

# EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

## Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at the Devon & Exeter Institution at 6.30pm on Wednesday 29 October 2014

### 1 Welcome

The President, Peter Wadham, welcomed 30 members to the meeting.

### 2 Apologies

Apologies were received from Committee Members Ruth McLeish and Susie Hewitt, Richard Van Oppen, Susan Jackson, Julia Neville, Gordon and Val Read, John Monks, Azmeena Ladha, Celia King, Pat Purchase, Barbara Looser, Darren Marsh, Mike Walker, Diana Beasley, Peter Nickol, Hilary Noakes, Julia Sharp, Diana Davies.

### 3 Minutes of the previous AGM

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 20 November 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

### 4 Matters arising.

None

### 5 Chairman's Report

It's been a privilege to be Chairman over the past year- not something I thought likely when I joined 3 years ago. And during this year I have been impressed by the scale of detailed knowledge and archive material that is available about the city's history – long may this continue, which is likely with such rich pickings available here at the DEI. A lot has happened during the past year to develop the society and enable member involvement, and I hope more will be possible and evolve over the next year, so I have a lot to say in this report.

At the last AGM there was a discussion about the establishment of a **River, Canal & Quayside sub-committee**, and I am pleased that it was approved by members. The group was initially chaired by John Monks, who proposed it, and with a strong membership of interested members, there has been much research and investigation into what happens in the area, what is proposed, and what is good and not so good along the river as it passes through Exeter. They have made contact with the authorities, as well as users and traders, and undertaken a survey. The sub-committee has walked most of the river where it is accessible, and some of the canal, and gathered a wealth of information from which it hopes to identify concerns and opportunities, which will be the only document to do so by a single organisation. In due course this will enable the Society to lobby and challenge the authorities about improvements and development.

Shortly after the formation of the RCQ group a **Highways and Transport sub-committee** was established as a result of one member's concerns about current and future congestion in and around the city. Trevor Preist is chairman of this sub-committee and has completed extensive and detailed analysis of the impact of new homes being built as well as commercial development up to the mid 2020s. Using nationally published data, as well as the Highway authority's own improvement proposals, it shows a depressing increase in the number of cars likely to be using our roads. Trevor presented his views to members at the September Saturday morning talk, followed by a short workshop. The sub-committee believes that the authorities need to develop a long-term

strategy to reduce the need to use cars and introduce high quality alternative modes of travel to enable people to travel in and around the city.

The **Planning sub-committee**, under the long-term chairmanship of Pamela Wootton, continues to challenge poor and inappropriate development proposals for the city. This is dedicated work that requires an eye for detail, keen investigative skills to scrutinise proposals, and an appreciation of what is good or poor architecture and design. Who would have thought that the planning application for signage for Princesshay would have been as extensive and intrusive – it is only due to the critical eye of the subcommittee members that this was brought to the public's attention. This could have set a precedent for signage across the city and I hope that our challenge has resulted in less intrusive signage.

As a result of new sub-committees emerging, and to ensure there is no conflict of representation from the Society, each now has terms of reference to ensure consultation between them where appropriate.

**The Blue Plaques scheme** continues apace under John Monks' leadership, with some support from one or two members, and the website becoming a great reference source. In early October we erected a plaque to FJ Widgery, and in December we expect to erect a plaque to the Vanbrugh sisters, both well-known actresses from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and daughters of the vicar of Heavitree. John is working with an offshoot from the university – Placify – to develop a mobile phone application (smart phones) which will allow people to research plaques and listen to a short description about the person, event, or building. It is hoped to develop this later this year. We may market the app as an income stream for the society.

**Events and visits** continue to appear in the Society's calendar and I am pleased that they are usually fully attended and sometimes over-subscribed. We consistently have at least one visit a month as well as our monthly Saturday meeting and talk. My thanks to Ruth for her work in organising these and juggling speakers when they pull out, and for those that are supplying her with ideas which means we have events booked well into next year. This autumn we have excelled ourselves with 3 events and two meetings, and in November we have 3 events and the Saturday meeting.

**Donation to Good Causes:** As a charity with few financial commitments we have too much money in the bank – we need to spend it on causes that are in line with our constitution, to comply with Charity Commission guidelines. In the spring newsletter we asked members for projects / ideas to spend our funds on but did not receive any suggestions, so the committee agreed to offer £1000 to appropriate projects via the Express & Echo, which has brought us publicity. We only received 3 requests: Renovation of the Phoenix statue in Princesshay; the renovation of the General Gordon Lamp in Heavitree; and support for the Mint Methodist church to erect an information board to commemorate John Wesley's visits to Exeter. The Phoenix will be renovated by Princesshay owners. Most funds will go towards the lamp, and support is being offered towards the Wesley board when the church has completed its design work.

**The coming years:** Looking to the future there is much the Society will need to do to ensure that the city develops appropriately and sympathetically. Consultation about the redevelopment of the Bus & Coach station site should be with us later this year, followed by outline planning. This will set the blueprint for this development so it is critical we and you comment. Changes to road layouts and bus routes can be expected, as well as a new swimming pool (is the old one destined to be more housing?).

Additional housing developments will commence on some of the remaining fields within the city, as well as to the east of Pinhoe and Sowton, and to the south of Alphington. Commercial migration away from the city centre is likely with more buildings there being

converted into residential. As commerce moves away from the city centre what should we expect from the buildings that are vacated? The old library is likely to become yet more student accommodation – should there be a city centre development strategy for those buildings which are iconic?

Retail and commercial development will continue on the outskirts of the city – a retail centre off Honiton Road / Sowton, Ikea, a new Morrisons and Asda, and more Hotels, I expect.

The City Council will soon start considering the City's development beyond 2026 – although there is not much land to develop on. What could this mean- no new housing within the city limits – or will it result in developers forcing development on the few open spaces that are left? High-density development in the central areas? More satellite towns and communities around Exeter? I would like the Society to be pro-active in identifying what should be preserved, developed or built on.

Traffic congestion and easier movement of people will also be challenges which we can be proactive about.

Proposals for a city centre theatre will continue to be developed throughout the decade. This splits opinion, but if it can be funded and can operate with little or no public subsidy, it should be a great asset to the city.

*Questions on the above Report reminded the Chairman to mention the Cathedral's plans for various developments including re-exposure of the Roman baths as a visitor attraction.*

## **6 Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer presented accounts for 2013-2014, explaining that a new calculation system meant that these figures could not be compared directly with those presented last year. The overall financial situation was good, thanks to savings on speakers and blue plaques, and income from Gift Aid.

There were a few requests from members for clarification on detail which it was agreed the Treasurer would bring to the next committee meeting before posting the accounts in the Members' Area of the website.

## **7 Secretary's Report and Membership Report**

### **Website**

The Members' Area of the website has developed more this year. Here you can find the Constitution and an archive of newsletters and AGM minutes, as well as working areas for the three sub-committees. You can also access the first five *Discovering Exeter* booklets which are now out of print but have been made available for members to freely download. This year the website has acquired a Shop, and although we don't have much for sale just yet it's important to have this facility for the future. The Blue Plaque area has continued to add new information, which is especially exciting when it's one of our new plaques.

### **Events**

We have only held one double event this year which was 'Exeter and the First World War' with Todd Gray and Richard Batten speaking in September. Ticket sales were much lower than normal and we only just broke even after expenses. Both talks were fascinating and enjoyed by all, but we felt sure the reason we only sold 50 tickets instead of 100 was due to people having several months of World War One overload in the media.

## **Membership Report**

The membership figures for 2013-14 were as follows:

Life Members: 58

Yearly members: 171

Total members: 229

We lost 24 members from the previous year

We gained 1 new life member and 15 new yearly members

Our membership was therefore down 8 from the previous year

Gordon Read claimed £355 in Gift Aid on these subscriptions

There are currently 151 e-mail addresses on the e-mailing list.

## **8 Election of Officers and Committee**

There being no resignations and no nominations, the current committee was re-elected en bloc: Proposer: Robin Wootton and Seconder: Janet Robb

Chairman: Keith Lewis

Treasurer: Peter Caspar

Secretary and Memberships: Pamela Coleman

Programme Secretary: Ruth McLeish

Minute Secretary: Felicity Murdin

Other Committee members: Susie Hewitt, Ann Kennedy, Pamela Wootton

## **9 Amendment of the Society's Constitution**

An amendment to *Administration – Clause 7* in the interests of clarification was discussed. Adoption of the final version was proposed by Peter Caspar and seconded by Trevor Preist.

The motion was carried unanimously.

*The Society shall be directed by a Committee which shall consist of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Membership Secretary and Honorary Treasurer and the President and Vice-Presidents, and of not more than 12 elected members.*

*Committee members who have been elected or co-opted will become Trustees of the Society after they have served on the Committee for a period longer than six months.*

*Notwithstanding that, the President and Vice-Presidents need not be Trustees if they so wish.*

## **9 Any other business**

None

The President declared the Annual General Meeting closed.