

The London Forum Annual General Meeting 2018

Minutes of the 2018 AGM of the London Forum Of Amenity And Civic Societies - held 6.30pm, 31st October 2018, at 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1

Present: Peter Eversden (Chairman), and representatives of the Amwell Society, Barnet Residents Association, Barnet Society, Beckenham Society, Bedford Park Society, Brixton Society, Camden Civic Society, City Heritage Society, Clapham Society, Dulwich Society, Ealing Civic Society, Finchley Society, Friends of Greenwich Park, Hammersmith Society, Highbury Community Association, Highgate Society, Islington Society, Kensington Society, Kew Society, Knightsbridge Association, Ladywell Society, Penge Forum, Pinner Association, Putney Society, Regents Network, Stamford Brook Residents Association, Sydenham Society, Thorney Island Society, Wimbledon Society and Sam Dunkley (individual member).

Apologies for absence: Balham Society, Brentford Community Council, Bromley Civic Society, Enfield Society, Fulham Society, Highbury Fields Association, Isleworth Society, New Barnet Community Association, Positive Plumstead, Southgate District Civic Trust, Stamford Brook Residents Association, Seven Dials Trust, Streatham Society, Wandsworth Society, Westcombe Society, Marion Harvey (Vice-President), Judy Hillman (Vice-President), Helen Marcus (News Forum editor), and Peter Makower.

1. Minutes of the AGM 12th October 2017.

The Minutes of the 2017 AGM had been circulated in News Forum. The Chairman asked for any comments. In the absence of comments he proposed the acceptance of the Minutes. They were agreed, *nem con*.

2. Chairman's report.

The Chairman thanked his fellow Committee members and recorded the Forum's appreciation of Alan Baxter and his staff in the provision of office and meeting space, facilities and valuable networking opportunities with so many other organisations in their building and for their interest and support for the Forum's work. This was the Forum's thirtieth AGM and the first which Marion Harvey, the founder-chairman, had not attended. Two trustees, Derek Chandler and David Lewis, had died; Bill Tyler had retired from being a vice-President; Tony Allen (Treasurer for many years) and Helen Marcus were standing down from the Committee. The Chairman mentioned particularly Tony's guidance in matters of governance and Helen's exemplary production of News Forum three times every year.

The Executive Committee was strengthened by the election in 2017 of Andrew Bosi of the Islington Society, and John Myers of the Camden Civic Society who took over the role of Honorary Secretary following Derek Chandler's death. Two other people volunteered to join the executive committee, were co-opted by the trustees and were seeking election. They were Oliver Bennett of the Wimbledon Society and Paul Thornton of the Amwell Society. Paul became Membership Secretary and improved subscription collection and communication admirably.

The Review of the Year in the Annual Report summarised the work and achievements of members of the London Forum's team; there had been more detail in News Forum over the year; he hoped member societies circulated it widely - using the pdf rather than the paper version saved the Forum costs. A new editor for News Forum was required, though Helen Marcus had volunteered to compile News Forum for the time being. Besides the Annual Report

and News Forum there were regular ebulletins; much useful material on the Forum's website, especially the 'New Updates' pages; and the Chairman's postings on Twitter.

The Forum had continued engagement with the Mayor's senior officers and with the Assembly committees and responded to consultations. All Londoners were faced with more changes in the planning regime, with a new National Planning Policy Framework and a draft replacement London Plan. There were more proposals by Government to be introduced or consulted upon and it continued its damaging permitted development policies, reducing the ability of London Councils and citizens to influence how development is carried out. The Forum continued to oppose tall buildings in the wrong places.

The draft New London Plan had many changes from previous versions; the main ones being a much higher housing target, densification of the suburbs, the removal of the density matrix and more emphasis on design as a decision criterion. That was perhaps a subjective assessment but had been used by some Planning Inspectors as grounds for rejecting developers' appeals. There would shortly be an open meeting on design, exploring how to avoid harm to neighbourhoods in the face of intensification of land use. It was important to produce delivery of homes people could afford without harming localities and with all the required infrastructure and public transport in place. The Examination in Public of the draft New London Plan would run through the first four months of 2019 and required attendance by the Forum team and much written input.

3. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2017/18:

The Chairman said that the Treasurer was not able to be present; if there were any questions on the accounts he would try to answer them, or refer them to the Treasurer for a response. The Forum's financial position was healthy, with a small surplus and there was no need for a subscription increase. There were no questions. Mr Wood (Beckenham Society) proposed and Mr Luscombe (City Heritage Society) seconded the approval of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2017/18); the motion was passed *nem con*.

4. Appointment of Honorary Independent Examiner:

Mr Egan was willing to continue, and this was agreed.

5. Election of Trustees:

Michael Hammerson and Peter Eversden were retiring by rotation and were willing to continue. Oliver Bennett and Paul Thornton had been co-opted during the year and were now standing for election. Ian McInnes of the Dulwich Society and Stephen Speak of the Kew Society had also offered to serve. All had been validly nominated. A motion to elect the five candidates *en bloc* was proposed by Ruth Boff (Pinner Association) and seconded by Carol Seymour-Newton (Knightsbridge Association). They were elected *nem con*. The Chairman appealed to member societies to continue to consider people who could be nominated to both London Forum's Executive Committee and for its committee dealing with planning, housing, environment and transport.

6. Other Business:

i) Andrew Bosi asked to be provided with evidence relevant to Transport for London's proposals for cuts to bus services.

ii) Tom Ball said that the Forum had been neglecting its individual members in recent years and that it should put more effort into recruiting and retaining them. Another speaker

supported this plea. Paul Thornton said that he had hitherto concentrated on the membership of societies, but had no intention of disfranchising individuals, and would soon turn his attention to this category.

iii) Robert Gurd (Ealing Civic Society) said that the last time the London Plan was revised his and other societies had put much effort into commenting without much sign that their comments were taken into account, and their participation in the Examination-in-Public was rather a waste of time. The Chairman said that the London Forum had a high profile in these proceedings and had achieved many alterations to draft London Plan versions in the past. The Forum welcomed support and participation from member societies. If there were matters about which a society felt strongly it should draw them to the attention of the Forum team.

iv) The Chairman asked if anyone present was unhappy with the Forum's use for communicating with them the data they gave when they signed in. No-one was.

Discussion of the Survey of Members

Following the business of the AGM the Chairman led a discussion of the results of the Survey of Members conducted in June 2018; he was gratified that the response rate had been over 50% and at the enthusiasm expressed for News Forum. A summary of responses had been circulated in advance of the AGM. The survey questions were taken in order:

1. Importance of the objects of the Forum

Most of respondents considered all of the objects to be important or very important; high standards of planning and conservation seemed to be the most popular.

In discussion Tom Ball (Thorney Island Society) emphasised the need to 'spread the word', and regretted the apparent demise of the Media Awards scheme. The Chairman explained that falling interest among members, shown by reducing entries, had led to the decision to discontinue the scheme. Robert Gurd (Ealing Civic Society) suggested that it should be tried again.

Concern was expressed at the average age of members of civic societies. Working with schools on, for instance, 'designing and making', could increase awareness among parents as well as children. It was clear from the experience of the Bedford Park Society and others that people of working age were concerned with the same issues as traditional civic societies, but through social media and informal networking. The challenge was to harness this concern, while recognising that it was unlikely to be manifested in becoming active in societies, although it might be possible to excite their interest in individual projects.

2. Helpfulness of the Forum's activities on a London-wide basis to advance members' interests.

Each of the choices was widely supported. A suggestion was made in discussion that the Forum should instigate petitions through 38 Degrees.

3. What more London Forum could do to support the activities or advance the key interests of member societies.

The Forum already covers most of the things that members would want. Responses mentioned in particular protecting green spaces, open spaces, parks and common areas; information on what other societies were doing and their success stories; and protecting historic lines of sight. There were requests for Open Meetings on different days and at different times.

In discussion members expressed concern at additions made to planning permissions after approval - “developers bamboozle planning authorities”. Tom Ball said that the Thorney Island Society was strongly opposed to the large memorial planned for Victoria Tower Gardens. Sam Dunkley (individual member), supported by others, pressed the Forum to campaign more strongly against the speculative developments that remained empty while disfiguring parts of inner London. Hans Haenlein (Hammersmith Society) said that the new professor of economics at UCL could be invited to speak at an open meeting.

4. Informing and supporting members.

There was widespread support for all four options, (Updates on legal and planning developments; Briefings on key issues; Provide access to expertise; Escalate issues to various levels of government on members' behalf), with slightly less for ‘providing expertise’.

The discussion centred on Neighbourhood Plans (of which there were few in London), the problems encountered by neighbourhoods which sought them, and other ways of getting local concerns and ideas into boroughs’ plans (e.g. planning briefs, charettes, etc.)

5. How the Forum could better inform and support member societies.

There was a range of interesting requests, including a monthly newsletter and help with insurance coverage. In discussion the Chairman emphasised the value of his Twitter feed, and emphasised the need for the secretaries, etc., of societies to inform their own members.

6. Which communications channels work best for member societies.

Of the alternatives offered (Open meetings; Forum website; NewsForum; Twitter; Email updates; Direct communication with other members) NewsForum and email updates were found most useful, although there was widespread support for all channels except Twitter, with which fewer members are engaged.

The Chairman noted the apparent dislike of Twitter; he said that it was a very important channel to those outside the Forum’s membership; it was not necessary to participate in tweeting - just reading tweets was a good way of keeping informed about what was going on and other people’s opinions. Robert Arguile said that the Putney Society had a particular member who was active on Twitter, and had more followers than the society had members; Twitter was read by commercial organisations, who could be moved to reply to comments in tweets. Diane Burridge asked societies to let her know directly of important matters, and not leave her to pick them up from newsletters.

7. What else the Forum could do for member societies.

Suggestions included a message board; an inquiry bureau for local urgent planning problems, putting similar member organisations in touch; and early information about consultations, encouraging members to respond.