

Minutes of Oxton Society Executive Committee held 7th July 2020 at 17:00, online via ZOOM

Present:

Rhiannon Evans (RE) (Chair)
Alan Chape (AC) (Secretary)
Griff Round (GR) (Treasurer)
John Booth (JB) (Hanging baskets)
Patrick Toosey (PT) (Recruitment)
Steve Weber (SW) (Planning and Amenities)
Bob Knowles (BK) (History Group)
Cllr Allan Brame (AB)
Annette Capper (ACa) (Friends of the Arno)
John Heathman (JH)
Carla Walker (CWA)
Carolyn Weber (CWe)
Dominic Wilkinson (DW)
Don Firth-Williamson (DFW)
Dave Barden (DB) (Membership Secretary)
Heather Atkins (HA)
Graham McLean (GMCL) (Acting Minutes Secretary)

Apologies:

Jeff Willis (JW) (Vice Chair)
George Harrison (GH) (Tree Group)
Steve Ferguson (SF)
Chris Jarrey (CJ)

1. The **Minutes** of the online Committee Meeting of 9th June 2020 were agreed as a true record.

2. Matters arising

● *Wirral and Oxton connections with the slave trade*

AB referred to an alleged criticism of the Society by one individual for its failure to remove reference to the slave trade in the names of streets and buildings in the Village. BK noted that the History Group has decided not to engage with the issue, particularly with regard to the Shrewsbury family, which he believes was too diverse to ascribe a particular view to. Material published by the History Group has often pointed to associations with the slave trade, where relevant, and will continue to do so. It is the case that many people of any wealth in the area could readily be linked in some way to the slave trade. JH proposed that the Society should rely on the Council's position with regard to road and street names.

ACa reminded the group that the Earl of Shrewsbury is the Patron of the Friends of the Arno and Oxton Fields.

● *Bunting*

The Chair expressed the Society's thanks to DFW for his role in fitting the floral bunting in the Village as a substitute for hanging baskets this year. DFW mentioned that there were some problems with tangling of the bunting with other fixtures; he said that some other hooks are available that could still be used and that more bunting could be put up to replace the inferior ones outside Bon Bakery. He noted that Home Café did not want bunting, nor did Home Brew, but that all other businesses welcomed it.

- **AGM and Annual Meeting**

The Chair reported that most material had now been obtained for the annual report and that the Society's intention to hold the annual meeting, with the associated AGM, in March 2021 will be circulated shortly to the membership. The name to be given to the meeting will be discussed nearer the time. AC confirmed that the Charity Commission accepts the likelihood of charities having to postpone their AGMs and will not take action if deadlines are missed due to Coronavirus. It is important, however, to record the discussion of the postponement in the minutes of meetings, *as is being done here*.

The Chair mentioned that one of the Society's members, Prof. Shabbar Jaffar, who has professional experience in both epidemiology and tropical disease, recommends that the Society should not consider planning activities during the winter of 2020 as that is the most likely time for a resurgence of the virus in the community.

- **Rose Mount traffic arrangements**

AB reported that it was unlikely that any changes would be made to the arrangements for catering facilities on the road or pavements in that part of the Village. Thyme restaurant had made only an informal approach to the Council for permission but outdoor drinking from Home Brew has already caused concern, particularly over blocking of pavements, smoking, noise for adjacent neighbours and lack of suitable toilets. Some businesses too are opposed to any changes in traffic arrangements that would be necessary. AC has spoken to Council officer David Ball, who indicated that the Council is ready to look very carefully at any formal applications from businesses for a pavement licence. However, awaited new government legislation may necessarily influence the Council's decision.

- **Landscaping of the former bank site**

AC has spoken to Mike Hercules, leaseholder of the site to discuss the landscaping but he has not been contactable for further discussion. One issue is the low sandstone wall in front of the site and AC reported that Mr Hercules is content with it remaining in place and may be opposed to any major reconfiguration of the wall. The intention is that there will be a combination of hard and soft landscaping and the Society has a commitment to contribute no more than £2000 to the cost.

RE pointed out that the electricity supply to the proposed defibrillator on the adjacent ATM building will also have to be discussed.

- **Design Awards and Outstanding Awards**

The membership has not yet been asked for nominations. SW suggested that the Planning Group could produce a list of potential candidates in advance of suggestions from members. There will be new input into the final decision now that DW is on the Planning Group. JW is to be asked to get an email to members as soon as possible.

Action: JW

The Chair put forward the suggestion that special awards might be made this year to people not on the Committee who had especially contributed to the welfare of the Village during lockdown. It was agreed that the decision would best be made by the Committee and that there could be two groups — people and businesses; three likely candidates already exist for the latter group. ACa proposed Rachel Buxton, who had been organising collections in Oxton for Wirral Food Bank. She was also concerned that, without asking for nominations more widely from the membership, some people who had been active might be missed. AC suggested that the Committee could find more candidates from the Oxton Coronavirus Support site and AB agreed to look into this.

Action: AB

- **Approach to Ben Harrison**

The Chair proposed that the Society attempt some reconciliation with Ben Harrison, owner of three of the businesses in the Village, as relations had become strained after the issue with the mural on

the wall of his premises. It was agreed that DFW, RE and AB should make overtures with a view to a meeting with him.

Action: RE

AC pointed out that, with regard to the mural, it is unlikely that the mural would ever have been created if Mr Harrison had approached the Council in advance for planning permission.

● **Newsletter**

CW informed the group that 12 pages of the next newsletter were nearly ready and that it could be circulated online towards the end of next week. The Chair commended the variety of the articles in it.

● **Facebook**

AC reported that hundreds of people who are not members of the Society are seeking to post on the Members-only pages; he believes that they think that Oxtton Society merely means society in Oxtton. He plans to post on the Only in Oxtton Facebook site to clarify the position of the Society's pages. CWa mentioned that Only in Oxtton similarly has difficulty in avoiding posts that are merely irrelevant advertising or are otherwise unsuitable.

AB asked if the contact with non-members through their request to post material might be a recruitment opportunity for the Society and AC confirmed that this has happened to a limited extent but that it is often clear that people want to post mainly for commercial or mischievous reasons.

● **Oxtton History Interpretation Panels**

BK reported that the History Group are happy with the idea of interpretation panels and that there remained only the question of siting and manufacture. It may be possible to apply for part of the cost from the Council's Councillors' Community Fund. GR questioned if there might be planning issues and AC suggested the former Bank Site where there would be no issues of obstruction. AB confirmed that there was no urgency with this as the fund is still open to applications for some months.

3. Reports

i. Financial report

The Hon. Treasurer presented an interim financial summary, which was scaled down this year through cancellation of Secret Gardens. The main expenses have been the bunting and insurance. JH questioned if the finances can support the Christmas lights this year and GR confirmed that the cost could be covered by reserves, in the order of a maximum of £2000, subject to the Committee's approval. JH confirmed that it is unlikely that there would be an associated switch-on event.

ii. Friends of the Arno

ACa gave a verbal report. She said that the gardens and fields were well used during lockdown but that there were some problems with littering and damage. Volunteers are now able to work in socially distanced groups to continue with maintenance. JB will build two bee hotels to replace the one that has been vandalised and a tree will be dedicated with a plaque to the late Mr Blackedge.

The Chair expressed the thanks of the Society to the Friends of the Arno for keeping it in fine condition so that it was a useful facility for exercise during lockdown. ACa said that this experience may well help in a recruitment drive for membership. She also noted that the trees provided by the Council in February are doing well and that more tree planting is planned.

DFW left the meeting at this point.

iii. Planning

SW commented on a circulated planning report. There was nothing controversial in it and a previous concern about the facade of the former bridal clothing shop in Christchurch Road did not reflect a serious planning issue.

iv. Trees

The Chair referred to a comment in the circulated tree report about the general issue of mature trees in gardens where the owners are unable or unwilling to maintain them. AC said that he had been discussing the general issue of the treescape with David Coombs (leads the Tree Group) encouraging the development of a strategy on trees in the Village. AC suggested a presentation and discussion of this topic at the October/ November Committee allotting sufficient time for that. This was agreed.

v. History Group

BK pointed out that the bookshop and thus the history archive will become available again when the Williamson Art Gallery re-opens in October. There is a prospect of Oxton Walks resuming, with smaller numbers and safe distances being observed.

The Chair reminded the group that progress on the latest Blue Plaque — to the Willmer sisters — had been delayed. The owner of the property is keen for the installation event to go ahead partly online, in a way that would permit invitations to the members of the family who live outside the area and to local journalists and academics. There was general agreement that this should be progressed.

Action: RE/BK

vi. Membership

There was no membership report.

4. Other business

i. JB mentioned that the Royal Horticultural Society were seeking applications for awards relating to initiatives during lockdown and that we could submit the bunting as an example. JW will assist him with the application form.

ii. AC will convene a group to discuss character properties and walls. The membership will be AC, CWa, SW, DW and HA.

5. Date of next meeting

8th September 2020 at 17:00, probably online via ZOOM.

The meeting closed at **18:35**.