

**Minutes of the 2013 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the LONDON FORUM OF AMENITY AND CIVIC SOCIETIES** - held 6.30pm, 15th October 2013, at 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1

**Present:** Approximately 30 members were present.

**Apologies:** These were received from:

Patrons: Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Alan Baxter and Tony Travers.

*Vice Presidents: Judy Hillman, Harley Sherlock,*

*Member Societies: Michael Bach of the Kensington Society; Peter Makower of the West London River Group; Dave Morris of the Haringey Federation of Residents Associations; Peter Pickering of the Finchley Society; Monica Smith of the Enfield Society. ?????*

**1. Chairman's welcome and introduction:**

The Chairman, Peter Eversden, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and particularly new members, to the London Forum AGM at the finale of our twenty-fifth year. Our Patrons, Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Alan Baxter and Tony Travers, are unable to be with us this evening.

The Chairman then explained that he would take the chair for the meeting. Normally our AGM meetings would be introduced by our President, Sir Richard MacCormac, but he has been seriously ill lately and has decided to step down from being our President. The Forum's Executive Committee will be seeking someone else for that role. I would like to record the Forum's appreciation of Sir Richard's support and advice in the many years he has been our President. London Forum has had only two presidents and, as this is our 25th year, I would like to recall also the hard work of its founder President, the late Walter Bor, and of its founder Chairman, Marion Harvey, who steered the development of the Forum for the first half of our 25 years. Several of the original trustees are still with us as Vice Presidents, supporting the rest of the team.

**2. Minutes of the AGM of 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012:**

The Chairman stated that copies of the minutes of the last AGM are on our web site. A report on the meeting was published in last Autumn's Newsforum. There were no revisions proposed by anyone but he asked that if you have any suggestions for change now, please say so. In the absence of comments he proposed the acceptance of the Minutes. These were agreed, *nem con*.

**3. Chairman's report:**

I must start by giving my thanks to Helen Marcus and Peter Pickering for helping me to compile the review of the year. It summarises the key activities of members of the London Forum's team and there is more detail on several topics in the editions in the past year of Newsforum, which Helen Marcus has developed to a high standard. I am amazed at the range of activities of member Societies that are reported in Newsforum. Articles from it have been printed in other publications, one being the award winning 'Planning in London'. London Forum subscribes to that magazine, which is now in PDF form only, so that it can be made available to members at no charge. It should help to keep you informed on planning matters and some of the more eccentric planning ideas now being proposed.

I hope member Societies find Newsforum content useful for their own newsletters and work. It is issued by email, as well as a printed version and it would be useful if you forwarded it to your Committee and to those members for whom you have email addresses. If you want text from it for your own publications, just ask Helen. Please

send Helen material for inclusion so that other Societies learn about your activities. We are keen to reduce the Forum's printing bill, so if you would be prepared to stop receiving the paper version of Newsforum, do let us know. A PDF version is already being issued by email and past editions are on the Forum's web site.

I will comment on some of the key points from the Annual Report.

An important one was the celebration of the **Forum's 25th Anniversary** just after our year end, hosted by the Mayor at City Hall. It was a great evening and many of those who attended have expressed their appreciation of the event. London's Living Room has probably not seen an event with such a London-wide attendance before. Our thanks to Sir Ed Lister, who was closely involved in the preparation for this event. Newsforum had a report and photographs and there is a gallery of pictures on our web site.

I felt it was a significant indication of standing of London Forum with the Mayor and the GLA and, as I said at the event, I think we have achieved a lot together. It has been a good relationship in which I think myself and the Forum's Trustees are seen as critical friends of the GLA. We have been very demanding but the dialogue has been open and positive. The Mayor has just set the **Outer London Commission**, of which he made me a member, new tasks to help Outer London Boroughs with the viability of their town and district centres and to consider higher densities and intensification of land use in them. That will feed into further alterations to the **London Plan** at the end of this year which will be our next big challenge to respond and to seek the policies we want.

It seems only a few months since Michael Bach and I were involved in the public examination last year on the alterations made then to the London Plan for which the latest version was published only a few weeks ago. The large growth in population, the changes in businesses and the lack of homes are the main topics for the next set of amendments. Government proposals and the need for more house-building are forcing changes to the London Plan. The Mayor now has powers, including the control of rents, which can overrule the London Boroughs. The Greater London Assembly did not vote against these changes.

The year covered by the annual report was one in which we saw the Government withdraw **Localism**, despite the Act of Parliament with that name. The introduction of more permitted development for changes to use of buildings and to other developments is damaging to London's town centres and economy and the Mayor sought exemption from some of the relaxations in control for only the Central Activities Zone. As with the National Policy Planning Framework, the Government has cut down the documentation for planning guidance and there is now an on-line only version for which your comments have been sought. At present this is not easy to use. Because the on-line version will only have the latest content a question arises on the availability and effect of earlier versions. We will be reviewing the implications of the planning changes at one of our open meetings on 22nd November, as announced, and I hope that date is in your diaries. One question that will arise is the effect of the end of "permitted use". Will planning applications be needed for this to continue? The conversion of offices to housing causes concern by displacing small businesses, for example in Richmond.

In view of the changes and "relaxations" in planning policy that the Government has introduced, all Societies need to ensure their Borough's **Local Plan** is up to date and its policies cover your neighbourhoods so that you do not need to consider the time and cost of producing a Neighbourhood Plan, unless local circumstances or lack of borough cooperation requires that you do so. A Neighbourhood Forum can help by "encouraging" a Borough to concede a Neighbourhood Plan.

London Forum is still concerned about the quality of the frameworks for London's

large areas of opportunity and intensification. They are owned in various ways and are all at different stages of completion. Further planning detail will need to be added by Boroughs and I hope you will make sure that happens before developers take the lead.

Several useful **open meetings** were held here during the year, as summarised in the annual report and detailed in Newsforum. The ones on planning, population statistics and air pollution were very interesting. We are fortunate to have use of this Gallery for our meetings. The office space and facilities we have at this Alan Baxter and Associates building and the valuable networking opportunities we have with so many other organisations here are much appreciated.

The **London Forum web site** gives me the opportunity to keep you informed on all things that might affect you in your work and in the area you live. I do hope you will keep an eye on the updates there. It has London News feeds that bring the latest information from Government and the GLA and it displays my Twitter entries which have reached almost nine hundred and are followed by over 200 people.

We will now move on to the financial part of our annual report and I hand over to Tony Allen of the Chislehurst Society, London Forum's Treasurer.

#### **4. Financial Report:**

The Treasurer thanked the Chairman for the introduction and continued that his Report would not be lengthy.

We have £23,000 in the bank after paying all bills. At a level of £3,000 subscriptions substantially cover the running costs so our ongoing position is good. There was a small deficit this year of £171.

I have to ask "What should we do with the £23,000?"

The Accounts show that membership is up a little but the accounting and membership years are different.

A significant cost this year was the Membership Survey at £1,000. This Survey was last made in 2008. The costs for the Anniversary Event were met in the previous year.

The collection of subscriptions is a heavy task and might be eased by use of electronic payment directly or through the website.

The Treasurer invited questions on the Accounts but none were asked.

Marion Harvey, past Chairman, explained that the London Forum had a £10,000 dowry when it was founded and in the early years had to pay for meeting facilities. We now had the very valuable benefit of the use of the Gallery without charge.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for his work over the year and noted that the subscriptions to London Forum were raised for 2012 by around 12%. He hoped that members found that acceptable. We went for a period of around eight years without raising our subscriptions which was probably not wise, as we dipped into reserves a couple of times. Members present at our AGM in 2008 approved a gradual increase in our fees to ensure we could cover our costs and increase our reserves a little. I trust you will find your ongoing membership of London Forum worthwhile and we will continue to work hard on your behalf.

#### **5. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13:**

The Chairman stated the presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts was complete and asked for a proposer and seconder from paid-up members for the motion to approve the Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13. Motion to approve proposed by Neville Grant of the Westcombe Society and seconded by Nick Jeffrey of the Culverley Green Society. The motion was passed *nem con*.

## **6. Election of Honorary Independent Examiner:**

The Chairman reported that the Treasurer, Tony Allen, asked that Simon Baddeley be elected as Honorary Independent Examiner and asked for a seconder for the motion to this effect. Andrew Bois of the Islington Society seconded the motion, which was passed *nem con*.

## **7. Election of Officers and Trustees:**

The Chairman then reported that two members of the present Executive Committee retired by rotation and were willing to stand for election. Each had been formally nominated: Tony Allen and Derek Chandler. A nomination had been received for Lucie Carayon (Peckham Society). No other nominations had been received. A motion to elect the three nominees *en bloc* was proposed by Annabel McLaren of the Sydenham Society and seconded by Anna Townend of the Greenwich Environment Forum. This was passed *nem con*.

Peter Eversden stated that he was happy to continue as Chairman of the Executive Committee (EC); the other members the EC would be Tony Allen, Treasurer, Michael Bach, Chairman Planning and Transport Committee, Derek Chandler, Secretary, Helen Marcus, Editor Newsforum, Haydn Mylchreest, Membership Secretary, Peter Pickering, Minutes Secretary, Diane Burrige, Michael Hammerson, Martin Jones and Bill Linskey. Two vice-presidents were co-opted to the EC, David Lewis and Bill Tyler. Marion Harvey had decided to resign.

The Chairman thanked Marion Harvey for her many years of work for London Forum, she was a founder member, and hoped that she could continue to guide us in an informal capacity. Haydn Mylchreest wished to resign as Membership Secretary in the near future. The Chairman thanked Haydn for his work on membership records and subscription collection and hoped that a replacement could be found soon, possibly from one of our member Societies.

The Chairman thanked the EC for their work and support, observing that there were vacancies for anyone interested in participating.

## **8. Any Other Business:**

Marion Harvey reported that the Walter Bor Awards event would be on 26th November at the Gallery and that Peter Murray of New London Architecture would present the awards and give a talk after the presentation. The Chairman praised New London Architecture for the quality of their exhibitions and catalogues. Also every quarter there was a "Sounding Board" for the discussion of current key problems.

A member of the Sydenham Society raised the matter of the plans for London's airports. The Chairman said that the Davies Commission was continuing its assessments while new and old ideas were pushed into view. The Estuary airport proposed by the Mayor was almost certainly too expensive. The Commission would almost certainly include employment and freight in the assessments. A recent proposal was for runways 3 & 4 parallel to 1 & 2. This could lead to stacks making the entry path lower, increasing noise. The Commission might like the parallel proposal, the interim report is due at the end of 2013.

The Chairman closed the AGM at 7.30pm, explaining that there would now be a break for refreshments followed by the report on Society Achievements.

## **REPORT ON SOCIETY ACHIEVEMENTS**

The Chairman thanked the Societies that had submitted details of their achievements. Panels showing the entries were on display. It was very useful to have examples from Societies on the way problems had been tackled.

The Chairman then invited Bill Tyler to speak on the submitted Achievements. Bill Tyler explained that the Executive Committee proposed marking the 25th Anniversary by asking member Societies to submit details of their major achievements during the 25 years of the London Forum. 11 entries were received, perhaps fewer than expected, but while many Societies do campaign on local issues others are more concerned to inform their members on local matters such as planning proposals. None-the-less the entries do reveal the diversity of interests and that determination and perseverance can achieve success. Certainly these entries demonstrate to all 120 member Societies what can be achieved by a pro-active attitude.

Campaigns and activities have covered a wide range - some being long-term and phased, such as Knightsbridge Association's to renew the railings round squares or Blackheath's successful campaign to have roads across the Heath made into cycle+pedestrian ways. The Enfield Society fought a long-running planning issue with the Rank Organisation and was the only successful combatant out of 109 nationwide similar planning issues with Rank.

St Marylebone, one of our most senior members, achieved a particularly good outcome for a derelict piece of land that they had raised £3,000 to refurbish in 1951 - then "lost" to a building site, but were able to ensure that this was re-created in 2011/12 with new landscaping.

Ladywell Society campaigned successfully for Conservation Area status for their locality, as did Victoria Drive residents Association. These small local Societies, membership of 11 and 68 respectively, have shown what can be done with determination.

Westcombe has achieved extension of its Conservation Area and works with the Local Authority on highway issues. Traffic and road matters have been a major concern in Herne Hill and the Society has also achieved a notable success in securing improvements to the rather run-down shopping area.

Landscape improvements have been a big part of the Enfield Society's continuing work - the New River waterway restoration scheme achieving a Civic Trust award.

The Putney Society has had success on another river - securing what has turned out to be an award-winning riverside housing scheme.

Winning of another sort has been the success of the Isleworth Society in achieving formal Village Green status from Hounslow Council for their village greens while the Clapham Society has notably secured the restoration of a remarkable band stand in their somewhat larger green 'Common'.

Westcombe is very involved in the community, bringing people together by raising money for purposes that benefit local 'society' as a whole. Knightsbridge successfully fought off Al-Fayed's proposal for helicopter take-off and landing on the roof of Harrods.

Clapham, Herne Hill, Blackheath and St Marylebone have produced guides, books and leaflets on their localities - an essential component in reaching out to the public. There are no winners or losers but there are my thanks your efforts and successes.

Bill Tyler then asked for comments from those present.

Tiva Montalbano of the Camden Civic Society reported on a 'work in progress', the revitalising of this Society, the main one for Camden. Tiva had joined in 2010 and about 18 months ago realised that the Society had become moribund. The membership was falling and the stable but elderly Committee could not attract replacements. The Chairman suggested a merger with another Society but there were not any responses. Tiva decided to try to revive the Society by introducing more modern features. This involved much hard work but there was some luck as

well. A website was set up, also a Twitter account and a local Blog. A local voluntary centre provided speed-matching of an individuals' interests to the local activities that were required. Several young people disenchanted with politicians but wanting to be effective came forward and received a one-to-one introduction, a 'buddy' system. The existing Committee kept office. The Society is moving to provide income-generating events such as pub quizzes and guided walks to involve people that were not yet members.

A member of the Sydenham Society emphasised that new techniques were needed so that Societies are seen to be up-to-date. Facilities such as PayPal were essential. A stall in the local market generates interest. Young people in particular would respond to a shift to social matters of general interest such as transport. Web sites must be efficient and well-structured, if more than four "clicks" are needed to find information users will give up. Societies should blend voluntary community activities and interest groups. Nowadays there were many more people renting homes so these should be included as well as the traditional owner-occupiers. Helen Marcus emphasised that Societies should not be involved in party politics but should be politically conscious in their campaigns. When Elmbridge borough was politically independent all went well but once party politics took over everything went wrong. There was little interest in "Green" issues at present and many young people were non-political and Societies must make use of this attitude.

Tom Ball said that Societies must balance "rules" and "no rules", having a general aim to "do good" for the community. Councillors when members of a Society committee will try to use the committee as a vehicle for their aims and not a body concerned with real local problems. This distortion is best avoided by not having Councillors on a committee.

Gaby Higgs gave some more information about the re-created garden. This was a memorial garden on the site of the original St Mary's parish church and it took 7 years to recover the garden and have it restored. This achievement has wide effect on the recognition of the value of the Society as it achieved what residents wanted despite the objections of the Council. Gaby agreed that it is very difficult to attract young people but perseverance is essential. The Society has a broad remit reflecting local interests but may not always be able to cover everything. The Society involves planning students in planning matters.

Peter Eversden mentioned the success of the William Hogarth Trust in erecting a statue of Hogarth in Chiswick High Road to raise awareness of Hogarth's house nearby. Local businesses were persuaded to help with the cost of the statue.

Neville Grant spoke on the emphasis of the Westcombe Society in involving local people and the local paper as well as their 300 to 400 members by holding events which attracted local people, additionally raising money for local bodies. Some £100,000 had been raised so far. All this raised the profile of the Society. He commented that the young want to "do things", not talk about action.

Helen Marcus asked for on-going reports of achievements for publication in Newsforum and Michael Hammerson supported this as the news of achievements would be spread more widely in this way, and encourage member Societies by showing what could be done.

Neville Grant proposed a vote of thanks to London Forum for their work, this was warmly endorsed by applause from the audience.

The Chairman then closed the meeting at 8:30 pm.