

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 18 July 2023

Present: Keith Lewis (Chairman), Gert Vonhoff, Jane Evans (Treasurer) Andy McKeon (Secretary), Jennifer Woodman.

Apologies: John Monks, Pamela Wootton, Hazel Harvey.

1. Minutes of previous meeting – 18 July 2023.

The minutes were approved.

2. Matters arising.

Item 3 Matters Arising. Central Station Cupola. KL was still awaiting a reply from Great Western Railway.

Item 3 Letter template. GV would circulate an electronic version to committee members.

Item 3 Discovering Exeter Booklets. The booklets had proved popular at the Harbour Festival. It would be possible to update some of the existing ones if necessary although consideration should be given to having more immediately appealing covers. The popularity of the booklets and the pricing of other similar publications suggested it might be possible to sell new versions at up to £10 per copy. The meeting discussed finalising the revised St Leonards booklet. AM agreed to meet Ian Maxted and Julia Neville to produce a specification of what was needed to publish it, including matters such as font and format. This would be considered and a designer approached to prepare a final design which would then apply to future revised publications. GV and JE suggested possible designers.

Item 3 Pyramids Leisure Centre Foundation Stone. JE would contact the owners of the site and Exeter City Council about the stone's preservation on the new development.

Item 4 Exeter Observer. JE had attended an Exeter Observer event. The Observer had reached its fund raising target and may still launch a print edition. If they increased the circulation they could become the primary local newspaper in which public notices will need to be published.

Item 4 Community Alliance. JE reported that a copy of a Civic Society poster was up on the hub wall and the Society was listed as an affiliate organisation. It was agreed that KL would contact the Alliance to ask that the affiliation listing be deleted and the poster taken down as no decision had yet been made on affiliation.

Item 4 Heritage Harbour Festival. KL reported that there would be another festival at the Piazza Terracina on 24 September. It was agreed that the Society would have a stall (KL to confirm with organisers), preferably close to the Friends of the Canal. GV would sound out those who had helped at the May event to see if they would also do so in September. JE expected to be able to help with the stall.

4. Chair's Report.

The speaker programme to December was confirmed:

- 16 September. Diana Moore (Green Councillor) with others on sustainable transport in the city centre. (GV)
- 21 October. Dave Crump on Fred Karno (AM)
- 18 November AGM
- 16 December Peter Stephenson of St Petroc's (JM – confirmed by JM 6 June)

KL would contact the Exeter Cycle Campaign and the leaders of Labour and Conservative parties to see if they, or a nominee, would be willing to speak at Saturday meetings in the New Year.

Other possible speakers and talks for 2024 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)
- Dave Hodgson, ECC's Finance Director, on local government finance and Exeter.
- Bindu Arjoon, ECC's new Chief Executive.
- Tony Buller on Exe Bridges (PM to provide details to KL).
- Dissenters' Graveyard speaker (PM to provide details to KL).

Then, Now, Next walks. The 1 August walk would be a rerun of the washed-out Newtown Walk. No further walks would be posted on the website as it was uncertain whether they would continue.

Cathedral Archive Visit 7 August. Meet outside the front of the cathedral at 1.50pm. KL would see if Ruth McLeish would like to attend.

Tuckers' Hall Visit. It was agreed that KL would seek to organise a guided afternoon visit for 14 October at £5 per head. The Society would need to provide its own refreshments.

Heritage Assets. KL had not had a further response from Anthony Harding. It was noted that ECC proposed to repair the city walls by the City Gate hotel.

Letter to ECC CEO. KL would circulate the reply from the new CEO, Bindu Arjoon, to his letter.

Community Alliance membership. This was deferred to the next meeting.

Working arrangements with Topsham Association. No reply had yet been received from the Association.

Planning Workshop for members. KL proposed to take this forward later in the year.

Exeter European City of the Year. It was noted that Exeter had been nominated for this award.

5. Treasurer's Report.

JE had circulated the accounts. She would write to life members about making donations at the point when subscriptions were increased.

6. Planning Report.

There was no planning report due to PW's illness. KL had reviewed some applications and would continue to discuss future arrangements with members. New member and retired planning consultant Chris Dent had agreed to look at some applications.

JE reported that the Water Lane design code Citizens' Panel had been poorly run and very disappointing in its content. Those attending had all been from organisations. The suggestions made seemed to be at odds with the pre-determined views of the consultants and council. It was suggested that a letter be sent to the Express and Echo regretting the lost opportunity.

7. Strategic Planning and Highways Group report.

GW reported that:

- the 'active travel' group needed more volunteers to make it properly viable, despite significant outside interest;
- the tree preservation group had 3/4 volunteers, sufficient to take the work forward with Stephen Mariner the contact point;
- he had represented the Society at the independent examiner's hearing about the Community Infrastructure Levy proposals. The hearing had been fair and thorough. The examiner's report was now awaited;
- the Haven Banks planning application was expected to be considered in early September or October. He intended to attend the July planning committee meeting to get a feel for its dynamics.

GV alerted the committee to Devon County Council's consultation to allow buses to turn right from Longbrook Street into Sidwell Street. This would be better than the current arrangement using York Road. He considered the council could go further in limiting the speed limit on the high Street to make it a better pedestrian zone.

8. Revising the Constitution

KL had circulated a paper commenting on possible changes to the constitution which would be discussed at the next meeting. JE would circulate proposals on governance arrangements for sub-committees. In the meantime, AM would circulate copies of the current constitution as accepted by the Charity Commission.

9. Blue Plaques

The Committee noted the report which highlighted the unveiling of the Mary Willcocks plaque, the exhibition in the foyer of Exeter Central Library; and the forthcoming unveiling on 31 July of the plaque to Dick Pym in Topsham which had been the Topsham Museum's project.

The Committee discussed funding of future plaques, noting significant increase in the cost of plaques, such that each plaque might now cost c£800 including any associated event. The committee concluded that there should be only one plaque per financial year

(September to September) for the time being and that contributions should always be sought. The plaque to George Gissing would therefore be the only one for 2023/24.

KL asked if the plaques group could work on improving the plaques guide, perhaps making it A3, and working with the tourist office.

10. Exeter Local History Society project

The Society had received a request to sponsor a book on the lost buildings of Exeter which would be written by Todd Gray. The Committee concluded that it could not afford the £300 requested but might be able to negotiate a lower figure and still continue to receive some of the benefits offered – an acknowledgement in the book and three free copies - or different ones e.g., a reduced price for members. AM would consult committee members by email.

11. River, Canal and Quay Group.

Deferred to the next meeting in John Monk's absence.

12. Any Other Business.

KL would consider whether the Society should engage with the recently established Housing Commission for Devon.

AM would circulate the Progressive Group's letter to the Planning Committee chair about the Clarence Hotel.

JE advised that it was possible for individual citizens to review ECC's unaudited 2022/23 accounts and any documents relating to them in detail for a 30 working day period specified by the authority. She intended to do this when the accounts were made available. Other committee members might also wish to do this. A particular interest for her was the reason for the significant overspend by ECC's waterways department.

13. Dates of Next Meetings.

29 August 2023 at 2pm Southernhay United Reformed Church. AM to organise. The meeting would focus on the constitution and the forthcoming AGM.

24 October 2023 at 2pm Southernhay United Reformed Church. AM to organise.