

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 29 August 2023

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

1. Apologies: Jennifer Woodman, Pamela Wootton, Hazel Harvey.

2. Minutes of previous meeting – 18 July 2023.

The minutes were approved subject to correction of two typographical errors.

3. Matters arising.

Item 3 Matters Arising. Central Station Cupola. KL was still awaiting a reply from Great Western Railway but had identified a different manager whom he would contact. If he received no reply, he would go through the complaints process.

Item 3 Letter template. GV had sent a copy of the template to Paul Barkley for use in responding to planning applications.

Item 3 Discovering Exeter Booklets. The design meeting had had to be postponed until 10 October. Hazel Harvey had suggested that £5 would be an appropriate charge for the new booklets.

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 3 Community Alliance. GV had recovered the poster and the Society's listing as an affiliated organisation had been deleted. The Alliance's 'shop front' in Bedford Street had been vacated and their future was uncertain. KL would contact the Alliance to find out their intentions.

Item 3 Heritage Harbour Festival. GV would check when the stall would be available during the festival and then sound out possible helpers. Blue plaques would be featured with copies of the updated leaflet and trail (available from AM) and possibly the mocked up plaque used at the 60th anniversary.

Item 4 Then, Now and Next Walks. Jim Perriam had taken over the walks from Lynn Hornblower. Lynn would continue to help with them while in Exeter. The next walk – Flow Orchards – would be on 6 September.

Item 4 Letter to ECC CEO. KL to circulate the reply from the new CEO, Bindu Arjoon.

Item 9 Blue Plaques. Committee members had commented in writing on a paper from Hilary Neville on a proposal to amend the 'Devon Witches' plaque. It had been agreed that the plaque should be changed next year, resources permitting. Contributions would be needed, particular from the individual who had originally suggested making the change and who had offered to help.

Item 10 Exeter Local History Society Project. Committee members had agreed in writing that the Society would donate £100 to the project in return for a copy of the book and inclusion in the patrons' list. JE noted that, while supporting the donation, priority should be given to the Society's own projects, including revising the Discovering Exeter booklets.

4. Revising the Constitution.

The meeting considered possible amendments to the constitution. It was agreed that:

- The Society's objects (constitution para 2) continued to be relevant and appropriate.
- The Society's powers (paras 3 and 4) continued to be appropriate.
- Membership (para 5). The wording of the first sentence would be clarified. A right of appeal should be given to any person refused membership or whose membership was discontinued by the committee.
- Officers (para 6). To avoid confusion, the references to 'Honorary' would be deleted but it would be made clear that officers were not paid except for expenses.
- Committee membership and elections (paras 7-10). The constitution provided for over 20 members. This was considered unnecessary and unrealistic. The total membership of the committee would be reduced to a maximum of 12 – 6 officers and 6 other members.
- The 6 officers would be the chair, vice-chair, Secretary, Membership Secretary, Treasurer and President. They would be elected annually at the AGM.
- The 6 ordinary members would also be elected annually at the AGM.
- No person could serve in the same post for more than 10 years so as to ensure there would be change over time.
- Sub-committees (para 11) To ensure accountability, sub-committee chairs would be members of the committee. Members would be appointed by the [main] committee. The power of sub-committees to co-opt individuals, even if they were not members of the Society, would be changed so that the sub-committee could be helped and advised by experts but they would not be members. Sub-committees would continue to have a minimum of three members but this would no longer be in addition to any [main] committee officers on the sub-committee. Separate from the constitution, membership of sub-committees would be reported at AGMs along with their activities as part of the overall Annual Report. The committee would also seek to meet annually with each sub-committee.
- AGM (para 14). 'Independent Examiner' would be substituted for 'Honorary Auditor' to reflect actual practice.
- Minor wording changes. 'Chair' and 'Vice-chair' rather than 'Chairman or Vice-Chairman' would be used throughout the document. 'Their' would be substituted for 'his' in para14, final sentence.

AM would prepare a revised constitution and circulate it to committee members for further, final, consideration prior to submission to the membership at the AGM on 18 November.

5. AGM AGENDA.

The draft agenda would be amended so that sub-committee chairs and key officers would speak to their areas as part of consideration of the annual report. They (and the report more generally) would look forward as well as back. Questions would be taken after each section.

A written annual report would be provided to members. The Rowe Room at the Mint Methodist Church would be used for the AGM (AM to book). Refreshments would be provided after the meeting for a small charge.

6. Chair's Report.

The speaker programme to March is:

- 16 September. Cllr Diana Moore (Green Party and Progressive Group leader) 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)
- 20 January Cllr Phil Bialyk, possibly on ECC's Passivhaus programme (KL)
- 17 February – Historical topic?
- 16 March Cllr Anne Robson (KL)

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).
- Exeter Cycle Campaign.

Tuckers' Hall Visit. Arranged for 14 October at £5 per head. WebCollect would be used for ticket purchases.

Heritage Assets. A response from Anthony Harding was still awaited. KL would write to ECC welcoming the proposed repair to the city walls by the City Gate hotel.

Facebook Page. GV had volunteered to manage an ECS Facebook page. As the Society was effectively frozen out of the existing one the new one would require a different name e.g. The Official ECS page.

Mint Licence. Those leading Saturday meetings would need to familiarise themselves with the fire precautions. A register should also be kept of attendees both to identify non-members and for fire safety. KL had circulated a template register. The receptionist at the Mint would be asked to register names at meetings.

KL would send a revised letter, including the planning sub-committee's response to the cathedral's planning application, to the Dean of the Cathedral about the poor state of the Cathedral Close following the Christmas Market and Craft Fair.

Working arrangements with Topsham Association. A reply had still not been received from the Association. The matter would not be pursued further.

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

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

7. Treasurer's Report.

JE reported that little had changed since the last meeting .The new subscription rates were now in Web Collect and on the website. She would shortly write to life members about making donations.

8. Planning Report

KL had circulated a report of recent activity and some consultation responses to the committee. KL will chair most future meetings but it may be necessary for members of the main committee to take turns in this role, with GV chairing the meeting of 19 September, and KL chairing the meeting later on 29 August. It was uncertain what role PW will take in the future. It was agreed that future planning responses must be on headed civic society paper, and this would be conveyed to the sub-committee at the 29 August meeting. He noted that the recent planning application for 110 co-living units in Victoria Street was controversial and would be opposed.

9. Strategic Planning and Highways

GV had circulated a report on the group's activities. The Committee agreed to fund a round table event in October or November aimed at bringing more measured discussion about the controversy surrounding the Heavitree and Whipton Active Streets trial.

KL reported that the Water Lane Development Management Company expected to submit an outline planning application soon. In light of this development and news of a further, apparently more successful, consultation panel on the design code it was agreed that no letter would be sent to the Express and Echo about the missed opportunity of the consultation on the design code discussed at the last meeting.

10. River Canal and Quay Group.

The meeting discussed the future of the Group. JM proposed that the next bulletin should invite members to join the group. He would draft the entry. If the appeal was unsuccessful, he suggested that the Society should discontinue the group and instead seek to join the community group being established to steer the Heritage Harbour. The Society would be represented by an individual nominated by the Committee. JM would seek to facilitate this arrangement. The Committee agreed to the proposed approach.

11. Any Other Business.

There was no other business.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

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

28 November 2023 at 2pm Southernhay United Reformed Church. AM to organise.