



# THE BEACONSFIELD SOCIETY

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## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for the year 2010-2011 held in the Fitzwilliams Centre on Thursday 26 January 2012 starting at 7.30 pm**

The following Committee members and twenty members and guests were present.

**Committee:** President, Les Davies; Chairman, Sandy Saunders; Treasurer, Tony Bristow; Other committee members; Mike Elliott; Co-opted members; Jessica McEvoy, Laurence Smaje.

### **1. Welcome by the President.**

The President welcomed members and guests present and the guest speaker, Jacquetta Lowen-Cooper. He went on to pay respects to his predecessor, John Gorton who did so much for the Society. Among his contributions he had been Chairman from 1993 to 1998 and then President until 2008. He had been a keen supporter of the Society's Awareness Day and one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Twinning Association. To our great regret he died suddenly in August 2011 on his way home from holiday. Following applause from the audience in appreciation of John Gorton, The President introduced the Chairman, Sandy Saunders to give his report

### **2. Apologies for Absence.**

Apologies had been received from Committee members John Meredith and Janet Simmonds. Richard Keith, the Town Mayor and Adrian Busby, Leader of South Bucks District Council had also been invited but were unable to attend and sent their apologies.

### **3. Minutes of the last AGM held on November 3 2010**

The Chairman summarised the events of the AGM and reminded members that the Society had made the Citizen of the Year award to Ian Johnson but that no new buildings were felt of sufficient quality to justify an award as Building of the Year. After the business meeting, Countess Howe, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, had given an illuminating and amusing description of the history of the appointment and her current responsibilities.

### **4. Chairman's Report**

The Chairman also paid respects to John Gorton and reiterated John's account of the role of the Society. In short it was to preserve and enhance the amenities of the Town, encompassing both the physical environment and the spirit of the community.

He then pointed out that the Committee had been debating how best to achieve these objectives and, following the Big Society Event held in June 2011, decided to seek members' views using a questionnaire. He thanked the nearly two dozen members who

had responded and said that 90% had listed *Monitoring proposed development plans*; 75% *Issuing Newsletters* and 70% *Acting as a pressure group when required*. The more community-orientated issues received less support of around 50%. However, among those who commented on this section, there was strong support for a Comprehensive Information Service and for development of a Community Facility in a central location.

The Chairman pointed out that such initiatives could not come about overnight, and that we needed more members and volunteers to help realise such desirable developments. He was pleased to add that despite this caution, he would be able to announce some positive steps in this direction after the rest of the formal business was completed.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer had tabled the Receipts and Payments Account for the year to 30 September 2011 and highlighted the salient points. The bottom line was that the Society had a surplus for the year and that the Bank Balance was somewhat larger than that of 2010. This was due partly because we had not run an Awareness Day last year and further that membership income had increased following his encouragement to recalcitrant members who were behind with their subscriptions. Last year we also issued only one Newsletter, rather than the three circulated in 2010.

The Treasurer then took us through some of the details of payments and satisfied some specific questions from members.

Before finishing he thanked George Foden who had kindly examined our accounts for many years and also did so for this year.

The Chairman thanked him for his work on behalf of the Society, and the Report was Proposed, Seconded and approved unanimously by the meeting.

## **6. Presentation of Awards**

The Chairman declared that, yet again, the Committee felt unable to nominate an outstanding building for an award but was delighted to announce that the Committee had enthusiastically nominated Michael Harrison as Citizen of the Year. He had known Michael for more than 40 years when they both moved to Beaconsfield and when Michael retired from IBM in 1994 he had wanted to give something back to the community. He had been giving back magnificently ever since.

The year after he retired, he joined the Beaconsfield Independent Electors Association and served as its Secretary for the ensuing 9 years. He remains on its Committee today and has only just retired from the role of Electoral Commission Nominating Officer. He has stood for Town, District and County Councils, and been Secretary of the Candlemas Pond Action Group, the Beaconsfield Donkey Derby Committee, and the Cybercafé Committee. To this day he remains Secretary of the Beaconsfield Lions Club and the Beaconsfield Community Association and to top all this, the Society is indebted to him for his role as our Secretary from 2003 to 2009. Throughout this time, he had the unstinting support of his wife Audrey, without whom he undoubtedly would have been unable to achieve so much. In finishing, the Chairman commented that 'there couldn't be a more deserving citizen', with which the members agreed with applause.

In response, after thanking the Society for the Award, Michael said how much he and Audrey had enjoyed living in Beaconsfield, but that he deplored the erosion of local autonomy. Even more worrying was the increase in anti-social behaviour by both young and adults and he hoped that local community organisations could find ways of working more closely together in order to foster a stronger feeling of a caring community.

## **7. Election of Officers and Committee**

The Chairman handed over to the President for election of the Chairman. The President said that the Chairman's term of office was 5 years and that as the Chairman had served for only 4 years, in principle he could serve for a further year. The Chairman said he was prepared to do so and the President proposed him. This was seconded by Henry Wilson and he was elected unanimously.

The Chairman then said that existing members of the Committee – Tony Bristow, Mike Elliott and John Meredith- had agreed to stand again and that the Committee wished to propose for membership Kari Dorme, Jess McEvoy and Laurence Smaje, who had also agreed to become Secretary. The Chairman asked if they could be elected *en bloc* and this was seconded by the President and agreed by the membership who did so.

## **8. Any other business**

The Chairman was pleased to announce three initiatives for the coming year.

First he said that Laurence Smaje would lead the updating and expansion of the Communities Database and in developing the Information Resource. Jess McEvoy had agreed to take over running of the 'Awareness Day', which would take place on 26 May and would be renamed *Beaconsfield Now! 2012* and Kari Dorme was planning a celebration of the centenary of the arrival in Beaconsfield of the great American poet, Robert Frost, to be held on 15 September 2012. Each in turn expanded briefly on their plans and members were invited to ask for clarification of any points they wished. Further details were provided which will be found on the Society's website.

Finally, the Chairman mentioned that Councillor Joy Legg is chairing a Committee examining the options for creating a BMX park in the town where youngsters can use their bikes energetically without disrupting other parts of the town. Councillor Matt Denyer is orchestrating the Beaconsfield Games on 7 July, prior to the Olympics and is also leading the Cycle Path initiative and Councillor Graham Davie is finalizing plans for the Fitness Trail.

## **9. The biggest planning and disruption threat ahead is HS2 and the Chairman asked the Treasurer to raise points of particular concern.**

The Treasurer pointed out that the Government had announced the proposed route, which would traverse the Chilterns via Amersham and the Misbourne Valley and that there would be a hybrid bill at the end of next year. Despite an 80% vote in the consultation exercise against the proposal, this figure was not announced by the Minister and its strategic value is dubious to say the least. Moreover, there will be massive disruption to the whole of the Chilterns for years in view of the huge amount of material being excavated and then

required for its construction. The Treasurer felt it was still not too late to oppose the Bill but that the arguments would need to hinge around the strategic case.

The formal business meeting closed at 8.10 pm

**Talk by Councillor Jacquetta Lowen-Cooper, chairman of South Bucks District Council Planning Committee.**

Our Chairman then expressed great pleasure in asking Jacquetta Lowen –Cooper to speak.

Jacquetta introduced herself as a Beaconsfield girl. Born in Chalfont St Giles, she had grown up in the area and had attended Beaconsfield High School for Girls. She now lived in Seer Green and was sometimes questioned as to her suitability for chairing the Planning Committee as she did not actually live in the District. She countered this by pointing out that this made her genuinely independent and not subject to accusations of ‘nimbyism’, when people were aggrieved by decisions of her Committee.

She first described how the Committee was constituted by 12 members, one from each parish in the District and that they each tried to act disinterestedly on behalf of the community as a whole. They were, however, constrained by planning law and governed by the Local Development Plan. They were only able to reject applications inconsistent with the Plan on the basis of sound planning reasons. Many proposals were decided by Officers in the Planning Department by delegated authority, but if a member of the Planning Committee were concerned, or there were 10 individual objections from the public, the full Committee had to give consideration to the proposal. This included a site visit by members of the Committee together with Council Officers with specific expertise in relevant areas such as traffic control, conservation, and environmental protection.

At this point Jacquetta invited questions from the audience and answered them openly and effectively. In response to most questions she also used them as a platform to provide more information about planning law and other issues around planning. One interesting asymmetry appeared in this context. If the Committee rejects an application, the proposer can appeal against it, but if it approves an application the public cannot appeal against it.

The audience was deeply engaged for fully 40 minutes before the Chairman felt it time to call the meeting to a close. He thanked Jacquetta for her fascinating insight into how frequently contentious decisions are made and for her openness and clarity in answering the many questions that were posed.

He then invited the audience to stay for some simple refreshments during which many more questions and animated discussion took place.