



# **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2024**

**(Draft, for formal approval at the 2025 AGM)**

**Held at The Mount Without, St Michael's Hill at 19.30 on Tuesday 14  
May**

## **Attendance**

Apologies for absence were received from Alan Morris, Geoff Haslam, Alan Elkan, Judith Sluglett, David Mander and Suzanne Audrey

## **1. Opening of meeting.**

The meeting was opened by the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Bristol, Councillor Paul Goggin. He reflected that this was the second Civic Society AGM he was attending, and he was pleased to be able to do so. One of his first engagements after being elected Lord Mayor was to unveil a Civic Society Plaque to Sir George White; and he wanted to take the opportunity to return to the subject of Blue Plaques. Since it was accepted that the scheme wished to do more to identify more women, and more working class people, worthy of being commemorated in this way, he wanted to draw attention to Barbara Buchanan, a pioneering Bristol journalist during the last century. As well as having a distinguished journalistic career, she had also campaigned for cervical smear tests and was arguably responsible for saving many lives.

After formally opening the meeting, he handed over to Simon Birch (Chair of the Society) who chaired the rest of the meeting.

## **2. Minutes of 2023 AGM**

These were approved without change.

## **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **4. Review of Civic Society activity 2023**

An overview of the Society's activities since the start of 2023 was given by the relevant team leaders/convenors.

### **Major Sites Group**

Peter Ellis, who chaired the group, explained that its main roles were in responding to development proposals for major sites at the application or (formal or informal) pre-app stages; and contributing to planning policies and area based planning frameworks. He ran through a selection of the sites that the group had commented on; while several had elicited the group's praise and support, a large number contained elements that they needed to oppose, generally on grounds of height or other insensitivity to surroundings. Unfortunately the group's representations usually met with little success, so the exercise could be a frustrating one.

### **Transport & Placemaking Group**

Mike Bates, standing in for the absent Alan Morris, said that the work of this group resembled that of MSG, and sometimes overlapped. It had been meeting (on zoom) since Jan 2021, mainly to develop responses to proposals/consultations, while also trying to educate itself, to widen its knowledge of the issues and keep abreast of current plans and policies. Its members included people with relevant expertise or background, and others- the majority- with simply a lay person's interest. He then ran through a number of issues that the group had looked at during the year, and concluded with an invitation to members to join.

### **Better Bristol**

Mike Manson, the editor, being away, Simon Birch introduced this. The magazine continued to appear twice yearly and was widely praised for its quality. He thanked Mike for his work, and also Tracy Annear, the designer, and Dave Thomas who organised distribution.

### **Events**

Nic Billane introduced the Events Team: himself (though he was stepping down), Graham Egarr, Mike Bates, Angela Nutbrown and Andrew Buchanan. He went through, with examples, the different sorts of event they had organised, and what was upcoming in the rest of 2024: talks, both conventional and by Zoom; a variety of walks (with thanks to members Gordon Young, Ed Hall and Dave Blackburn, who acted as knowledgeable guides); visits to places of interest; and the summer and winter social events. He concluded by asking members to feed back their views on eg subjects to be covered; areas of the city of interest for walks; and the balance between zoom talks and conventional ones. Volunteers to join the team would also be welcome

### **Blue Plaques Scheme**

Gordon Young, the convenor of the Blue Plaques Panel, reported that only one plaque had been installed during the year, commemorating the Crimea and Indian Mutiny Association. But the Panel had been kept occupied with a number of applications, though progress- not in the Panel's control- had sometimes been at a glacial pace, notably with the National Trust, who owned Westbury College, where it was hoped to mount a plaque for William Canynge II. Gordon ran through a number of other applications in the pipeline, ending with one marking the possession, by the University Chemistry department, of a sample of moon rock.

He noted that English Heritage's London scheme was being extended, in a modest way, across the country by Historic England, and Bristol was to receive one of the first. He felt that their chosen subject (not made public yet) was unimaginative when compared with the range of BCS plaques.

### **Design Awards Scheme**

Simon Birch, who had convened the group, reported that the next awards ceremony would be on 22 June at the Bristol Beacon, and there were four excellent schemes being honoured. In 2023, awards had gone to Brooks Dye Works, St Werburghs; Clayton Hotel Broad St; and the Merry Hill housing project, Lockleaze.

He encouraged more members to join the team, even if only for a year. The work was fun and not arduous, being mainly concentrated in March and April after nominations closed, visiting and assessing the candidates.

## **,Ashton Court Mansion**

Simon Birch reported that efforts to effect some movement had continued during 2023 and still continued. Previous initiatives, including the visit and report by The Prince's Foundation, had not led anywhere. Although stepping down as Chair, he would continue to work on this. He was currently in ongoing contact with Historic England.

## **5. Financial report**

The Treasurer, John Jones, said that as in previous years he was able to report that the society was in excellent financial health, with a surplus of £4,300 in 2023, increasing the cash balances to £54000. (It was interesting- given the location of the meeting- that the last time it had been in deficit had been in 2017, when spending on a bid to bring St Michael's church as it was then, into use had tipped the balance).

On income, membership numbers and income had been flat; interest increased at £500; the sponsorship of Design Awards covered their costs and Events made a small surplus. The main expenditure as usual had been Better Bristol, which had cost slightly more; and there were two substantial spends on organisation- the AGM at SS Great Britain cost £1000 more than the previous year; and the Society spent £2200 on recruitment of its new chair.

No questions were raised and the accounts were noted with approval by the meeting.

## **6. Election of Chair for 2024/25**

Simon Birch reminded the meeting that, following his decision to stand down, the MT had had no success in using the usual informal methods to identify a volunteer to take over. They had therefore engaged the executive search consultants Moon. This exercise had produced several excellent candidates, from whom the MT had selected Sandra Fryer.

Sandra introduced herself briefly, reiterating the points she had made in her email of 30 April to all members about her background and reasons for wanting to take on the role.

Questions were raised from the floor about her role as Chair of Governors at Cotham School and the school's ongoing legal dispute over the Stoke Lodge Playing Fields; it was asserted that this made her an inappropriate choice for the present role. SF responded that there was no conflict of interest, and that the issue had been fully considered by the MT when recruiting her. BCS's role was strategic, city-wide; Stoke lodge was a local issue.

One questioner asked a detailed question about the definition of the curtilage of the school's playing fields. SF replied that this was too complex an issue to be discussed in the meeting but she would be happy to talk later.

Sandra Fryer was nominated by Peter Weeks, seconded by Stephen Wickham. There were no other nominations. She was elected by an overwhelming majority, with four votes (including one proxy vote) against.

[note by the Secretary: two absent members had asked the Chair to cast proxy votes for them, one in support and one opposing the election]

With the agreement of the new Chair, Simon Birch continued to chair the remainder of the meeting.

## **7. Election of other officers for 2024/25**

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

The following were nominated by Nic Billane and seconded by Graham Egarr:

Treasurer: John Jones  
Secretary: Mike Bates

Both were unanimously elected.

## **8. Election of other Management Team Members**

Three Society members had come forward to fill vacancies on the Management Team:

Graham Egarr  
Geoff Haslam  
Josh Nesfield

They were proposed by John Jones and seconded by John Frenkel

All were unanimously elected.

No existing MT members were due to stand down/seek re-election in 2024

## **9. Appointment of Honorary Auditor for 2023/24**

Brenda McLennan had offered to continue in this role and her appointment was approved by the meeting. The meeting expressed its appreciation of her continuing contribution.

## **10. Thanks and tributes**

Simon Birch reflected briefly on his 10 years as Chair, and thanked his colleagues past and present, and the membership generally, for their help and support.

John Frenkel, past Chair of the Major Sites Group and past member of the Management Team, paid a tribute to Simon's achievements- and also singled out for thanks Simon's wife, Sarah, who had over many years taken responsibility for providing refreshments at the AGMs

Concluding, he proposed a Vote of Thanks to Simon, which was warmly supported by the meeting, and presented him with gifts on behalf of the MT and other close colleagues.

Simon expressed his thanks and, there being no further business, thanked members and for attending and closed the AGM.