

The licensing of events and activities on the Heath will be indirectly controlled by the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and, following the recent fiasco of the cafe tenders, the members of that Committee are organising themselves so as to ensure that their views are always taken account of in the future. The City now recognises that in relation to the cafes there was a failure properly to consult the Committee, and these consultation procedures are now being reviewed and – the Society anticipates – reformed to ensure that nothing like the cafe matter happens again.

The Society's charitable remit does not extend to campaigning over the cafe tenancies but the Society had asserted a legitimate interest in the need for the City to follow the mandatory consultation procedures in relation to all Heath matters laid down in the 1989 Order.

The Chair's third general matter related to the subscription increase which was approved at last year's AGM. The increase seemed not in any way to have deterred membership renewals or the rate of new members joining. This was very gratifying when one recalled that at the last increase, 10 years ago, the Society appeared to have lost around 400 annual members as a consequence.

At the AGM last year, members raised three questions for the Trustees to consider in relation to membership subscriptions, and he would answer those now.

The first was to extend the youth discount to age 35 instead of 25. The Trustees had looked at what other charities did in this regard, and decided that, so far as there was a norm, the norm was 25; and they were concerned that the extended discount would, on balance, lose funds which would not be made up by compensating increase membership in that ten-year bracket.

The second was to review the age profile of the Society's membership. This in practice proved impossible to do meaningfully because the Society had never asked the age of its joining or renewing members. When members claimed their senior discount, their claim was taken in good faith without obtaining evidence of their age. Trustees did not think that moving to a new regime which require disclosure of age as a condition of membership was, given past practice, one that would be generally welcomed. In response to a question from a member, the Chair said he thought that approximately 40% of the Society's membership qualified as "senior" under the current subscription regime.

The third suggestion was to introduce direct debit arrangements. The only advantage of direct debit over the existing system of standing order was that the Society could unilaterally increase subscriptions without the member's specific consent. Trustees had decided not to introduce direct debit for four reasons: 1 some members would be against it because of the control it gave the Society; 2 the renewal of the standing order subscriptions for the new membership rates had been easily handled with members readily increasing their standing orders without repeated prompting; 3 the Society lacked the administrative staff annually to activate the direct debits; and 4 the Trustees were not planning to recommend increased subscriptions for the next few years, and so the advantage of direct debit became less immediately relevant.

Nevertheless, the Society was looking into the possibility of members paying by PayPal. When this was looked at a few years ago, the PayPal commission charge was too great as a percentage of the members' subscription to make it worthwhile. However, that percentage was now much lower and the Society might be able to negotiate a percentage that which was acceptable.

In concluding he reported that the Society was in good health: its finances remained sound and it had replenished all three of its subcommittees with talented and committed new members. The Society had a new newsletter editor, Martin Webster, and it had just appointed and welcomed a new press officer, Mahima Luna.

On behalf of all those who run the Society he wanted to thank the membership for their continuing financial, practical and moral support.

4. Treasurer's Report

The President invited the Treasurer to present the Society's Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2015, which had been examined by Fisher Phillips, Chartered Accountants, and which were then tabled.

The Treasurer delivered the following report to members.

The major item of difference between the Society's 2015 Financial Statements compared to prior years was the donations received and expenditure for the legal costs of the Society's Hampstead Heath Ponds and judicial review campaign during 2014.

Membership was sustainable year on year, standing at over 2,000 members in 2015/14. Subscription income, including gift aid, was up by 7% year on year. She was pleased to report that there had been no material decrease in membership renewals caused by the increased subscription rates adopted last year.

During 2015 the Society's expenditure exceeded income by £3,967; there was a £5,819 deficit in restricted funds and a surplus of £1,852 in unrestricted funds. There was a small loss on investment for the year giving a total deficit for 2015 of £3,980.

The Society's running costs were down by 14% year on year. In 2014, the Society's running costs were down by 31% compared to 2013. The Society continued tightly to control costs.

During 2015 the Society reviewed its accounting policies. It was decided by the Trustees that no changes to these policies were required.

At 31 December 2015 the Society's capital and reserves were in a satisfactory position, standing at £54,744: £21,042 held in unrestricted funds and £33,702 held in restricted funds.

The membership subscription rates proposed by the Trustees for 2017 were are the same as those newly adopted for 2016.

There were no questions from members on the above report.

RESOLVED that the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2015 be adopted.

5. Appointment of Auditors

The President thanked Fisher Phillips, 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, 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 2017 and invited members to resolve to accept that recommendation.

RESOLVED that there should be no increase in the Society's membership subscription rates for 2017.

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

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
 Nigel Steward – Secretary

Following receipt of nominations, the President then proposed the election of the following as members of the General Committee for three-year terms, each of whom was elected:

Jessica Learmond-Criqui

Douglas Maxwell
Peter Tausig

The President advised that the following would be re-appointed as Chairs of their respective Sub-Committees and thereby would be appointed as Vice-Chairs of the Society and as members of the General Committee with effect from 30 June 2016:

David Castle – Planning Sub-Committee
Frank Harding – Town Sub-Committee
John Beyer – Heath Sub-Committee

The President mentioned that Robert Linger, the Society’s Membership Promotion Officer, could not stand for a further elected term of three years, having just served two successive such terms. If there was a vacancy on the General Committee, it was the Trustees’ intention to appoint Robert to that vacancy for one year, after which he would be able to stand once again for election.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Conclusion

The meeting concluded at 8.20 pm. and was followed by a talk by Matthew Maran, award-winning wildlife photographer, whose photographic album of the Heath, its wildlife and habitats, entitled “Hampstead heath: London’s Countryside”, was about to be published, the culmination of a four-year project.

(Note: a précis of Matt Maran’s talk will be found in the Society’s Newsletter for October 2016).

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Chair

Date: