



Minutes of Annual General Meeting 2021

(Draft, for formal approval at the 2022 AGM)

Held online at 19.00 on Tuesday 22 June

Attendance

41 members participated online. Apologies were received from Roger Mortimer, Peter Ellis, Wendy Pollard and Peter Floyd.

Business of the meeting

1. Chair's welcome

The Chair, Simon Birch, welcomed participants and thanked them for making themselves available. He regretted the need to have the meeting via Zoom again rather than in the former St Michael's Church, but showed some images of the restoration work there. The Society would be organising a visit soon.

2. Minutes of 2020 AGM

These were approved without change.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Review of Civic Society activity 2020

Simon Birch, the chair, reported on activities in the year 2020 and 2021 to date.

Unlike some charities, the Society had not been badly hit by the pandemic, with membership rising to 577 (up 27) and finances remaining very sound.

Communication had been very effective, with Better Bristol attracting a lot of praise as usual, and he thanked Mike Manson and Tracy Feltham, the editor and designer for their work. The Events Team under Nic Billane had organised a stream of interesting zoom talks and entertaining archive film footage, and, more recently, walks. The website, managed by Alan Morris and David Demery, was lively and interesting, and a good source of information about developments in the city

The Major Sites Group, now convened jointly by himself and John Payne, had 12 members. It had engaged with some major issues including St Mary le Port, Ashton Gate, the Redcliffe Quarter and Temple Island and was working well, though it was not always easy to assess what influence it actually had (but it could point to some undoubted successes in the past, eg the BRI Old Building).

As announced last year, the Planning Applications Group had wound up, and he paid tribute to John Payne's work over the years.

Two new groups had been formed: Transport and Place-Making, chaired by Alan Morris, with 12 members, which was already busy; and Heritage, chaired by himself, looking at among other things, Western Harbour, Ashton Court, Silverthorne Road and the Llandoger Trow (which had been facing an uncertain future but which, he noted, was about to reopen under new ownership).

He thanked Gordon Young for the work of the Blue Plaques panel, which had continued during lockdown (leading to a backlog of plaques awaiting installation). Sue Ellis had taken over the Design Awards: there had been no award in 2020, but there would be a presentation for 2021 in September.

Looking to the future, he mentioned three priority issues:

- St Mary le Port had raised the issue of the nature of the Society's input to the planning process: how far it should be that of a small expert group, seen by Council planners as a critical friend, measured and rational; and how far should it reflect wider and perhaps more polarised and extreme views;
- the very rapid pace of change in the city; in the regard he mentioned a planned event in the autumn, which he hoped might become a regular item, on "The Changing Face of Bristol"
- Western Harbour, where the Council were revisiting their earlier "consultation"; and where the Society was setting up a group to develop its own input into the discussions, working with two postgraduate students from UWE.

In conclusion he noted current developments on Ashton Court. Prince Charles's The Prince's Foundation had become involved in running a consultation on the way forward, and he had been invited (along with the mayor, the Lord Lieutenant and others) to a two-day workshop on Weds 23 and Thurs 24 June. He would be emphasising the need to keep the house and the estate as one, and to maximise public access.

The report was noted with approval and there were no questions.

5. Financial report

The audited accounts for the year 2020 were introduced by the Treasurer, John Jones, who said that the finances were very healthy. Income from membership had grown, Better Bristol had cost less owing to smaller print runs, and while events had not generated a surplus as in 2019, some events which might have entailed expenditure had been deferred. There had been a £5000 surplus for the year; the Society had a healthy fighting fund if it needed it.

In response to a question from David Bruce, the Treasurer explained that the sums on the Project Account, a surplus in 2019 and an identical deficit in 2020, represented money for a Blue Plaque being held temporarily in the Society's accounts, having been received in 2019 and disbursed in 2020.

The accounts were approved by the meeting.

6. Election of Officers for 2021/22

In accordance with the constitution, all officers stood down, and all presented themselves for re-election. There were no other nominations.

At the 2020 AGM Simon Birch had stated his intention to stand down at the 2021 AGM, but the unusual circumstances of the pandemic had complicated the issue of seeking a successor, so he had agreed to stand again

The following were proposed by John Payne and seconded by Ed Hall:

Chair: Simon Birch

Treasurer: John Jones

Secretary: Mike Bates

Membership Secretary: David Giles

All were unanimously elected.

7. Election of other Management Team Members

The following were proposed as members by David Giles and seconded by Stephen Wickham:

Matthew Montagu-Pollock, who had previously been elected three years ago, presented himself for re-election;

Nic Billane, who had been co-opted onto the MT following the 2020 AGM, was standing for election for the first time.

Both were unanimously elected.

8. Appointment of Honorary Auditor for 2021/22

Brenda McLennan was proposed by John Jones, seconded by Alex Dunn, and approved by the meeting.

9. Patron for 2020/21

The Lord Mayor of Bristol for 2021-2022 is Councillor Steve Smith, who has kindly agreed to be the Society's patron for the coming year.

10. Thanks and tributes

The Chair expressed his thanks to all those who served on the Management Team. He expressed particular thanks to John Payne, who was stepping down from the MT after many years of service in several capacities.

11. Feedback from the Survey of BCS Members' views

Matthew Montagu-Pollock, who had proposed and compiled the survey, introduced the item and thanked all those who had responded. 140 replies had been received so far, which for a membership of 577 was a very good response. He thanked in particular those who had expressed an interest in learning more about the Society's sub-groups, with a view to helping/participating; they would be contacted very soon.

He went through some of the main emerging conclusions, and said that the full results would soon be made available to all members, with a summary/overview (for which reason the details of his presentation are not recorded here).

There being no further business, the Chair thanked all participants for their involvement, and closed the meeting.

