

THE HEATH & HAMPSTEAD SOCIETY
Minutes of the 121st Annual General Meeting held at
St. Stephen's, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead on Wednesday 13 June 2018 at 7.30pm

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

Apologies were received from Douglas Maxwell.

President's Welcome

The President welcomed members to the 121st Annual General Meeting and extended a particular welcome to Andrew Lavery, Chair of the Hampstead Village Business Improvement District, Janine Griffis, Chair of the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum, and Piers Plowright, the Society's guest speaker.

1. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the 120th Annual General Meeting of the Society held on 19 June 2017 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 2017-2018 which was then read on the Chair's behalf by John Beyer, Society Vice-Chair, the Chair being temporarily indisposed.

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

4. Treasurer's Report

The President invited the Treasurer to present the Society's Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017, which had been examined by Fisher Phillips, Chartered Accountants, and which were then tabled.

The Treasurer delivered the following report to members.

The major items of difference between the Society's 2017 Financial Statements and those for prior years were the legacies received and the donations made as expenditure in 2016. These items could be seen on the face of the Statement of Financial Activity.

Membership was sustainable year on year, standing at over 2,000 members in 2018/17. Subscription income, including gift aid, was down by 7% year on year. This percentage decrease was due to the late payment of their subscriptions by annual members.

During 2017 the Society's expenditure exceeded income by £8,868; there was a £383 deficit in restricted funds but a surplus of £9,251 in unrestricted funds. There was a gain on investment for the year giving a total surplus for 2017 of £9,190.

The Society's running costs were down by 4% year on year. The Society continued tightly to control costs and was currently seeking to reduce the production and postage of the newsletter.

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

At 31 December 2017, the Society's capital and reserves were in a satisfactory position, standing at £68,042; £35,650 was held in unrestricted funds and £32,392 in restricted funds.

The subscription rates proposed by the Trustees, as recommended by the Treasurer, for 2019 are the same as those for 2018.

There were no questions from members on the above report.

RESOLVED that the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017 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 proposing no increase in the subscription rates for the year 2019 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 2019, and no change to the present limit on free membership.

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

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

Martin Humphery – Vice-President

Gordon Maclean – Vice-President
Marc Hutchinson – Chair
Maureen Clark-Darby – Treasurer
Evelyn Ellis – Secretary

Following receipt of nominations, the President then proposed the re-election of the following as members of the General Committee for the second of their three-year terms, both of whom were re-elected:

Tony Ghilchik
Dr Vicki Harding

The President advised that the following would be appointed or 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 2018:

David Castle – Planning Sub-Committee
John Beyer – Heath Sub-Committee
Andrew Haslam-Jones – Town Sub-Committee (new appointment)

8. Hampstead Village Business Improvement District

Andrew Lavery, Chair of the Hampstead Village Business Improvement District (usually known as the “Hampstead BID”) delivered a brief talk on the purpose, achievements and plans of the Hampstead BID.

9. Any other business

There was a suggestion that estate agents from Dartmouth Park and Highgate be included, in due course, in the so-called estate agents’ scheme for new member recruitment. The Chair agreed this should be considered.

There was a question about the frequency of basement developments in Hampstead and whether these remained a problem. The Chair confirmed there were, for the time being, fewer such developments but the planning process around them remained problematical.

There was no other business.

10. Conclusion

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm and was followed by an illustrated talk by award-winning BBC radio producer, Piers Plowright, entitled “Fog, Sounds, Smells, Conversations, And Eccentrics – Growing Up In Hampstead 1945-1965”.

(Note: a preview of the talk can be found in the Society's Newsletter for January 2018).

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President

Date:

Appendix – Text of Chair’s Annual Report

The most important event happening in Hampstead this year, or I suggest this decade, is the referendum to be held on 21 June to approve the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan. This monumental piece of work, produced over the last five years by the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum, will, if given proper effect by the authorities, make a significant difference to the planning regime as it affects Hampstead. The substance of the proposed plan was summarised in our May newsletter and I will not revisit that summary now, but a team from the Neighbourhood Forum is here this evening, and I have two requests to make of you: first, if you have not already done so, please pick up a leaflet from their stand over there and, if you are able to do so, display a poster in your window urging local residents to cast their vote on 21 June; and my second request is that you personally do indeed cast your votes on that day.

In order to be adopted the Plan only requires a simple majority of those voting. However, the greater the turnout, the greater the weight to be given to the Plan in planning decisions at all levels.

I would like to mention the principal achievements of the Society during these last 12 months.

First, the Heath. In relation to the Heath we have been closely involved in the drafting and re-drafting of the so-called ‘events policy’, which will be implemented under the Open Spaces Act of 2018, the legislation regulating all the City’s open spaces, which received its Royal Assent in March. This events policy is specific to the Heath and, as a general principle, does not seek to expand the range, size, frequency or locations of future Heath events relative to those currently held. The policy does contemplate that the City may wish to license an occasional novel event of a significant scale, in which case the approval of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee will be required as a prerequisite. The next policy on which the Society will be engaged in relation to the new Act is a policy for licensing, obviously in a limited and controlled way, the undertaking of commercial activities on the Heath by private enterprises, such as organised fitness classes and commercial dog-walking.

Without wishing to tempt fate, we have been successful so far in dealing with the threats posed to the fairground sites at the Vale of Health. The South Fairground Site was bought last year and the new owner has erected a bungalow on it, in breach of planning law. Camden Council are taking enforcement action on the basis of photographic evidence which we have provided. Unfortunately, the enforcement process is a slow one owing to hold-ups, not at the Camden level, but in Whitehall, where an inspector has to be appointed for the owner’s appeal. In relation to the North Fairground Site, the holder of an option to purchase the site applied for permission to erect 12 caravan-style bungalows on the site. I understand that the permission, which we have opposed with the support of counsel’s opinion, will in due course be refused.

I had hoped to be able to make a substantive announcement today in regard to the fate of Harry Hallows’ land, but all I can say at this stage is that the Society and the City are in confidential discussions with the charities, who are proposing publicly to auction the site on 18 June, to try to acquire it by private treaty.

The Globe Lawn Tennis Club situated 5 minutes from here has achieved its status as an asset of community value, which is one step down the path of preventing the site being sold for development. The Society played a significant role in helping the club with the nomination process.

Some of you may remember last year that I mentioned a forthcoming book by Helen Marcus, a former vice-president of the Society. The working title of the book is "How the Heath was Saved" and what will distinguish this publication from others on the same subject is that Helen is going to highlight the role of the Society in the preservation and expansion of the Heath over the last 120 years. Helen tells me that her book is now due for launch in late autumn.

Turning now to our achievements in the Village.

I am grateful to Robert Linger for taking the lead in organising the planting of the four new London plane trees in Hampstead High Street, which was the subject of the photograph on the cover of our last newsletter. I am also grateful to one of our patrons, Bill Oddie, who agreed to lead the ceremony.

We have recently successfully opposed the installation of so-called Legible London Signage: these very large black and yellow glossy pavement posts – they are round the West End - containing directions and maps for the local area. Years ago, the Society took the initiative for the erection of the modest black and white finger posts which you see around Hampstead indicating places of interest, and we feel that those are much more appropriate to the area. It appears that you all feel the same, because many of you, in response to an e-mail from me, wrote directly to Camden objecting to the proposals, and it was that weight of numbers which led to their abandonment.

This year saw what probably is the last, at least for the time being, of the exhibitions of paintings mounted at Burgh House relating to Hampstead; the title of the series was 'Hampstead Rediscovered'. The sixth exhibition, like the previous ones, was organised by Robert Linger and Malcolm Holmes, our archivist. These have been wonderful and memorable exhibitions, and I am very grateful to them both for organising them over the last few years.

Another project currently underway is the renovation and restoration of the black-and-white tiles for the street names of Hampstead. These are one of Hampstead's most distinguishing local features. Camden is in receipt of a large stock of new tiles and Anousheh Barbezieux of our Town Subcommittee is working with Councillor Stephen Stark to carry out this restoration project across the Hampstead conservation areas.

Another project on which we have been working, but which is unfortunately somewhat delayed, is the plan to restore and reopen the garden at Oriel Place near Gail's bakery. That garden belongs to Camden Council and will be reopened as soon as it has been refurbished. However, there has not been consensus on the recent and long-delayed proposals for that refurbishment, which were prepared by a private company; and so now, with Camden, we will need to procure a new set of designs, which take better account of the immediate surrounding area and pedestrian passage.

There are three important planning matters currently concerning the Society.

The first is the recent High Court decision concerning 15 Gayton Crescent, where unauthorised building work was carried out by the owner, who then successfully resisted its removal on the basis of cost and safety. We are still, with the help of legal advisers, analysing the significance of this case but, regardless of any legal technicalities, it does seem a shocking result that someone who openly and knowingly defies the planning laws can subsequently, and by reference to their own financial circumstances and the physical structure of the property, be able to evade those laws in practice.

The second matter concerns the erection of the Pears Building for the new immunology unit at the Royal Free Hospital. We are represented by one of our Planning Subcommittee members, Jeremy Walker, who is an architect, on the Community Working Group. The project has posed, and continues to pose, a threat to the structure of this Grade 1 listed church we are in tonight. There has been a serious conflict of expert opinion over the significance of that risk. In the end, at our request, Camden asked their own independent adviser on the resolution of this conflict to express a reasoned analysis of the competing views, and this analysis was in due course published and quite properly relied on by Camden. It explicitly favoured the views of the experts advising the Hospital rather than those advising the church. The Society of course is not in a position to seek to arbitrate in this matter and so, through the Community Working Group, we will continue to monitor the development with a view to protecting the church in pursuance of our second charitable object, which is the protection of all of Hampstead's old buildings.

The third planning matter which has arisen in the last month or so is the threatened sale of Queen Mary's House for demolition and replacement with luxury flats. Queen Mary's House, owned by the Royal Free, was built nearly 100 years ago as a maternity hospital; about 15 years ago it was converted to low-rental housing-association flats. It is the large institutional building at the top of East Heath Road on the corner of Heath Street. Too much affordable housing has been lost in Hampstead over the years, and we believe the building should not be demolished, but should be refurbished as affordable housing, which it plainly can be. We will certainly oppose the advertised proposal for a deluxe multi-storey apartment-block development there, given the sensitive site on the edge of the Heath.

My report is never complete without an expression of thanks to those who have conspicuously helped the Society so much during the past year.

I particularly wish to thank our Communications Subcommittee led by John Weston and assisted by Latoya Austin, John Beyer and Mahima Luna for all the work they have done in getting up and running our new website. I suppose a website is always a work in progress, and ours is no exception. Although we have uploaded a large amount of the historic material by way of an archive, there is still quite a lot of new material to be uploaded and I hope that will occur over the next 12 months or so. The element of the new website of which we are most proud is the interactive map of the Heath where members can, on their smartphones, access information about the particular piece of the Heath which they are visiting, in real-time and as they stand on it.

Our membership numbers continue to hold up and we hope they will be boosted by a large mail drop we are intending to do in September after the summer holidays. Last year, at this meeting, members approved an arrangement under which the General Committee could offer discounted or even free memberships to prospective new members as part of a particular scheme for recruitment. The first scheme was what we call the 'estate agents scheme' under which eight local agents agreed to provide purchasers in the district with a 'welcome pack' from the Society and an invitation to take one year's free membership on the condition that they signed a standing order for future membership payments at the full rate. The timing of our launch of the scheme was unfortunate in so far as it seemed to have coincided precisely with the collapse of the Hampstead property market, with the result that I think we have not achieved a single new membership via this scheme. Nevertheless, the estate agents themselves remain enthusiastic about it and, when the market picks up, we will be able to test the scheme for what it is worth.

The other scheme which we had in mind was one to offer not free, but discounted, memberships to the thousand or so participant entrants in our Heath photographic competition - hashtag my Hampstead Heath. Although that was our intention, we have had second thoughts insofar as, now that the new website is up and running, we wish personally to invite those entrants to join at the full rate.

We will see how many of them take up that invitation and, if we achieve a poor response, then we will reconsider the offer of discounted memberships.

So, given the situation with respect to both of those schemes, we do not need to ask members to alter, for the current year, the limited annual authority which they gave us last year for such memberships. And our President will seek your agreement to that status quo in the context of your approval to keep next year's membership rates at the current rates.

I need to mention some changes among those who help run the Society.

Martin Webster has acted as editor of our newsletter for over three years and, having planned absences overseas, now wishes to step down from that role. I'm very grateful to Martin for all he has done and I hope you will agree with me that the standard of the newsletter is as high as it has ever been. This is a recent decision of Martin's and therefore I wish to take this evening to ask anyone present, who would like to consider the role of editor and to understand more about it, to contact me. I should say, for reasons I won't go into now, that the role is not as onerous as it might appear. We always seem to have a surfeit of material for the newsletter, so the editorial role is more a management role than one of chasing reluctant authors.

Similarly, Avril Kleeman, a long-standing member of our Town Subcommittee wishes to step down from her role in managing the Hampstead Card scheme. The scheme, as of this year, is completely up-to-date, and I would be grateful if someone will come forward to assist with its future management, which - I must emphasise - only requires occasional bouts of work and is certainly not a weekly or even monthly task.

The appointed Chair of our Town Subcommittee, Martin Thompson, had unexpectedly to step down owing to work and other commitments here and overseas. I'm very grateful that another member of that Subcommittee, Anousheh Barbezieux, agreed to act as acting chair up until this summer when, after this annual general meeting, the trustees resolve to appoint or reappoint the chairs of the three subcommittees. I am pleased to say that another existing member of the Town Subcommittee, Andrew Haslam-Jones, has agreed to become its permanent Chair, and it is the intention of the trustees to appoint him at their meeting in July. Anousheh will of course remain as an active member of that subcommittee.

On our Heath Subcommittee, John Hunt and Peter Tausig retired, to be replaced by Professor Jeff Wagge OBE and Pete Mantle; we welcome them as new subcommittee members and are grateful for the work which they are already doing in their respective roles.

To conclude - the Society is in good shape, both in terms of its reputation, its influence, its finances and its membership, and once again I need to thank the committee members for the thousands of hours of work which they collectively put in each year, and to you our membership for your financial and moral support of us, and in particular to all of those who take the time to write in forthright terms to Camden or other relevant authorities when we need to mount a campaign in pursuance of the Society's aims.

Thank you very much.

Are there any questions?