

THE STRATFORD-UPON-AVON SOCIETY
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 3rd March 2008

The meeting was chaired by the president, Sir Brian Follett.

A minute's silence was held in memory of Jean Abelson, who had died aged 88. Jean had been chairman from 1987-1990 and then became vice-chairman. She had also been an active member of the executive committee for many years and was a strong supporter of the society and its aims. A letter of condolence would be sent to the family from Ian Prosser on behalf of the society.

Apologies were received from Mr John Maples MP, Mr Nicholas Fogg, Mr Donald Hanson, Mr John Miller, Mr Paul Standing, Rev Margaret Sweet, Mrs Patricia Wainwright.

The minutes of the annual general meeting held on Monday 5th March 2007 were approved and signed.

Chairman's Report

The chairman, Ian Prosser, opened his report by commenting on the much improved attendance figures at monthly meetings, particularly for the presentations made by Robert Bearman, the Rev Martin Gorick and George Ferguson. In addition, a consultation meeting on the pedestrian footbridge had attracted more than 70 people. There had, however, been some disappointments, with lack of support for the Christmas lunch and the Sing-along despite considerable efforts by Neville Usher and Joan Burgess. Feedback from members on the Society's activities was needed so that the needs of the membership could be fulfilled.

The range of activities undertaken by the Society was wide and included monitoring and commenting on planning applications, supporting improvements to Chestnut Walk with maintenance and replacement of trees, publishing books on local matters, taking a full part in the consultation process of WCS, holding discussions with key bodies in the town such as the Town Trust and supporting the Heritage Open Days at the Town Hall.

On behalf of the Society, the chairman had also chaired an international conference in Stratford about the control of Canada Geese.

All these activities showed that the Society plays an important part in the life of the town and was not just a one-dimensional group. However, while earning a reputation as 'influential' it was necessary to monitor how we could improve our effectiveness in the causes we take up.

Bancroft Gardens Leon Tanner and the planning group had submitted eloquent objections and some of our comments had been accepted and the designs modified. The chairman also reported that, as representative on the Community Forum of the WCS, he had complained about the handling of the proposals, which were not brought back to the Forum for discussion. He had been assured by Professor Ronnie Mulryne, chairman of the Forum, that this would not happen again, but the lack of opportunity for discussion had contributed to the feeling of frustration concerning the wholesale tree felling.

The Bridge There was an excellent attendance and response by members to the consultation exercise by WCC in November and further views were invited by email and letter. Thanks were expressed to Ian Fradgley and Beryl Downing for collecting and collating all this information. Our comments had been sent to WCC in January and our view was that they had failed to establish the need for the bridge in this location.

Stratford-upon-Avon – a history of its streets and buildings The reprint of Robert Bearman's book had gone extremely well and only 100 copies remained. A grant had been received from the Town Trust and the Society was most appreciative of its help. As a follow-up to the publication, a small group, headed by Peter Burgess, had been set up to develop the theme of preserving and enhancing the Historic Spine between the Birthplace and Holy Trinity. A comprehensive paper had been written on the subject and the constructive suggestions would be discussed with the local authorities.

Schools Project The Society had been awarded a prize of £500 by WestMASA (West Midlands Amenity Societies' Association) for a project devised by Beryl Downing to assist local schools in the citizenship curriculum. The Society felt this was a considerable achievement and had agreed to allocate a further £1,000 for the costs of production.

Communications The Society had made considerable progress in improving its communications. Ian Heggie was heading a support group to help Ian Fradgley and the website had been updated and improved. *Talk of the Town*, edited by Patricia McFarland would be enlarged to allow for in depth features on matters of importance to the town and would appear every six months. A two-page *News Update*, edited by Beryl Downing, would be issued four times a year to keep members up to date with the latest developments and other matters affecting the town. To date one enlarged *Talk of the Town* and four *s* had been issued and had received very positive feedback.

In addition, press releases on various topics had been issued by Jayne Pantazievits.

The chairman ended his report with an appeal for help from any members who might have even a few hours a year to spare. The Society particularly needed help to oversee the distribution of the stocks of various publications published by the Society over a period of years.

Web Presentation

Ian Fradgley gave a detailed presentation of the website and how it could best be used by members. He demonstrated its ease of access, the type of information it contained about the Society and how to access the latest information on the work of the various groups and on any forthcoming social events. He also explained the various categories of access, which included a section open to the public and another which was for members only and required an individual password. These were issued at the meeting and would be sent by post to members unable to be present.

Group Annual Reports

Strategy, Planning, Photographic, Membership, Programme, Social and Communications reports had been circulated with the notice of the meeting and chairmen were invited to respond to questions from the floor.

Strategy Group

Members: Brian Wright (chairman), Bob Bearman, Nick Bishton, Peter Burgess, Will Hawkes, Ian Heggie, Leon Tanner.

Brian Wright emphasised the importance of the evolution of World Class Stratford, the publication of the draft Local Development Framework and the debate about the volume and design of new housing.

He also expressed concern about the future of the town centre citing the threat of out-of-town retailers and the high cost of operating in Stratford, which effectively blocked the opening of new small shops. He hoped World Class Stratford could address these issues, including following up the High Street study undertaken two years ago.

On the Local Development Plan the Strategy Group had pressed the view that any new developments should not be at the expense of green space within Stratford town boundaries and that 'infilling' should be more tightly controlled.

Design was of major importance and, with members of the Planning Group, the Strategy Group was trying to resurrect the debate started three years ago by Ian Heggie when planners from two East Anglian towns explained how they had got design incorporated into their planning guidance, despite the opposition of the major builders.

On housing, the Government was calling for the overall total for the East Midlands to be increased, which would certainly put more pressure on Stratford. It was possible that the prevailing financial crisis could slow these proceedings, but the Society would resist any further large-scale developments in the town. Proposals for the Government's new Eco town at Long Marston would be watched closely as it would have a bearing on Stratford. Units in Eco Towns were not allowed against overall housing targets.

Planning Group

Members: Leon Tanner (chairman), Peter Burgess, Paul Burley, Alan Dyke, Anne Grey, Alan Hawkins, Audrey Hillyar, Robert Humber, Paul Standing, Brian Wright.

Leon Tanner began by thanking the Society for the award presented at the 2007 AGM, which he had not been able to collect in person.

Referring to developments during the past year he contrasted the good relations created by the RST over its development and the friction arising from the local councils' handling of the Bancroft Gardens, Recreation Ground and Bridge. Information had been difficult to come by and the Society often had to make judgements based on rumour rather than fact.

The next focus would be on the Rother Triangle and while some landowners seemed to believe that a coordinated approach would be to their advantage, one owner had submitted an application for a scheme which would pre-empt any opportunity for collaboration. The town had not been well served by its recent new housing and this attitude did not bode well for future large scale developments which were inevitable if the Government's housing allocations were to be met. Improving design standards was crucial and the regulations required to reduce carbon emissions should not be an added burden to designers but a stimulus to break out of the rut.

A member questioned from the floor whether any agreements had been made between RST, SDC, CC and AWM before WCS began as the current activities appear disconnected. BW responded that it appeared there were no clear measurements to judge success – no unified driving force and little understanding of current developments impact on the retail sector of the town centre.

Photographic and Awards

Jack Crimp reported that the Society had joined with the Town Management Partnership to buy a Powerpoint projector, which had been used successfully on several occasions since at Society meetings.

As part of the Society's response to the District Council's invitation to consider the future use of the Toll House, a series of photographs had been taken of the Toll House to contribute to the investigation. The photographs were featured as the centrepiece of the annual Heritage Days exhibition at the Town Hall and also formed the basis for the Town Management Partnership's video presentation at the same event.

Membership report

Ian Fradgley reported a small increase in membership and an additional corporate member. Email communications were now received by 48% of members and 71% of members allowed the Society to reclaim tax on their subscriptions through Gift Aid. Changes to the website included details of the Society's responses to planning applications with a link to the District Council website. A new members' log-in function would allow members to contribute their views online.

Programme report

Joan Burgess reported that the season's lectures had been particularly well attended with talks by Dr Robert Bearman and the Rev Martin Gorrick attracting particularly enthusiastic

audiences. Other distinguished speakers had included the architect and broadcaster George Ferguson, who gave the C A Rookes Memorial lecture. The Falcon Hotel had proved a good venue and its manager, Kevin Skeet, had been extremely helpful to the Society. The Christmas Carols Sing Along evening had unfortunately had to be cancelled because of lack of support.

Social programme report

Neville Usher reported that the May visit to Stanton Guildhouse and the December lunch with the Warwickshire Local History Society had been enjoyable events, but poor support for the latter would put any similar future event in doubt. A chairman's evening was being planned for the summer and would include a tour of Holy Trinity church, guided by the Rev Martin Gorick.

Communications report

Members: Beryl Downing, Peter Burgess, Jenny Fradgley, Ian Heggie, Patrica McFarland.

Beryl Downing reported that a group had been formed to consider ways of improving the Society's communications and building on its role as a Civic Society. In addition to the newsletters, the pilot booklet based on citizenship and carbon emissions (referred to in the chairman's report) was being developed with Bridgetown Primary School and Stratford High School. Particular thanks were expressed to Jenny Fradgley for her help in liaising with the High School.

Hon Treasurer's Report

Bertie Tuckey presented his report which showed assets of £8,173. The re-appointment of Guard D'Oyly as the Society's reporting accountants was proposed by Bertie Tuckey, seconded by Neville Usher and agreed.

Subscriptions

It was proposed by Peter Burgess and seconded by Neville Usher that in future subscriptions would be

1. Students £10.00
2. Individual £15.00
3. Household £20.00

The proposal was carried.

Election of officers

The meeting agreed the re-election of the following officers:

Chairman	Ian Prosser
Vice Chairman	Ian Heggie
Hon Treasurer	Bertie Tuckey
Hon Secretary	Beryl Downing
Membership Sec	Ian Fradgely

Election of general committee members

The meeting agreed the re-election of those general committee members who were retiring in rotation: Jack Crimp, Patricia McFarland, Paul Standing, Neville Usher. Will Hawkes had retired from the committee but was happy to be involved for consultation and advice in his specialist area.

AOB None

The next annual general meeting will be held on Monday 9th March 2009

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