



*putting Chesham first*

## The Chesham Society Annual General Meeting

19:30, 26 January 2023

Council Chamber, Chesham Town Hall

### AGM minutes

#### 1. President's welcome

Helen Salisbury [HS] warmly welcomed everyone to the 2022 AGM:

“Welcome once again to the Chesham Society’s AGM 2023. Thanks to all our members who support us throughout the year, and it’s been very nice to see you at the various events that have taken place throughout the last twelve months. As always we’re looking at future plans and projects for the Society to engage in and if there is anything you wish us to campaign on, please bring your ideas to the attention of the committee.

“The sad news is that our Honorary Secretary, John Graves [JG] will be standing down from the committee at the end of this reporting year, so this will be his last year on the committee. John has been Secretary since 2016 and I cannot thank him enough for all the hard work and support he has given the Society and its members over the last eight years [applause]”.

HS then declared the AGM open and handed over to JG.

#### 2. Apologies for absence

JG reported the following: Brenda and Brian Platt, Georgina Lomnitz, and committee members Debs Wilbee and Aidan Harris.

#### 3. Minutes of the AGM held on 27 January 2022

JG reported that the minutes from the last AGM had been posted on our website and that members had been pointed to the location. Printed copies were also available in the room prior to the start of the meeting. Given that hopefully the majority of members had now read them, JG requested a motion that they were a true record of the meeting. Tony Molesworth proposed the motion that they were a true record, Roger Smith seconded the motion. The motion was carried.

#### 4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising that are not covered by the agenda.

## 5. Report of the Chairman of the Chesham Society

JG reported that with no chairman currently in post and the absence of the chairman elect, Aidan Harris [AH], he introduced the vice-chairman, Jean Slater [JS] for her report.

“I will proceed as speedily as possible in order to promptly conclude the meeting. I am holding this position until the new chairman is formally elected and takes over, but more of that later.

“I will start by briefly looking back over what the Society has achieved this year. Whilst it looks as though there are a lot of us at this table, we are in fact thin on the ground as a committee. Therefore we are pleased to report that we have achieved a lot during 2022. Regular activities include responding to consultations on behalf of members, such as to the Boundary Commission’s proposed changes to the constituency boundaries, and responding to planning applications the latter for which has been led by Nick Moss [NM]. We have published four editions of *Focus* newsletter and I would like to thank Andy Roker for designing and art-working the issues as, without him, *Focus* would simply not be viable. Thanks are also due to the many contributors who work to strict deadlines, and to the team of volunteers who tirelessly deliver the newsletter to members in all weathers throughout the year.

“We have had an interesting programme of events which included a walk around Waterside, for which we must thank Tony Eustace; an illustrated talk on the history of Bekonscot Model Village; a guided visit to the Chiltern Open Air Museum; a summer afternoon party in the Old Town; a lecture on the local branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England; a celebration of Trafalgar Day and a toast to Admiral Lord Nelson by our very own JG; and in December we celebrated with a glass or two of wine the 65th anniversary of the Society and a hands-on look at some of the Society’s archives over the previous seven decades. We should also mention Heritage Open Day [HOD] which the Society organises and implements every second year. In recent years it has been co-ordinated by JG for which we cannot thank him enough. He, along with others, had again been planning HOD for September but as you know we decided to cancel it at the eleventh hour due to the death of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

“Turning to our special projects, in January 2022 we launched our new Chesham Society website which has been very generously funded by two of our longstanding and supportive members. We have teamed up with Chesham Connect to put together a project bid to the Chesham and Villages Community Board for a Visit Chesham and Villages promotional website. We were successful in securing the necessary funding and the website is currently under construction by a local company, Studio Beam. The Society has been collating all the information for the new website and we are on target to secure funds to maintain the website for the first five years, largely due to Chesham Town Council’s Town Team. In addition AH, who sadly can’t be here this evening, has done much work on the Buckinghamshire Local Heritage List on behalf of the Society.

“The Society’s own archive which dates back to its formation in November 1957, and which has been residing in an attic in Waterside, has been catalogued by our archivist Angela Bishop [AB]. AB’s work has brought to our attention the value of this archive as well as the track record of the work of the Society itself. We are therefore investigating how we can secure the future of it, perhaps by depositing it in the county archive, the Buckinghamshire Records Centre, and we will report back in due course”.

## 6. Report of the Honorary Treasurer and adoption of the annual accounts of the Society for the year ending 31 December 2022

Gerry Griffin [GG] read AH’s Honorary Treasurer’s report on his behalf.

“The summary of accounts presented this evening are unreviewed but we have once again been fortunate to have been offered the assistance of Liz Pooley in reviewing our accounts for another year. The Society made its statutory declaration to the Charity Commission in October for the financial year ending December 2021.

“The summary of accounts shows a dip in receipts for membership and donations in 2022 compared with 2021. This is primarily due to 2021’s figures including several one-off donations, and the amount received for membership subscriptions is broadly the same. We have also been fortunate to have received a one-off grant of £250 from Chesham Town Council’s donations fund. The Society has not yet made a claim for outstanding Gift Aid receipts – there is a four year time period in which to make this claim, and we have found it more efficient to make claims for more than one year at a time. Finally, our accounts show the remaining part of a very generous legacy left to the Society in 2020.

“Our expenditure for the year shows two rather large and one-off outgoings – the first involved a payment for design services associated with the new Society website, which provided a welcome refresh which we hope to build upon in the coming months. The second large one-off payment is the Society’s contribution to the Visit Chesham and Villages website which is in development.

"Production of *Focus* also accounts for a sizeable expenditure in the year, and while these costs are extremely good value it does not reflect the very considerable amount of time and energy that is put into each edition of *Focus* by committee members. The Society holds memberships of several organisations including The Friends of St Mary’s Church, Civic Voice and the British Association of Local History Societies (which provides the Society’s insurance policy). Some miscellaneous items include a refund of overpaid membership fees which fell into the 2022 year. Also note that some expenditure items are not directly comparable from 2021 (for example. some admin costs could not be differentiated between AGM and other admin costs).

“The Society’s bank balance at the end of last year stood at £21,702.67. This is a very healthy endowment held in trust for the Society’s future activities, and represents nearly six years of normal expenditure (based on 2021 figures)”.

#### 7. Nomination and election of an Independent Examiner for the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022

LP volunteered to examine the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022. JG proposed the motion to elect LP as Independent Examiner, Liz Payne seconded the motion. The motion was carried.

#### 8. Nomination and election of members to the Executive Committee

HS read the names of those who put forward their names for election to the 2023 committee:

Chairman	Aidan Harris
Vice-Chairman	Jean Slater
Honorary Treasurer	Post vacant
Honorary Secretary	John Graves
Membership Secretary	Dr Jim Conboy
Events Programme Secretary	Roderick McCulloch
<i>Focus</i> Newsletter Editor	Jean Slater
Social Media Secretary	Debs Wilbee
Committee Member	Gerry Griffin

HS announced a block vote of the nominated members and proposed the motion to approve their election to the 2023 executive committee. TM proposed the motion, Andy Garnett seconded the motion. The motion was carried and the nominated members were duly elected.

Jim Conboy [JC] announced that having been elected Membership Secretary and given that our Constitution required all the named posts to be filled, he proposed to take on the post of Honorary Treasurer in addition to that of Membership Secretary. A vote was taken and, as there were no dissenting votes in the room, JC’s proposal was unanimously carried.

## 9. Planning forums

JM reported that the Society started a series of planning forums prior to the start of the first lockdown and the intention is to restart them in early spring for all those who are interested in, or who were potentially affected by, local planning applications, but also for those who are affected by current developments. JC will invite members by Mailchimp to the first meeting.

## 10. Heritage listings initiatives

JG reported that AH has been the lead on this initiative and compiled the following report.

“In 2021, Buckinghamshire Council began a project to compile the county’s first list of Local Heritage sites. The county benefits from many sites that are nationally recognised for their historic importance. But there are many sites that do not meet the nation criteria for national listing, but are nevertheless of local significance and importance. The Local Heritage List project sought volunteers to nominate local buildings, landmarks and other sites that should be included in the list

“The Chesham Society has been actively involved in this project, nominating dozens of sites and helping to record details of their historic, architectural or other special interest. The first batch of nearly thirty sites in the Chesham area were officially confirmed by Buckinghamshire Council this month, and another twenty are under review. The sites chosen by the Society cover the town and surrounding villages. They include: our iconic Clock Tower, The White Hill School, the Bagnall Centre, cottages in The Lee, Pednor and Waterside, and a Cold War bunker in Hundridge. The project is ongoing and anyone can register with the website to add their own nomination for sites that deserve to be recognised.

“Sites recorded in the Local List are ‘Non-Designated Heritage Assets’ and planning officers are required to consider the impacts of their decisions on the heritage value of these sites. The Local List is one way of keeping a systematic record of the value of our local heritage, helping to ensure that local heritage is given proper consideration in the planning process”.

JS wished to pass on her congratulations to AH for spending so much time and effort on the project, which is of potential use to everyone in the area of benefit. She also stressed that the Local List could include monuments, open spaces, or anything that is deemed of local significance.

## 11. Any other business

JC reported that the Society has developed a new membership records system that uses an online app. The new system has become necessary because, when the previous Membership Secretary, Richard Gamester [RG], passed away, his own system became inaccessible to fellow committee members due to RG’s security firewalls still being active. JC told members that they might receive automated expiry dates for their membership which they should ignore.

JS reported that the Society’s award for the best High Street shop window was inaugurated last year because we had been so impressed with what Emma Hogg at the Rennie Grove Hospice shop had achieved with her imaginative and engaging displays, a heroic effort on her part that had transformed that stretch of the upper High Street. Other shop fronts are a continual delight, such as those of Chapter Two and Brian Sutti Opticians but, after much consideration, we would like to give the award this year of the best High Street shop window display to JPS Stationers in Market Square, because Ray Williams never fails to come up with lively and entertaining displays, often using specially commissioned artwork [applause].

JS reported that as a Society we have had our challenges this reporting year, in common with many other voluntary societies, namely a lack of human resources. The Society’s committee has been thin the ground with vacant posts in 2022 for Chairman, Membership Secretary and Events Secretary. The good news this evening is that we have now resolved all of these hitherto

vacant posts. JS believed that AH will be an excellent Chairman and JC will be an excellent Membership Secretary, while we are grateful to RMcC for taking on the Events Secretary post.

JS added that as from the end of this year, both JG and herself will be stepping down from editing *Focus* and a new editorship will be required. Since COVID *Focus* has developed into a key membership benefit and become a large expenditure item for the Society and we need to consider whether the outlay in terms of time, resources and costs is worth the investment in the newsletter's current form. It could be that we support instead other voluntary groups that have a similar vision to the Society, such as Chesham Connect.

JS introduced Philip Plato [PP], a co-Director of Brown not Green [BnG] to briefly update the environmental group's recent activities to protect the Green Belt to the northeast of Chesham. PP explained that two years ago BnG made an application to have the green around Lye Green listed as a Village Green. He reported that there will now be a Public Enquiry held over six days between 21—29 March. He explained how the enquiry would examine the application. Prior to the application BnG had tried to have the land listed as an Asset of Community Value which ultimately was unsuccessful, hence the new application. Had BnG not made the Village Green application there would have been a new housing development application for building new homes on the site. PP urged all Society members to engage with the campaign and to support BnG's application, details will shortly be on its website. JS thanked PP for his presentation [applause] and there were a number of questions from the floor.

JS asked members whether members had any questions for the committee. Merrin Molesworth [MM] asked whether *Focus* might become a "paperless" publication or, if it continues as a printed publication, whether it can be reduced from four to one or two issues per year. JS agreed new editors will be free to take *Focus* in any direction they like as it has had many incarnations over the preceding decades. She added that the new proprietors of *yourChesham* are interested in including *Focus* content in their publication. As a previous editor herself MM expressed an interest in editing it, and MM and JS agreed to meet to further discuss the matter.

Kate Hutchinson [KH] reported to members that Chesham Connect is reintroducing the annual pancake race in the High Street on 18 February and that it will be a "family friendly" event. JS thanked KH for all the good work that Chesham Connect does for the High Street.

TM urged members to engage with and respond to Chesham Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan and that the Chesham Society should take a "significant role" in monitoring responses to it. He felt that the Society also needs to monitor and comment on Buckinghamshire County Council's new Local Plan when it is published. JS thanked TM for flagging up these issues and informed members that he had arranged for the Society — JS, RMcC and JC — to sit in on the recent Neighbourhood Plan consultation sessions. This had been a worthwhile exercise for the Society's committee as specific sites in the town were under consideration for future development and it was useful to learn where these sites were and for what purpose they could be developed. JS informed members that the Society will be keeping a watching brief on the consultation and would flag up areas of concern.

JS thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 20:35 and refreshments were served.

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

Signed and dated Chairman or Vice Chairman, The Chesham Society