

THE HEATH & HAMPSTEAD SOCIETY
Minutes of the 123rd Annual General Meeting held at
St. Stephen's, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead on Wednesday 21 July 2021 at 7.30pm

Members of General Committee present: Lord Hoffmann (President), Marc Hutchinson (Chair), Maureen Clark-Darby (Treasurer), Evelyn Ellis (Secretary), John Beyer, David Castle and Andrew Haslam-Jones (Vice-Chairs), Latoya Austin, Tony Ghilchik, Robert Linger, Thomas Radice and Jeff Waage (Members of General Committee)

Apologies were received from Martin Humphery (Vice-President), Frank Harding, Dafydd James-Williams, Jessica Learmond-Criqui, Peter Tausig and John Weston.

President's Welcome

The President welcomed members to the 123rd Annual General Meeting and noted that, owing to the inability to hold the annual general meeting in 2020 because of lockdowns, this meeting would deal with business left over from last year.

1. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the 122nd Annual General Meeting of the Society held on 19 June 2019 were tabled for approval.

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

2. Chair's Report

The President invited the Chair of the Society to present his Report for 2019-2021.

The text of the Chair's Report is appended to these minutes.

3. Treasurer's Report

The President invited the Treasurer to present the Society's Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2019 and 2020, which had been examined by Fisher Phillips LLP, Chartered Accountants, and which were then tabled.

The Treasurer delivered the following report to members.

This year members were being asked to approve the adoption of two sets of financial statements, the first of which the Society has already had to file with the Charity Commission.

Rather than deliver the usual full report, it would make more sense just to highlight the important numbers, and any significant changes or trends since 2019.

The Chair has already commented on the closure of our PO Box, the effect of which seriously disrupted and delayed our seasonal membership renewals for 2020.

Turning then to the key numbers:

Membership has been sustainable year on year, standing at 2,053 at the end of 2020, of which 526 were life memberships. Membership subscriptions, including the related Gift Aid, were down by 7% in

2019 but up by 8% in 2020. These percentage differences are due to timing differences in subscription receipts from annual members and, in both years, an increase in life memberships, including some members switching from annual to life membership.

Donations to the Society were up in 2019, including £49,500 principally made to cover the legal costs of the Society's engagement of an expert witness and successful legal representation, with the Vale of Health Society and the City, at the two inspectors' hearings in relation to the two fairground sites at the Vale of Health.

In 2020, the Society received donations from interested parties of £28,374 to fund legal representation and expert witnesses for the inspector's hearing of the Abacus School appeal.

Most of these donations were Gift-aided, and the Society has recovered the Gift-aid element, and, as you will know, the Society's position was upheld in all those hearings.

The Society running costs remain generally consistent, although they were reduced in 2020 by reason of the cost-saving from the decision to produce only two newsletters rather than three.

The Society's exceptional costs of £67,472 for 2019 represent the legal and expert witness costs of the fairground cases, of which £26,667 was for the South Fairground and £12,420 for the North Fairground, the Society contributing £15,000 from its own reserves.

In 2020, the exceptional costs of £31,374 represent the legal and expert witness costs for the Abacus School hearing; and the exceptional costs of £6,000, from the Society's own reserves, represent the cost of the seasonal biodiversity display boards erected to mark the 150th anniversary of the Act of Parliament that saved the Heath.

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

At 31 December 2020, the Society's capital and reserves were in a satisfactory position, standing at £47,793; £20,613 was held in unrestricted funds and £27,180 in restricted funds.

The subscription rates and free membership cap proposed by the Trustees as recommended by me for 2022 remain the same as those for 2021 and 2020. In other words, no increase.

RESOLVED that the Reports and Accounts for the years ended 31 December 2019 and 2020 be adopted.

4. Appointment of Auditors

The President thanked Fisher Phillips LLP, Chartered Accountants, for acting as the Society's auditors for the two last financial years. 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.

5. Subscription Rates

The President noted that the Trustees were not proposing any increase in the subscription rates for the next financial year 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 2021, and no change to the present limit on free membership.

6. Amendment of the Constitution

The President explained that the Trustees, with the support of the Charity Commission, proposed to put beyond legal doubt the ability of the Society and its committees to meet by audio, or audio-visual, means. There was no proposal to move generally to this mode of meeting but it was important to have the flexibility in case of the impracticability of meeting in person.

In response to a question from the floor, the President said the Chair would report at the 2022 AGM on the practical experience of the Society in holding virtual meetings in 2021-2022.

RESOLVED: that the proposed new Rule 27A, as set out in the Notice of Meeting, be adopted.

7. Ratification of continuation in office of elected General Committee Members

The President explained that, whereas those General Committee Officers who are elected annually had, under the express terms of the Constitution, remained in office until this meeting, those members serving three-years terms were limited to their term. Since it had been impossible to hold the AGM in 2020, the Trustees and those elected members had collectively agreed that the latter should simply serve an extra year. The members of the Society were now asked to ratify this arrangement with retrospective effect.

RESOLVED: that the elected members of the General Committee should, notwithstanding the terms of the Constitution, be treated as validly serving an additional year as part of their nominal 'three-year' term.

8. 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

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

For a first term of three years:

Latoya Austin

Dafydd James-Williams

Jessica Learmond-Criqui

Maddy Raman

Professor Jeff Waage OBE

For a second term of three years:

Frank Harding

Robert Linger

Tony Ghilchik and Vicki Harding 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.

It was the Trustees' intention to appoint Thomas Radice and John Weston to vacancies on the General Committee under Rule 21(2). Thomas Radice was stepping down in September 2021 from his position as the Society's representative on the City's Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee; he would be replaced by Professor Jeff Waage.

9. Any other business

Members raised the following:

- Gratitude was due to Heath Hands and the daily volunteers who helped restore the Heath after its degradation through heavy footfall
- Camden Council was to be congratulated on its use of water bags to help the growth of newly-planted street trees
- There was a problem with the use of overly-white pavement grouting in conservation areas – it was confirmed that the Town Sub-Committee would look into this
- The Society should oppose the high-rise buildings proposed in the Murphy's Yard development at Gospel Oak – it was confirmed the Society actively opposes these
- The trees at Parliament Hill were now blocking the view of London and needed to be crowned and pruned – it was confirmed that lockdowns had delayed this work in 2020 and the work would proceed in the winter of 2021
- The recent Heath floods appeared to justify the Dams Project on the Heath – it was confirmed that indeed no dams had collapsed but that the recent storms were not the 1-in-400,000-year event modelled for in the construction.

10. Retirement of Lord Hoffmann and the election of Lord Mance as the Society's new President

Tony Hillier, the former Chair of the Society, and Marc Hutchinson delivered tributes to Lord Hoffmann. Lord Hoffmann replied and proposed the election of Lord Mance as his successor as President.

RESOLVED: that Lord Mance be elected as President of the Society.

Lord Mance then addressed the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 8.50pm.

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Chair

Date:

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Chair's Report to 2021 AGM

It is just over two years ago that I delivered my last report to you as Chair of the Society. So much has happened since then. I prepared this draft report and read it aloud in order to time it. It took well over an hour. Nice as it is to be face-to-face again, I sensed a risk that an unprecedented gargantuan report from me tonight might be regarded as yet another manifestation of post-lockdown aberrant behaviour.

So, I have reduced this report to the essentials.

We tried more than once to schedule an annual general meeting last year, but we were defeated by the sudden imposition of lockdowns and the unavailability of suitable venues - for example St Stephen's itself was not available at all last year because it had been taken over by the adjoining school. As an unincorporated charity we lacked the legal power to hold an online AGM, and so your trustees eventually concluded that the least uncertain and problematic course was to combine the relevant business of last year's intended AGM with today's.

In my attempt to ensure you leave this building in a state of optimism. I have decided to report the bad news first. There are two pieces.

At some point in 2020, the Royal Mail closed our Post Office Box. They did this without any notification to us and despite the fact that we pay for its annual renewal by direct debit. Not only was it closed, but we had no reason to suspect the

closure at the time because the Royal Mail continued to forward to our secretary some of the mail being sent to the closed box. Following discussions with the Royal Mail, who owing to staff turnover and lack of records were unable to explain the closure, we understand that most mail addressed to the box would have been returned to sender. Earlier this year we managed to get the box reopened with the same number and address. We very much regret the widespread inconvenience caused to our members and we are seeking compensation from the Royal Mail.

The other setback concerns building on the edge of the Heath. We have always successfully opposed the four successive attempts to build new houses in the tiny car park of Jack Straw's Castle.

Last year's attempt was again rejected by Camden in response to which the developer appealed to an inspector. Along with the City, we intervened at the online hearing and we were represented by counsel. Like the City, we did and said all we could to oppose the proposal for two new three-storey mock-Georgian townhouses, and we produced relevant evidence on biodiversity and the loss of views to and from the Heath. So we were hugely disappointed that on 17 May the inspector found in favour of the developer.

In doing so she departed from the reasoned views of the previous inspectors who had turned down appeals to build on the site, ignored the biodiversity arguments and, most shockingly, reasoned, in an Alice in Wonderland fashion, that although relevant Heath views would clearly be blocked by

the new buildings, Heath visitors could escape the impact of the loss by walking away into the more heavily wooded areas.

Notwithstanding what we regard as these flaws in the decision, our counsel and Camden do not see the basis for an appeal to the court. So this decision is a terrible setback and precedent for us in our attempts to stop building on the very edge of the Heath - remember that no planning permissions have been given in recent decades to allow any new building on the edge of the Heath, and that the Society extended its objects in 1933 specifically to include the prevention of inappropriate building on the Heath fringes.

There is one unfinished aspect to the outcome of this appeal, namely the revised roof plans which the developer handed up to the inspector during the hearing showing that the roofs extend, in a trespassing manner, onto the Heath itself. The City are now in our discussion with the developers and Camden on this unanticipated problem the developers now face.

Now for all the better news.

First, the Heath.

This year we celebrate the passing, 150 years ago, of the Hampstead Heath Act 1871, the Act that saved the Heath for the public in perpetuity. We have been coordinating with the City over the celebrations, which included the Kite Display day we organised in June - a sunless but windy day which provoked such enthusiasm we intend to stage it again next

year. If you have not seen it, do watch the video on our website, which captures the joy of the occasion, especially amongst children.

The City have erected large monolith information boards at South End Green and elsewhere, and the Society is providing large seasonal biodiversity display boards at several points on the Heath, an example of which we have here today near the door.

My personal thanks go to committee members Melissa Fairbanks for organising the Kite Day and to Jeff Waage for the biodiversity boards.

Those of you who regularly walk on the Heath will have noticed its changing condition during the recent seasons and lockdowns. It looked its battered worst after 17 million annual visits in the spring of this year, but most of us have been simply amazed how so much of it has recovered of its own accord, following the periods of sustained rain and then sunshine, alongside the reducing footfall. Of course, the Heath Superintendent and his staff have done what they can to repair the most damaged areas, but it has been really heartening to see the speed and extent of the unaided recovery.

I want to take this opportunity to repeat the Society's thanks to Bob Warnock and his great team for their untiring efforts during these last 16 months. Bob retires next week and we wish him and his wife Catherine every happiness in their time

together on the South coast near Chichester. We and other local civic groups are holding a farewell party for Bob and Catherine next Monday.

Talking of retirements, one of our trustees Thomas Radice will be stepping down next month as our representative on the City's Heath Consultative Committee. Thomas has been a leading figure on that committee for many years. Perhaps his greatest achievement was to organise the successful opposition in 2019 to the proposed permanent erection of totally inappropriate sculptures above Cohen's Field. He will be replaced as our representative on that committee by Jeff Waage, but Thomas will continue as a member of the Heath Sub-Committee to organise the monthly Heath walks, which have now resumed, and as a member of the Kenwood Landscape Forum with Jeff Waage.

Talking of the Consultative Committee, you will recall that in 2020 it did **not** recommend the introduction of mandatory swimming charges for the Heath Ponds. In our opinion, its views were insufficiently considered by the Hampstead Heath Management Committee, which then imposed the charges. The Society's position - stated publicly and repeatedly at the time - was that, while it would be necessary for swimmers to pay for their swims - for the simple reason that the lifeguarding budget was taking an ever bigger share of the finite Heath budget – nevertheless, an initial attempt should have been made to raise significant funds through well-organised voluntary payment, rather than the installation of

expensive infrastructure and the engagement of extra stewards to impose the charging. The proper relationship between the two Committees is something which we will be pursuing with the City, now that we no longer have the diversions of lockdown.

We congratulate the Redington Froggnal Association on their initiative with the City to recreate 'Constable's Pond' at Branch Hill - the Pond so-called because it features in his famous painting at Kenwood House - and we will be assisting all parties with that project.

Probably the most significant task of the Heath Sub-Committee this summer and autumn is the implementation of the system of the licensing of commercial dog walkers. The City have sought expressions of interest from prospective licensees and expect to issue up to 40 licences.

Turning now to the Town.

The decision of the managers of the Hampstead Business Improvement District (the BID) not to seek its extension means that Hampstead is now without a body to represent its businesses. One probable consequence of this, at least in the short term, is that our Town Sub-Committee members will be more engaged in dealing with day-to-day problems in the village. Only last week, its Chair was working with Camden to try to put a stop to the illegal parking of numerous food delivery motorbikes at the top of the High Street, something with which Camden are now dealing. We hope as the Society that some new organisation will soon emerge to speak for the Village businesses.

The Grade 2 listed police station has been saved from being altered and turned into a school. Objections came from a broad-based campaign, which succeeded finally at an inspector's inquiry. We congratulate Andrew Neale and his Hampstead Committee for Responsible Development, an umbrella group that appeared as a Rule 6 Party at the inquiry, represented by counsel and assisted by expert witnesses. Andrew undertook a huge amount of work on This appeal and I and the Society assisted him on the legal side in the earlier stages.

The Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum is undertaking a new pollution survey. Camden Council do not have the funds for this and so the Forum, supported by the Society, is taking the lead. We need to raise funds and you can donate via our website or at the Forum's website. You will recall that five years ago Stephen Taylor, now the Chair of the Forum, carried out an initial pollution survey which revealed terrible levels of pollution in so many of our streets. It is hoped that this new and more detailed survey will provide the data to enable more effective systems of traffic and pollution control.

The Society's role in monitoring and sometimes objecting to alcohol licensing applications is never-ending. Our aims are twofold: to ensure strict conditions (including relating to hours) are attached to licences for on-sales; and to oppose all new licences for off-sales. The situation at South End Green is such that, before long, off-licences are going to comprise half the retail outlets there.

We are currently opposing an off-licence application by the tiny ice-cream takeaway called The NOOK, and also the appeal by Heath News to the Magistrates Court against the refusal of its off-licence. We unsuccessfully opposed the off-licence at the new wine bar called MUST but that outlet poses a low risk as a supplier only of expensive wines.

The problem with this concentration of off-licences - which the Metropolitan Police should be doing more to oppose - is the police-recorded level of incidents of anti-social behaviour in the area - 99 in the last three months, alongside 370 reported crimes. At least the Society has the explicit support of the Safer Neighbourhood Forums and the Hampstead Heath Constabulary, who deal weekly with the drink-fuelled raves on the Heath.

The Newsletter.

In June, I received this email from our Patron Sir Simon Jenkins, a former editor of the Evening Standard and of the Times:

"Dear Marc

I have finally come round to reading your latest newsletter. I receive a mass of conservation society literature but this really is the best. I think I read it cover to cover. Not only is it a mountain of information but it gives me - still a regular Heath walker - a wonderful insight into the frenzy of activity that goes into keeping this Europe's most splendid urban park. I was particularly intrigued by how you are recovering from the mud-bath horrors of last winter.

As for the town, I felt I had read six months of old Ham and Highs in one go. As one of your proud patrons I have to say congratulations. I look forward to seeing you in the autumn.

With best wishes”

This is praise indeed - and I want to thank our contributors, and the Newsletter Editor, Emilia Leese, for their work in maintaining its high standards.

As we exit lockdown, the Society's customary range of events can start again. So, we will be resuming guided plaque walks and we have two lecture events in the autumn – the Springett Lecture by Dr Merlin Sheldrake on 30 September and a Glass-In-Hand lecture by Sir Simon Jenkins on 26 October: details in the last newsletter. We are also staging an outdoor film showing, near the Parliament Hill bandstand, of Tinker Taylor Soldier Spy on Thursday 9 September, part of the 150th Heath celebrations.

To conclude: a departure and an arrival.

In our last Newsletter I announced the retirement of Peter Tausig from the General Committee on which he has served for many years. We thank Peter for all his work for the Society, not least in relation to Heath Hands and the Kenwood Landscape Forum.

I am very pleased to welcome here today our new Society Patron, Melvyn Bragg. Melvyn has been a local resident and Society member for several decades and we are absolutely delighted that he has agreed to the appointment.

Finally, I would like to thank you - our members - for your support during these difficult times, and not least for your patience over the Post Office Box.

And also our many Committee members who have continued to carry out their work without interruption.

Are there any questions?