

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 28 March 2023

Present: Keith Lewis (Chairman), Gert Vonhoff, Jane Evans, Andy McKeon (Secretary), John Monks, Jennifer Woodman, Pamela Wootton. Hazel Harvey attended as President.

Apologies: None.

1. Minutes of previous meeting – 7 February 2023.

The minutes were approved. A slightly redacted version would be posted on the Members' section of the website along with the dates of committee meetings. (GV)

2. Matters arising.

Item 3 Matters Arising. Central Station Cupola. KL would write to Network Rail.

Item 3 The new website was working well and could be dropped from the agenda.

Item 3 Livery. GV would obtain a letter template and circulate to committee members.

Item 3 Membership badges and purchase of advertising stand. GV would purchase the advertising stand once work on planning consultations declined. Holders were available for inserting names and could be used as badges.

Item 4 Civic Society Walks. Lynn Hornblower was organising the walks. The first around Water Lane would be on 30 March. There would be a walk with a low traffic neighbourhood theme around Newtown on 9 May and one with a transport theme from St David's Station to the new Marsh Barton Station on 6 June. HH had sent Lynn a set of Discovering Exeter booklets.

Item 10 Discovering Exeter Booklets revision. Ian Maxted had circulated a revised version to committee members. Comments should be sent to him. It was unlikely the booklet would be ready for the Harbour Festival in late May.

4. Chair's Report.

New Member Event. It was agreed that we should aim to hold the event on 22 or 23 May. The most probable format would be a late afternoon/early evening 'blue plaques' walk in the centre followed by refreshments, potentially at the Climate Hub (see below). Ian Maxted could be invited to guide the walk but if unavailable AM would lead. KL would take forward the arrangements.

The meeting discussed joining the Community Alliance which would give free access to the Climate Hub (a charity in its own right). Joining the Alliance seemed only to involve being listed as a member and providing a website link. A wide range of organisations were listed as members. The aims of the Alliance had a strong social justice element as well as action on climate change. It was recognised that joining the Alliance offered the use of the Climate Hub and that its aims touched upon some of those of the Civic Society. It also seemed to be very loose with minimal rules from the discussion KL and GV had had with its chair. However, concerns were expressed about possible reputational risk to the Society given the Alliance's wide membership and broader aims and lack of clarity about how it operated. KL would seek further clarity from the Alliance chair about how it operated (for example whether it issued statements or took action in its own right and how

these were agreed with the membership) and whether it was possible to use the Hub without being members.

Heritage Harbour Festival. The Society had been offered a stall as part of the festival on 28 May on the Piazza. The event would last from 11-4. Volunteers would be needed for the stall for periods of 2.5 hours each. JW said she should be able to help in the afternoon. JE may also be able to do so.

The speaker programme for April to July was discussed:

- 15 April Exeter City Canal, speaker Grahame Forshaw, Harbour Master (JM organiser) (NB KL would not be available in April. GV agreed to stand in for him at the meeting.)
- 20 May No speaker arranged. AM would ascertain whether the possible talk about Fred Karno would be suitable.
- 17 June No speaker arranged. [Julia Neville has now agreed to speak about 1920s Exeter. AM to arrange.]
- 15 July Gavin Stockley of Gorst Energy . There would be a follow-up visit to the plant itself (GV).

Other future possible speakers and talks were:

- Martin Redfern of Exeter Observer (KL)
- Topsham Museum who had offered a talk in return for the Society talking to their members about blue plaques. (Hilary Neville)
- Diana Moore (St David's councillor) who had asked potentially to talk after May about her proposal for public transport improvements including an electric bus along the High Street (GV).
- Dave Hodgson, ECC's Finance Director, on local government finance and Exeter. KL to approach.
- Bindu Arjoon, ECC's new Chief Executive.
- Peter Stevenson of St. Petrock's for the end of 2023 (JM).

KL asked that committee members continue to identify possible speakers for future dates.

Canal Basin Development. GV, PW and JM had had an on-line meeting with a representative of South West Historic England to follow-up KL's email to her and get further details of HE's approach to the Canal Basin development. The representative had explained their general powers and approach and the documents they had used on the Canal Basin. The meeting had been useful and an opportunity to inform HE of more recent developments, like the granting of Heritage Harbour status and the historic importance of the canal of which she was unaware. It was unclear what form the next stage of consultation would be on the development itself but May/June was thought a likely time.

Heritage Assets. KL had written to David Bartram of ECC about Heritage Assets (copy of letter previously circulated). Dave Hodgson, Director of Finance had replied saying resources did not permit any repairs to be made to the City Walls. The committee considered this very disappointing given the status and importance of the walls and believed provision should be made in future budgets.

Working arrangements with Topsham Association. KL had yet to contact the association.

5. Treasurer's Report.

JE had circulated copies of the current profit and loss account and the balance sheet. These were noted, including the encouraging numbers of new members. JE would write to Life Members about making donations.

6. Planning Report.

PW had circulated a report of the Planning Committee's activities and the letters to ECC which had resulted. These were noted.

KL raised the issue of the Moor Exchange planning application. This had diverted significantly from the outline application. He had identified 29 issues, including the raising of the embankment on Heavitree Road. Comments had been submitted to ECC, which had been forwarded to the developer to respond.

JM raised the issue of lobbying councillors on the planning committee about individual applications as Diana Moore (St David' Ward) had said that as a member of ECC's planning committee she was not permitted to discuss planning applications outside of the committee which seemed unsatisfactory. It was noted, however, that she had been very actively listening to comments made by the Society and local residents. PW understood that there was a longstanding council resolution which prevented planning committee councillors from discussing planning applications outside the committee. It might be helpful to ascertain from the Planning Committee Clerk what the rules were, including for officials who seemed disinclined to enter into any dialogue on any planning subject. An alternative was to discuss the issues with councillors who were not on the committee but who could speak at meetings if they wished to and directly inform colleagues of views.

JM also expressed concerns about difficulties in arranging discussions with Ian Collinson in particular. GV and KL confirmed similar difficulties. KL will write to Ian in respect of the Water Lane area and the need for a meeting. He will also write to ECC's new chief executive with concerns about the canal basin proposals, and the need for dialogue with IC.

7. Strategic Planning and Highways Group report.

GW had circulated a report on recent activity. Responses had been submitted on the Teignbridge Plan and the Haven Banks development. A response on the Exeter Cycling and Walking Local Infrastructure Plan would be submitted by the end of the month. A meeting with council officers to discuss CIL allocation had yet to be requested (KL/GV)

There had been a further consultation on the Water Lane development. PW noted that the developers had made progress in discussing a dedicated bus service with Stagecoach and establishing co bike and co car hubs. Committee members had made several points to the developer, including a possible mitigation for the loss of Gabriel's Wharf, the problems of the proposed bridge over the canal and the need for a new canal traffic survey, visitors needing to have access to a landing stage, the almost certain flooding in practice of the deepened pedestrian tunnel under the railway line and the need for paddle boarders to access the canal area with their equipment without using public transport.

8. Blue Plaques.

A report had been circulated.

The Mary Willcocks' plaque would be unveiled on 9 June at 88 Pennsylvania Road. The Devon History Society would arrange and meet the cost of a booklet and celebratory event at the Central Library earlier in the afternoon. The celebratory event would be ticketed but free. Definite reserved Civic Society attendees would be AM, JW and Hilary Neville. Ian Maxted, Lynn Hornblower and Mike Richard would also be asked if they wanted to attend. Hilary Neville would liaise with GV about wording for the website.

The Dick Pym plaque organised and funded through the Topsham Museum was still awaiting a date. AM and Hilary Neville would attend a reception at Topsham Museum on 6 April for the opening of the Dick Pym exhibition.

In respect of the Gissing plaque, the plaques team are still waiting for landlord approval to fix a plaque to their building.

The Committee noted the significantly increased cost of plaques which could have implications for the number of future plaques.

9. Revising the Constitution

The Charity Commission had informed the Society that the unamended constitution continued to apply. Any amendments needed to follow a process which satisfied the Commission, including justification for individual amendments when submitted. JE suggested that the Society's objects should be reviewed to ensure they were still in keeping with the Society's aims and practices. AM and KL would review the existing constitution with the aim of making any necessary amendments at the November AGM.

10. River, Canal and Quay Group

Further consideration would be given to the group in July following the New Members' event which might identify whether any new individuals wanted to take it forward.

11. Any other business

JE noted that the foundation stone of the Pyramids swimming pool might be lost on the site's redevelopment. She considered it worth preserving. The committee agreed. JE would follow this up with the relevant parties.

12. Dates of meetings

16 May 2023 at 2pm Southernhay United Reformed Church. AM to organise.

18 July 2023 at 2pm Southernhay United Reformed Church. AM to organise.