

The Chesham Society Annual General Meeting

20:00, 30 January 2020

Council Chamber, Chesham Town Hall

1. President's welcome

Helen Salisbury [HS] warmly welcomed members and guests and expressed her pleasure and relief that the Society has been saved from being closed down, thanks to the dedication of its committee and the support of the membership. She reported that the Society has been very active since the summer and that it has plans for doing much more in the coming year. She praised the programme of events and hoped that they will be well supported.

2. Apologies for absence

John Graves [JG] reported that the following apologies had been received: Sharon Morris, Georgina Lomnitz and Dame Cheryl Gillan (who sent the Society a letter of thanks and support for its recent work).

3. Minutes of the AGM held on 24 January 2019 and Special General Meeting (SGM) held on 25 July 2019

JG explained that the previous AGM had been irregular for a number of reasons, in particular the then Honorary Secretary had taken no minutes of the meeting, but instead a recording of proceedings had been made, from which the current membership secretary Richard Gamester [RG] had made a transcription. This is the only record we have of proceedings and several copies had been printed for members' information this evening. Jim Conboy [JC] added that the previous committee had not been legitimate because more than half its officers hadn't been paid up members of the Society in contravention of the Society's Constitution.

JG explained that the Special General Meeting [SGM] held on 25 July 2019 sought to change the Constitution and to elect a new, streamlined committee to relaunch the Society. The minutes of the SGM had been circulated among members shortly following the meeting and hard copies were also made available at this meeting and everyone should have a copy.

The transcribed minutes of the AGM held on 24 January 2019, were proposed by Tony Molesworth [TM] and seconded by Tony Franks, and the SGM minutes held on 25 July 2019, were proposed by Merrin Molesworth and seconded by Angela Bishop, and both sets of minutes were unanimously agreed to be a true record of their respective proceedings.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Report of Jim Conboy, Chairman of the Chesham Society

"Welcome to the Chesham Society AGM, 2020. Those of you who were present last year will remember that the meeting consisted of an extensive debate regarding the future of this Society, which showed that the members present were very much in favour of it continuing. I don't propose to dwell on the immediate aftermath of the AGM, particularly since I was not the chairman at that time but, as you know, a Special General Meeting was called in July 2019, at which the present committee was elected, most of the previous committee having resigned.

“Since then, our task has been to restore the Society to active life, and represent the Town in the ongoing preparations of the Local Plan, and the new Unitary Authority. I hope you will agree that we have made a good start, considering that there is significant lead time required.

“The events programme is largely the work of Jean Slater, who has devoted a great deal of time in preparing the diverse activities that have been planned up to May. We started off with a relaunch event, a wine and cheese tasting held here, which sold out. This was followed by the Society’s pre-Christmas event, held at newly opened The Junction Eatery, which was also fully booked. We have also experimented by holding a couple of ‘coffee mornings’ at The Drawing Room, where Society members can discuss any concerns with (some of) the committee. These have had a modest attendance, and we will persevere with them.

“One trigger for arranging the SGM was the need to respond to the consultation on the Chiltern and South Bucks local plan. We arranged a meeting for local organisations (BnG, Chesham Renaissance) even before the SGM was held. As the deadline for consultation was then extended, we were later able to hold a public meeting to consider our response – which was that the plan was poorly constructed, and did nothing to further the interests of Chesham. This was submitted to the District Council’s website, where it vanished from view for several months. It recently re-emerged, in several parts.

“We recently supported a letter composed by CPRE [Council for the Protection of Rural England] Bucks, suggesting that the existing plan be abandoned and a revised plan to be instead submitted by the new Unitary Authority. Some parties declined to sign, on the grounds that any plan is better than none, but it is our opinion that the impact on Chesham in particular would be so destructive, that we are better off without it. The Society also monitors local planning applications, and commented on proposals for Asheridge Road, Nashleigh Hill, Hollow Way Lane and for the café at the Rose & Crown site in Hawridge – opposing the first three, and supporting the last.

“The Society remains a member of Civic Voice, but in the absence of a committee member for planning, we have been unable to attend recent meetings. Regrettably, ANTAS has ceased operation, but the Chiltern Society has arranged a couple of meetings for local amenity societies in the area, at which we have been represented. We have also taken up our seat on ‘Impress the Chess’, which has been very involved in the Chalk Stream crisis over the summer, and we are also participating in the High Street revitalisation exercise led by Chesham Connect. Unfortunately, no one was available to attend the recent Climate Change Emergency hustings meeting here at the Town Hall.

“While there was only one issue of the Society’s newsletter, *Focus*, published in 2019, it was a bumper sixteen pages, and well worth the wait. As I speak the next issue is nearing completion. I must again thank Jean Slater for putting this together, and Andy Roker for preparing it for printing. You will find a list of future events on the noticeboard here, and in the next edition of *Focus*; some of these have restricted capacity, and require advanced booking, so sign up while places are available”.

6. Report of the Honorary Treasurer and adoption of the annual accounts of the Society for the year ending 31 December 2019

Gerry Griffin [GG] circulated to members ahead of the meeting hard copies of the accounts for the year. He reported that the accounts for 2019 show a reduction in income from subscriptions compared to 2018 which, given the reduction in activity and therefore profile of the Society, is not unexpected. We expect to be able to supplement this through a Gift Aid application which will be submitted shortly. The figure for other income includes an amount from the winding up of ANTAS.

The expenditure primarily relates to the publicity costs of the Special General Meeting, and for the Society's relaunch, which took the form of a cheese and wine tasting evening. The tapas evening at The Junction Eatery was the Society's other main event. Just one issue of *Focus* was produced in 2019 as the previous committee had failed to publish the newsletter. The Society accumulated funds at the end of 2019 of £6,245.00, for which £517.00 remains reserved for HS2 campaign purposes.

7. Nomination and election of an Independent Examiner for the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2020

GG reported that following Judith Aldridge's sterling work as the Society's independent examiner up to 2018, the Society is seeking a replacement and it is anticipated that the accounts will be reviewed by them in due course.

8. Nomination and election of members to the Executive Committee

The following nominations had been received ahead of the meeting and were read out by HS, together with their respective positions:

Chairman	Dr James Conboy
Vice-Chairman	Jean Slater
Honorary Treasurer	Gerry Griffin
Honorary Secretary	John Graves
Programme Secretary	Jean Slater
Membership Secretary	Richard Gamester
<i>Focus</i> Newsletter Editor	Jean Slater
Committee Member	Mora Walker

As there were no contested nominations for any of the above posts, HS proposed a block vote for the nominees, which was proposed by TM and seconded by Margaret Hildreth. The vote was unanimously agreed and the above nominees duly elected.

9. Future plans

JC reported that, as always, our activities are limited by the rather small number of committee members – assistance with planning and publicity would be much appreciated. As a consequence, much of the available effort goes into planning issues, as there is no other organisation to speak for Chesham as a whole, without its own specific agenda to promote. He said that he will return to this topic, under AOB.

10. Any other business

JC reported that he will be setting up a Planning Forum consisting of those objecting to applications, and/or living in close proximity to developments who are directly affected. In addition, he will set up an email list of Society members who may wish to comment on applications where the Society is planning to respond. He appealed to members that they are interested in helping with this, or any other work of the Society, to get in touch.

JC informed members of Chesham Connect's strategy document 2019-25 which examines ways in which the High Street can be reinvigorated and once again made a lively hub of the Town. He reported that the Society has formally responded to the strategy document and that we are keen to work with Chesham Connect to ensure the success of its High Street campaign.

JC informed members that the Society is one of several beneficiaries of the legacy of a local townsperson and that the sum is "substantial". Details will follow in the course of the year.

JC reported that partner organisations had not been invited to attend and contribute to this year's AGM for several reasons: firstly the collapse in the previous committee in the first half of the year had led to a general lull in collaborative ventures, secondly we are keen to use *Focus* as a vehicle to voice partner organisations' work, and also we would like to work more closely together with partners generally throughout the year.

Jean Slater [JS] reminded members that there were several topical, informative and entertaining events in the pipeline and that the date has been changed for the following event, as publicised in the last issue of *Focus*: the talk with deputy leader of Buckinghamshire County Council, Mark Shaw, will take place here in the Council Chamber on Tuesday 18 February, starting at 19:30, and that, while there is no need to book, the event is expected to be popular especially as it is being advertised in *yourChesham*. She added that the Town Council will be represented at the meeting by the Town Clerk, Bill Richards.

The events on Monday 9 March and Sunday 19 April both require booking and JS informed members that a reservation sheet was available for members to add their names if they were interested in attending the tours of The Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies and/or the Chiltern Open Air Museum. She stressed that places on both tours were limited and would be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis.

JS said that the event in May would be a photographic show-and-tell evening in which members are invited to bring along and discuss their photos of Chesham. This will be augmented by the Society's collection of historic photos as well as those from other sources. Details will be in the next issue of *Focus*.

AB expressed a note of thanks on behalf of the membership to the committee for its sterling efforts in reviving and sustaining the Society over what has been a difficult period in its history. JC thanked AB for her kind words and added that it had been a collective effort.

11. Date of the next Annual General Meeting

The next AGM will take place on Thursday 28 January 2021, at 20:00, in the Council Chamber, Chesham Town Hall.

The AGM concluded at 20:55, which was followed by refreshments. 38 members of the Society and three non-members attended.

I certify that these minutes are a true record of the meeting

Signed and dated Jim Conboy, Chairman, The Chesham Society