

THE STRATFORD UPON AVON SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 14th April 2014

The President, Sir Brian Follett, opened the meeting by paying tribute to Jeffery Dench, who died at the end of March and for whom there would be a memorial service at Holy Trinity.

Apologies: Ian Prosser, Nicolas Walsh, John & Jeanne Holtom, Paul Standing, Diana Letts, Beryl Dyke

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday, 13th March 2013 were approved.

Treasurer's Report: The financial statements had been circulated but Jonathon Craig began by drawing attention to a typographical error in the accounts whereby a figure of £608 for Gift Aid had been inserted instead of £638.

- There was a surplus of £1800 at the end of 2013 compared to a small deficit in the previous year. Whilst it is not the purpose of the Society to make a profit, we must maintain our reserves in order to fund our programmes. The main reason for the improvement in reserves was that we spent less on projects than in 2012 when significant outlay was required for the Historic Spine and the Shop Front project. On the other hand there was an increase in expenditure on very successful programmes and events in 2013.
- Jon drew attention to the balance sheet and the fact that a deposit account had been opened with Barclays thus avoiding the necessity of keeping large sums in the current account which is less secure. All of the Society's banking is now carried out with Barclays.
- At the request of the President the accounts were approved by the meeting.

Appointment of Independent Examiner: The reappointment of Guard D'Oyly as the Society's Independent Examiner for 2014 was proposed by Jonathon Craig, seconded by Brian Follett, and agreed.

Trustees' Report and Accounts 2013: The full report had been circulated to members. It included all Group Reports which were taken as read. Sir Brian complimented and thanked group leaders and the various committee members for the hard work during 2013. He then summarized the main issues arising in the reports which would also be covered in the Chairman's Report.

There will be a need for more primary schools and a secondary school as the town expands, but as yet it is unclear what plans are afoot.

The adoption of the Report and Accounts for 2012 was proposed by Ian Prosser, seconded by Peter Burgess and agreed.

Election of Officers: The following officers were unanimously elected for the period 2014-2017: Chairman: Kevin Bond, Membership Secretary: Ian Fradgley.

Election of General Committee Members: Nic Walsh was elected as Programme Secretary. The Chairman announced the resignations of Beryl Downing, Jean Clymer, Dick Prior, and Paul Mackey and asked for volunteers to fill the role of Secretary.

Kevin thanked Jean for her excellent work planning and organizing events, speakers, outings, and drew attention to the fact that in 2013 these activities were self-funding or even contributed to the Society's financial surplus.

Chairman's Report and Presentation: The report had been circulated to all members. Dr Kevin Bond began by drawing attention to the new publication by Bob Bearman and Paul Burley: The Frieze which is available for £7 per copy. Members are asked to help with the sale of this book which Kevin expects will be a seminal publication for the authors, Stratford and the Society. The Historic Spine programme has been one of the great successes of the Society due to the efforts of the committee, and the outstanding work of Bob and Paul.

The District Council is working on its core strategy for Stratford, and the decisions made during the coming months will effectively set in stone the development of our town and district for the rest of this century. The residents are currently being consulted by the council on this core strategy which will run until 2031, but whatever the outcome it is certain that the resident population will grow by at least 25% and possibly by as much as 50%. This has profound implications for the whole range of infrastructure and services. At the same time the Town Council is working on a Neighbourhood Plan intended to fill in the detail of the broader issues covered by the District Council's core strategy.

It is vital that the right decisions are made to protect the historic spine of Stratford and avoid the danger of too much traffic within that area, striking a balance between the needs of pedestrians and other traffic. It would be unrealistic to fight against the inevitable growth of our town and district given the current obsession among politicians with housing numbers and the market demand recognised by developers. For this reason Kevin proposed that the key issue, that which we must strive to influence, must be design. How we link communities to ensure a living, breathing, communicating town while ensuring, for instance, that we cater to an aging population with particular mobility issues and avoid vehicular dominance within the historic centre. This is not simply about pedestrianisation but about shared space.

So the feeling of the General Committee is that our emphasis should be on design of new developments, ensuring that they serve the community with appropriate infrastructure accompanying the residential growth. As an example, the inevitable expansion of the areas south of the Avon to include the Tiddington Road, which began with Trinity Mead, raises again the matter of schooling for that area, both primary and secondary. As the development progresses, as it almost certainly will, bussing becomes an increasing problem and the growth has serious implications for existing schools. Similarly, further development south of the river raises questions

about access to and from the major arteries. The same concerns apply with respect to expansion in Long Marston.

Planners tend to assume that developers will pay for these necessary enhancements but it is unlikely that sufficient funding would come from that source, and therefore it must be recognized that public money will also be required to ensure sustainable development.

Kevin explained that in view of the profound implications of the core strategy and neighbourhood plans, he and the general committee feel strongly about the importance of sharing these thoughts with all members and providing an opportunity for questions and debate, in the hope that we can reach a common Society view to present to the decision makers.

In summary the position we have taken so far is to stress the importance of quality, communication, connectivity, and boundaries. He reiterated the point that it is futile to argue against growth for we have seen councils consistently lose appeals without a clear vision for the future, which has resulted in heavy bills at the cost of the taxpayer. We simply must face up to the realities of the market and current government policy which is unlikely to change.

This presentation essentially developed the theme of the Chairman's report which was circulated and which is attached to these minutes.

Questions and Answers: A productive and positive exchange ensued which in which the following points were raised:

- Whilst there is general agreement on design and quality being the priority, some still feel that the scale of development envisaged, particularly in Long Marston will inevitably have a negative impact on our town.
- Who is to determine what is good design? Should not the Society be studying best practice going on nationally?
- It is important that interested parties within the community engage at a very early stage with developers. On the other hand the point was made that it is not good enough to wait until developers submit plans; the principles of good design must be clearly laid down in the core strategy and associated documents along with mechanisms for reviewing design, as opposed to the current situation of reactive planning.
- Who is in charge? Is it the government and is the core strategy nothing more than political rhetoric? The simple answer is that provided the District Council, through its core strategy, fulfils its obligations to the country at large (in the context of government policy), then it will be in charge of the process. However, the SDC has a history of failure to deliver on its obligations, as it has consistently taken the view that "we do not want new development". This flies in the face of central government, which has a responsibility to step in when local councils take such positions, and why councils' appeals generally fail. The Shottery and Long Marston developments are good examples. The consequence of resistance to developments is that they will go ahead

anyway, underfunded and without design and infrastructure controls. Hence the need for a clear and pragmatic core strategy.

- Even when the council does attempt to take control, as in the case of Shotton, a wave of objections from the community followed and the council withdrew its plans and subsequently lost on appeal. The existence of a clear core strategy would have prevented this.
- We should try to get some input from the younger generations whose lives will be more greatly affected by these decisions than most of the current members.
- There is a case for the Society increasing its credibility by forming a design committee of qualified people drawn from the local community. In this context the point was made that there is no architect on the general committee and our influence would surely be enhanced if there were.
- There is insufficient discussion in Stratford about traffic issues; the need for a new bridge which somehow must be funded; more pedestrian areas in the centre. If there is to be development on the scale being discussed then without a robust transport policy serious problems will ensue.

The chairman concluded by thanking all members for giving him the opportunity to present a view of the Society's main objectives. A summary of these ideas will be circulated and will appear on the website.

AOB: None

Next meeting: The date for next annual general meeting of the Society will be announced in due course.