

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 29 January 2024

Present: Keith Lewis (Chairman), Gert Vonhoff, Jane Evans (Treasurer) Andy McKeon (Secretary), John Monks, Rita Watson, Jennifer Woodman. Hilary Neville attended from the Blue Plaques team. Susan Barratt attended as an observer.

Apologies: Hazel Harvey, Pamela Wootton

1. Minutes of previous meeting – 28 November 2023.

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising.

Item 3 Central Station Cupola. KL reported that the cupola would be replaced in the coming financial year using glass fibre. Network Rail had agreed to a joint press release with the Society.

Item 3 Discovering Exeter Booklets. AM had contacted Exeter College and Hambly Freeman but had received no substantive response from either. Aylwyn Bowen(AB) had responded positively. AM tabled mock-ups of the front cover prepared by AB. Members considered the mock-ups suitable but made a few suggestions, including about the positioning and size of 'Exeter Civic Society', its logo and the title. It was agreed AM would meet AB to discuss the cover and design for the booklets further and costs. Ian Maxted had been unable to make progress on revising the draft of the St Leonard's booklet.

Item 3. Cathedral Dean letter. A reply had not yet been received. It was noted that much of the green had been re-turfed, some had been reseeded.

Item 3. Heritage Harbour Group. Kept on hold.

Item 3 Heritage Assets letter. Exeter City Council (ECC) had not yet replied.

Item 4 AGM Follow-up. The revised constitution had been accepted by the Charity Commission and their website now referred to the latest version. AM would add Rita Watson to the list of trustees held by the Charity Commission. KL suggested that an item on Trustee responsibilities be included on the next agenda. (AM)

4. Chair's Report.

KL had circulated a written report.

The Saturday morning meeting on 20 January with Cllrs Phil Bialyk and Emma Morse had been very well-attended and was generally positively viewed. The speaker programme to April is:

- 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 approached, reply awaited)
- Richard Holladay on the past city centre retail trade (KL to approach)
- 'Mark' from the Exeter Food Bank (KL to approach)
- Stagecoach Regional Manager (AM to approach)
- 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. KL would not be available for the 15 June talk but AM expected to be able to lead.

The next walk would be on 7 February starting in Northernhay Gardens.

KL and JE had attended the inaugural meeting of the Exeter Community Assembly. They recommended that the Civic Society should not join the assembly as it seemed to be aiming to operate outside normal democratic routes.

GV agreed to take the lead for the Society's involvement in the next Harbour Festival on 9 June.

The proposed planning teach-in would be held at the end of February [now deferred to March].

5. Treasurer's Report.

JE had circulated the current management account and balance sheet. The Society was dependent on membership subscriptions. Membership was more or less steady with joiners matching 'leavers'. She would be seeking donations from life members after the end of the month.

It was agreed that the annual donation of £250 would be made to the maintenance of the Matthew the Miller clock, provided the clock would continue to be operational. Members would be invited to contribute to the significant cost of repairs to the clock currently being undertaken by the church.

6 Planning Report

KI had circulated the minutes of the 12 December and 9 January meetings. There had been no major items. He reported that there was a proposal for a number of 'parklets' in Fore Street and Musgrave Row, probably using some parking spaces.

JM asked about the proposed repairs to the quay wall. He said that the ledge towards the top of the wall had been used by customs officers to survey ships at the quay and was of historic significance. KL said that he would relay this fact to the planning officer.

It was noted that no member had raised any planning issues for some time.

7. Strategic Planning and Highways

GV had circulated a report on the group's activities. He would be looking further into potential Civic Society and community involvement in ECC's Design Review Panel and the Exeter Design Quality Partnership led by Design West.

The meeting discussed the Society's response to the Heavitree and Whipton 'Active Streets' Trial. It was agreed that the Society would prepare a draft response which might be discussed at a meeting with a panel of one 'pro' individual and one 'anti' individual to see if there could be any common ground and to finalise the Society's approach. (GV)

JM asked about the role of the Tree Preservation Task Force in relation to preserving the trees at Larkbeare House which was now up for sale. GV said that he would ask the Task Force to go back to the ECC Tree Officer who had said he would consider tree preservation orders for the site to see if anything further had developed since the last meeting and in particular whether further action would be taken to preserve the significant trees in Larkbeare now it was up for sale and potential development. (GV)

8. Blue Plaques Report.

The Committee considered the written report.

It was agreed that the Society would not pursue replacing the 'Devon Witches' plaque as further research had shown it was not a Society plaque. HN said that she would in due course contact the individual who had lead the plaque to get further information about the plaque and its reference to 'witches'. Further information might then be included on the Society's website.

The Committee discussed the issues surrounding Dr Margaret Jackson and the plaque as outlined in the report. It was agreed that the Society could defend a plaque on the grounds of Margaret Jackson's overall positive achievements and would therefore support one. The plaque was expected to be fully funded by others. HN would apply for a grant. The money could be returned if anything untoward was discovered which prevented the plaque from going ahead.

JW reported that the DCMS/Heritage England wider blue plaque project was intended to complement existing activities, not replace them, and would be focused on areas where there was no active Civic Society or equivalent erecting blue plaques to notable local people. They would be seeking nominations soon. It was unlikely that Exeter would be involved given the Society had an active blue plaque scheme.

9. Any Other Business.

The Committee discussed the approach from the Devon Family History Society offering some copies of the Discovering Exeter and tram booklets and to digitise others for the benefit of both Societies. It was agreed that the offer of booklets would be accepted but there was no need to digitise others when hard copies were available and being sold. It was also agreed that the current digitised copies on the Civic Society's website should be moved to the members' area so as to provide a benefit to members.

10. Date of Next Meeting

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