



THE BEACONSFIELD SOCIETY

celebrating the past, promoting the present and influencing the future

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for the year 2011-2012 held in the Council Chamber, Beaconsfield Town Hall on Thursday 8 November 2012 starting at 7.30 pm

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

Committee: President, Les Davies; Chairman, Sandy Saunders; Vice Chairman, Mike Elliott; Treasurer, Tony Bristow; Secretary, Laurence Smaje.

Other committee members: Kari Dorne, Co-opted members; John Page, Graeme Richards.

1. **Apologies for absence:** Bryan and Marian Rigby

2. **Welcome by the President.**

The President welcomed the members and guests present and then paid tribute to Sandy Saunders who had come to the end of his 5 year tenure as Chairman. He said that Sandy had stepped in as chairman when the Society was in some difficulty and he was delighted to note that he would leave it in a much better state than that in which he found it.

3. **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for 2010-11 held on 26 January 2012**

This was agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

4. **Presentation of Awards**

a. **Outstanding Citizen of the Year**

The President expressed his pleasure at presenting the Citizen of the Year award to Frank Armstrong who had lived in Beaconsfield since 1981. Frank had been active in many organisations whilst here, in most cases taking on roles including chairman and/or treasurer. These include the Royal British Legion, the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Family Association, BOTRA, the Lions, Beaconsfield Community Association and as an Independent member of the Town Council between 2006 and 2010. Before giving him his certificate, the President said that on being asked what he planned to do in the future Frank had said, ' *to continue as at present, being a general nuisance to people who believe they are right and know all the answers*'

b. **Outstanding Building of the Year**

This is the first year the Society has felt it appropriate to make an award since 2007, a sad state of affairs, but this year we had no difficulty in awarding it to St Teresa's Parish Centre. This replaced the old Borlase Hall and its entrance not only beautifully reflects the Church Porch but the Centre provides an excellent community resource. Its internal partition walls can be re-arranged to provide several small rooms or even one very large one and we were delighted that

Father Francis Higgins was able to attend to accept the Award from our President on behalf of the Church.

5. Chairman's report.

The chairman introduced his comments by saying that it was not necessary to give a lengthy report as members recently received our Newsletter, but he did wish to review the highlights of this, his final year as Chairman.

He first wished to acknowledge members of the Committee for creating an enthusiastic and dynamic atmosphere and used the opportunity to warmly thank Jess McEvoy and Kari Dorme who, respectively took the lead in producing the Society's great successes during the year – Beaconsfield Now! 2012 and the Celebration of the Centenary of Robert Frost's arrival in Beaconsfield. He also thanked Laurence Smaje for providing support to both of them and for organising the visit to Penn Church as well as refurbishing our website and bringing it up to date. He noted that all the officers and members of the committee were prepared to stand for re-election except for John Meredith who has decided not to stand again. John has served the Society and indeed the whole town most loyally and the Chairman said how much he appreciated the support John had given him since he joined the Committee.

Before finishing, he reported that in view of the the recent announcement that the Defence School of Languages will definitely be leaving Wilton Park which will be re-developed, the Society has resurrected *Wilton Park Watch* in collaboration with BOTRA and other interested organisations. This is not only in order to monitor the proposed development but to contribute ideas to ensure that it is of benefit to the whole of the Town.

Finally, he thanked the membership for appointing him Chairman in 2007, following a suggestion by Juliet Gorton. He considered it a real privilege, particularly as his last year had been so successful with splendid support from the Committee.

6. Treasurer's Report

The statement of the Receipts and Payments Account for the year to 30 September 2012 had been tabled, so the Treasurer felt it necessary to highlight only a few significant differences from previous years.

Perhaps the most important feature was that the bank balance was essentially the same as last year, even though there had been a substantial increase in payments and a small reduction in membership income. The increase in payments was due to the expenditure on Beaconsfield Now! 2012 and the Robert Frost Celebration and a one-off cost of developing the refurbished website. These, however were offset by generous sponsorship from the Frost Partnership and a substantial surplus from ticket sales for the Robert Frost Celebration. Moreover, all of these could be considered as investments for the future, as without such activities the Society would be in danger of withering away.

In summary, the Treasurer felt the Society was in sound financial shape and he did not feel it necessary to makes any changes to the subscription. There were no questions from the members present and his report was accepted.

Prior to finishing, the Treasurer wished to thank John Brown for his extremely efficient and prompt examination of the Accounts.

7. Secretary's Report

There were just two items the Secretary wished to bring to the attention of the meeting. The first was the visit to Penn Church on Saturday 17 November, the arrangements for which he summarised and the second was the Society's website. He said he had recently been able to gain access to the first Minute book and early Newsletters of the Society which were in the archives of The Beaconsfield and District Historical Society. He said he would be creating a short History section in the website but there were huge gaps in the record and he needed help from members to hunt out old AGM Minutes and old Newsletters or any other material, including reminiscences of earlier times. He would be pleased to be contacted on 01494 681165 by anyone with any information that could help flesh out the Society's history.

8. Election of Officers and Committee

The President took the Chair for the election of the new Chairman and Mike Elliott was proposed by the current Chairman and seconded by the Secretary. There were no other nominations and he was elected unanimously. The new Chairman took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

His first task was to recommend that Sandy Saunders should be elected as Vice President for one year in the first instance. The committee had expressed the wish that they could retain his advice and experience even after he had completed his term of office as Chairman and this seemed a good way of doing so. This was proposed by Les Davies and seconded by Kari Dorme and he was elected unanimously.

With the exception of John Meredith, the existing Officers and Committee were prepared to stand for re-election and the Committee also proposed John Burton as a new member of the Committee. The Chairman proposed that they be considered en bloc and Ian Jackson proposed and Deirdre Smaje seconded the proposal which was approved unanimously by the members present.

This brought the AGM to a close at almost exactly 8.00pm

Talk by Councillor Martin Tett, leader of Bucks County Council

The Chairman then had great pleasure in asking Martin Tett to give his talk.

Councillor Tett was well known for his opposition to HS2 but, as he felt his views on this were well known, he thought it might be more appropriate to discuss the work of the County Council which was less well known. He would, however, be pleased to answer questions on any aspect of Council activity later.

We had a short ancient history lesson first. The county's name is Anglo-Saxon in origin from around 800AD coming from the district (*scire*) of *Bucca's* home (referring to Buckingham, the original County town before Henry VIII moved it to Aylesbury).

We were then brought up to date with some statistics. The county is some 720sq miles in area of which roughly a third is green belt containing 42 county parks. There are some 500,000 inhabitants in the south and another 350,000 living in the north, who together contribute some £11 billion value added to the national economy. Overall there are about 220,000 jobs in the county and the County Council budget is £328 million for the coming year. This then brought us to how this was managed.

Councillor Tett joined the Council in 2005 and was elected leader in 2011. One of the major issues facing the Council is that, being a relatively rich, it receives a very low contribution from central government and even that has been cut by 28% in the recent austerity cuts. The Education spend is similar to the total Council budget and comes from central government. However, the Council is responsible for how the education budget is spent as well as funding social services, fire and police services, roads, libraries, emergency planning and trading standards.

Faced with this wide area of responsibility and with a shrinking budget he had developed careful strategic plans in each area to ensure money was well spent, selling unused buildings and using those they had as efficiently as possible. Among other things this meant losing some 2000 staff from the previous 5000, open plan working for those who remained, even to the extent of hot-desking, removing annual increments for Council staff and replacing it with performance related pay. It also meant developing a priority plan for road maintenance and moving away from providing a universal service to commissioning others rather than as a service provider.

Buckinghamshire has more volunteers than any other county in the UK and Councillor Tett is keen to involve communities in taking as much responsibility for themselves as possible. He was proud to say that they had not cut any grants in the voluntary sector but was keen to hand over services where appropriate. For example, the county would provide the infrastructure of accommodation, training, books and support for volunteers to run local libraries rather than close them because of lack of money. The other rationalisation he was keen to support was sharing facilities and services with other counties by building strategic partnerships.

Questions from the audience sought his thoughts on removing a layer of local administration, for example abolishing District Councils, the success of the County's local area fora and how far central government was prepared to delegate to local authorities. We finally came to the issue of HS2 where he justified the county's spending on its campaign against the train. He made a convincing case that a Council has to take a strategic view as to whether initiatives are good value for money, their environmental impact and whether there are more appropriate alternatives. He felt that the case for HS2 fell on every score and provided strong evidence for this view. The Council may have to pursue its case through the courts, but are prepared to do so.

The Treasurer then gave an eloquent vote of thanks for a fascinating talk and invited members and guests to continue discussion over light refreshments.

Laurence Smaje
Secretary
9 November 2012