

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 28 November 2023

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

1. Minutes of previous meeting – 24 October 2023.

Item 6 the Facebook Page under Matters Arising was corrected from 60 to 16 followers. Otherwise, the minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising.

Item 3 Central Station Cupola. KL expected to learn for the next meeting whether Network Rail had included replacing the cupola in their five year plan.

Item 3 Discovering Exeter Booklets. AM had circulated a draft author and design guide agreed with Ian Maxted and Julia Neville. The Committee agreed several amendments – any changes to a booklet's coverage should be agreed by the Committee, copyright should be retained by the Civic Society unless the authors objected, the secretary should hold an editable electronic copy of a finished booklet as well as the master pdf. It was noted that if a booklet was to be downloadable an A5 portrait format would be better. Several suggestions were made about who might help with art work and layout – Aylwyn Bowen (possibly expensive), Exeter College, Louise Bewsey and Hambly Freeman. AM would action.

Item 3. Facebook Page. AM would include an item in the Bulletin encouraging members to access the page and increase the number of followers.

Item 3. KL had written to the Cathedral Dean but had not yet received a reply.

Item 3. Heritage Harbour Group. JM would further pursue the establishment of a community steering group, including the Civic Society, for the Heritage Harbour. The item would be kept on hold.

Item 6 Heritage Assets. KL had written to Exeter City Council (ECC) but had not yet received a reply.

4. AGM Follow-up.

The numbers of life and annual members had been transposed in the draft minutes and would be amended. KL had also made two minor amendments. The draft minutes would be put on the website.

Outstanding actions from the AGM were to

- revise the list of Trustees held by the Charity Commission with the election of Rita Watson to the Committee. (JE)
- submit the amended resolution and revised constitution to the Charity Commission. (AM/JE)

5. Chair's Report.

The speaker programme to March is:

- 16 December Peter Stephenson of St Petroc's (JM to officiate in KL's absence)
- 20 January Cllr Phil Bialyk, possibly with Emma Morse, who would be encouraged to speak on the revised draft Exeter Plan recently issued for consultation (KL)
- 17 February Ian Varndell on the Dissenters' Graveyard (KL)
- 16 March Cllr Anne Jobson (KL)
- 20 April Martin Watts on Exeter's mills (KL to approach)

Other possible speakers and talks for 2024 were:

- John Davidson on flood issues (KL to approach)
- Bindu Arjoon, ECC's new Chief Executive.
- Exeter Cycle Campaign.
- Stuart Blaylock on Heritage Assets, notably the City Walls (suggested by PW)

Details of talks should be sent to GV to put on the website.

It was agreed that the monthly Bulletin had taken the place of quarterly newsletters. However, it was currently only being delivered by email. AM would identify members without email addresses and circulate the list to the committee to see if bulletins could be hand delivered, so avoiding expensive postage.

KL had been in correspondence with Bill Horner, the County Archaeologist and a leading member of the Devon Archaeological Society about the proposed sale of County Hall land and Larkbeare House and the proposed development at Southgate where the Society had submitted pre planning application confidential comments. He hoped to further the relationship and to include Anthony Harding.

He asked committee members to consider whether there should be a Society event in February/March and what it should be.

GV suggested that the Society should identify members who lived in or near major proposed areas for development in order to generate greater interest and activity. This might particularly apply to the Southgate, Eastgate, Northgate and Red Cow proposals. KL would contact Ian Collinson at ECC to identify when development proposals might come forward so the Society could prepare.

The next walk would be around Polsloe on 6 December and would be led by GV. Jim Perriam was considering walks for January and February, possibly using walks from the Discovering Exeter booklets.

JE reported that the City Council Executive would be considering that evening a proposal to sell land at Clifton Hill and Mary Arches car park in order to meet the debt created by Exeter City Living's collapse. To get the best price, the Executive was being recommended to

dispense with the self-imposed ban on selling council land for purpose-built student accommodation. The Committee would monitor the outcome of the meeting.

6. Treasurer's Report.

JE reported that cash collected at the AGM, including some £40 for the raffle, had been banked. £60 in subscriptions had also been received. Letters to life members seeking donations had yet to be sent.

7. Planning Report

There had been two meetings of the planning sub-committee, with only minor applications to consider. Objections had been sent to the Spruce Close/Celia Crescent development. The next meeting would be on 12 December and would be chaired by KL. The main item was likely to be the proposed development at 26-28 Longbrook Street.

It was agreed that only the notes of meetings would be circulated to the Committee, not any letters sent.

8. Strategic Planning and Highways

GV had circulated a report on the group's activities.

Members of the Tree Preservation Task Force would meet ECC's Tree Officer on 1 December.

The Committee agreed the terms of reference for the taskforce but suggested that, in line with the proposal at item 5, members might be encouraged to form area groups to assess the need for further preservation orders in their locality. This would be helped if ECC published an up to date map of existing preservation orders.

JM expressed concern at the possible impact of sale of Larkbeare House on the trees in the grounds. He suggested the taskforce contact the County Council Tree Officer who was responsible for their maintenance.

HH suggested it would be worth looking at 'My Society' for their experience in protecting trees.

9. Blue Plaques Report.

The Committee considered the written report.

The George Gissing blue plaque would be unveiled at 25 Heavitree Road at 11am on 8 December. The Society had received a donation of £100 from the Gissing Society. KL would arrange for the plaque to be put up free of charge. In view of the donation and saving in the costs of erecting the plaque, the Society would fund free teas and coffees at the Barnfield Theatre afterwards. The committee agreed to a small gift to the person erecting the plaque.

The Committee noted that attention would turn to replacing the Devon 'Witches' plaque with more suitable wording. KL noted that it would be important to get the council interested in the change and they might provide some funds. Bideford might also be contacted about the intended change.

The Committee agreed in principle to a plaque to Dr Margaret Jackson, subject to further consideration at the next meeting of her apparent interest in eugenics. The plaque was expected to be fully funded by others.

It was agreed that it would be possible to do a further plaque in this financial year if it meant that it could be unveiled in the summer.

11. Any Other Business.

It was agreed that a gift , value £30, would be given to Peter Nickel for his chairmanship of the River, Canal and Quay Group over several years.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

Tuesday 30 January and Monday 11 March, both at 2pm Southernhay United Reformed Church. AM to organise.