

THE KNOWLE SOCIETY
(A company limited by guarantee)
Minutes of the 51st AGM of the Society - Monday 17th February 2014
Held in the Village Hall, commencing at 8.00 p.m.

1. Welcome

Leighton Jones as Chairman opened the 51st Annual General Meeting (AGM) of The Knowle Society (the Society). He thanked members for coming this evening. He reminded the meeting that only members are entitled to be present at the first part of the meeting, which is the formal AGM. He went on to say that after the formal part of the meeting is concluded there would be a break for coffee and biscuits. The meeting would then reconvene to hear the Reports from the Trustee Directors with an opportunity to ask questions about what the Society is doing and to make any general points.

Leighton Jones reminded members that there was an item on the AGM agenda where any member can make a proposal for the AGM to pass a resolution dealing with the formal business of the Society, providing it is seconded. He asked if there were any proposals.

There were no proposals from members present.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Kate Stables, Joe McGrain, Janet Eržen, Adrian & Glenna Jickells, John Moise, Margaret Plant, Neil McDougall and Andrew & Carrie Watson.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

Leighton noted that copies of the minutes of the previous meeting were available on the website but refreshed the members' memories by running through a brief summary of the main points.

Proposal: that the Minutes of the AGM held on 18th February 2013 are signed by the Chairman as a true record. Proposed by Phil Vince and seconded by Peter Ewin. The vote in favour of approving the Minutes of the AGM held on 18th February 2013 was unanimous. They were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

4. Chairman's Report

A copy of the formal Report of the Trustee Directors is attached to these Minutes.

Leighton Jones informed the meeting that extracts from the formal Report of the Trustee Directors were published in the January Newsletter and copies of the full Report were available this evening.

Leighton Jones noted that the meeting would discuss the year October 2012 – September 2013 in relation to finances and the year from February 2013 – February 2014 for everything else i.e. projects.

He said that this past year had again been a very active year for the Society and all those involved in running it have been very busy. As well as running the usual meetings and walks for members; dealing with planning applications and particularly, the Solihull Local Plan; running the History Centre; representing members on groups like the Airport Consultative Committee and Solihull Council Neighbourhood Group; the Society had also been busy on several projects.

Leighton Jones then drew members' attention in more detail to a number of projects currently being undertaken. He said that it has been eight years since the Society became a Company Limited by Guarantee with a new set of Governance documents. Trustee Directors (TD) had been looking at them to see whether the documents needed updating to ensure the Society can continue to operate in the best interests of Knowle. This work is on-going, but it is clear that there are significant improvements that can be made although nothing too radical. Once these have been identified they will be publicised before seeking approval from members and the Charity Commission.

Other work included the project to preserve much of the line of the by-pass as open ground through the registration of three areas as Village Greens. The Planning Committee has also been looking at the potential for a Neighbourhood Plan for Knowle which would enable the community to have some say in the future shape of the village. Leighton Jones informed members that these matters would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

He went on to say that TDs have also been in consultation with the Council over the proposals for changes to car parking in Knowle. Further information will be given during the TD Reports section of the meeting.

Leighton Jones then discussed publicity and told members that the Society now had Facebook and Twitter accounts and urged them to sign up. He noted that the use of social media was a good way to publicise information and events between Newsletters and also a platform for members to have their say and raise issues. Leighton Jones added that links to the Society's Facebook and Twitter accounts were available on the Society website.

Leighton Jones then thanked the TDs and another 150 members who he said were the unseen workhorses of the Society. They are involved in every aspect of the Society's activities from delivering Newsletters and serving on committees to helping set up for meetings. He added that there had been a low key tea party for volunteers in November which was enjoyable as well as providing an opportunity to ask for more help where possible.

Leighton Jones reminded the meeting that the Society is run by volunteers. More people are always needed; people who are willing to spare some time and contribute their skills. Volunteers are needed on several of the Committees; Kate Stables was recruited to stand in as Secretary on a co-opted basis and was to stand for formal election to this post later in the evening. Leighton Jones added that there is also a vacancy for the Chairmanship of the Natural Environment Committee and vacancies for TDs without portfolio. This was an excellent opportunity to get involved with the work of the Society. He said that he was happy to talk to anyone who might be interested and noted that as with everything the Society does its activities are targeted at preserving and enhancing the Village which we are all proud of.

He also extended his thanks to our Councillors who had been particularly helpful over the last year and had worked to improve contacts with Council officials while being supportive of the work of the Society.

Leighton Jones then reported the changes in roles amongst the TDs.

- John Rowley will be standing down as a TD at the end of the meeting and we are very grateful for the work he has done during the time he has been on the Board. John first got actively involved through the old Amenities Committee, now called Community Services. He was, and will continue to be, our representative on the technical consultative committee of the airport, so has been very busy with the runway extension and the proposed changes to the flight paths which promise to continue to be an issue in the future.

John was elected as a Trustee Director in 2006, taking on chairmanship of the Community Services Committee and has been fully involved in all our discussions and activities ever since. John notified Leighton that he wished to step down as Chairman for Community Services prior to the 2013 AGM but he was persuaded to remain as a TD for another year. In the last year he has continued to serve the Society despite undergoing heart surgery. Leighton Jones then thanked John Rowley for all he had done since taking on the role in 2006 and presented him with a small token of our thanks.

- Leighton Jones also said that the Society had been lucky to have another volunteer in Joe McGrain who took on the Chairmanship of the Natural Environment Committee as a co-opted Trustee. Unfortunately Joe was unable to carry on due to work commitments which have increased beyond what was expected. Therefore there is a vacancy for the Chairmanship of the Natural Environment Committee. Leighton Jones noted that whoever takes on the role will inherit a very good committee and plans to deal with some of the issues in the green spaces around the village.

5. Report on proposed launch of Neighbourhood Plan project

Peter Ewin discussed this item. He started by noting that there was a Local Plan which SMBC have had approved which sets out its view of future developments for the Borough, including Knowle. This is the Local Authority's plan. Separately from this the Localism Act gives Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Bodies the ability to form a Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan cannot materially differ from nor contradict the Local Plan but it can influence it i.e. hypothetically if the Local Plan proposed developing 100 houses at a certain location the Neighbourhood Plan could accept the building of 100 houses but could suggest an alternative location or 2 smaller developments of 50 houses each. The Neighbourhood Plan could not object to the fact that 100 houses would be built as that would materially differ from the Local Plan.

The position of the Society is that a Neighbourhood Plan for Knowle would be a good thing as it would set out the local community's position on future developments to developers who otherwise might feel that they would not receive any local objections to development.

Peter Ewin went on to state that the mechanism for agreeing a Neighbourhood Plan was first to elect a forum of 21 local people at a public meeting. He added that it was the Society's intention to facilitate this initial meeting by providing the seed money and leafleting all properties within the proposed Neighbourhood Plan area to invite them to a meeting at Arden Academy which had offered to donate the use of their hall for the evening. Once a forum of 21 people has been found the Society intends to withdraw from the project. This will leave the Neighbourhood Plan Forum fully independent and able to apply for funding.

Peter Ewin then showed the members a map of the proposed Neighbourhood Plan area. This encompassed Knowle, a small area to the north of the M42 and part of Bentley Heath. The border had been chosen following discussions with SMBC who felt the plan should mirror the political ward area. SMBC thought Dorridge should be excluded as it was of substantially different character to Knowle and therefore a separate area. As well as developments the Forum could also decide whether to include other areas within its remit such as healthcare and education.

Members expressed their concern that Dorridge might be excluded as it was not felt it had a separate identity especially given shared services such as Arden Academy. It was also felt that Dorridge might be at a disadvantage in opposing development if Knowle was covered by a Neighbourhood Plan and it was not.

Peter Ewin acknowledged that Dorridge could also apply to produce its own Neighbourhood Plan. However, he added that the area was just a proposal at present and once a Neighbourhood Forum had been created it would be up to them to finalise the area and submit the application. Dorridge had currently been excluded on SMBC advice.

Members asked how 21 people might be recruited and what if someone who was interested could not attend the public meeting.

Peter Ewin responded that he already had 2 expressions of interest in joining the Forum and hoped the remainder could be found at the public meeting. He added that if people could not attend he would be happy to discuss individuals interest in membership with them outside of a meeting.

Members asked what would happen if Arden Academy hall proved too small to hold the meeting.

Peter Ewin replied that that would be unlikely as the hall held 400 people and was the largest in Knowle but if that was the case the meeting could be reconvened at a later date and possibly outside if necessary.

Members asked about the role of the Society in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Peter Ewin said that the role of the Society was simply to facilitate the start of the Neighbourhood Plan. He stated that the Neighbourhood Forum might choose to ask the Society for help with funding but it would also be free to approach local businesses, Arden Academy and other local organisations. It could also apply for a Government grant. It was not felt that the Society should apply itself to run the Neighbourhood plan as it would mean that members would be subsidising non-members as non-members would also benefit.

Leighton closed the item by noting that if it took off it might be a very big project but if a minimum of 21 people were not interested in setting up a Neighbourhood Forum then the Society might need to think again about whether to pursue it.

6. Report on progress of Village Green applications

Leighton Jones reported on this item. He started by giving a brief history of the project which started in 2009 when an area in Shirley made an application which was approved in 2012. When the Society realised that the by-pass was not going ahead and that most of the land was held by developers it became concerned that it might be treated as windfall land. The Society decided to try and register the areas as Village Greens.

In July 2012 there was an initial meeting with Councillors and following leaflets being sent to neighbours to ask what they thought a positive response was given to it remaining open land. In October 2012 there was a useful meeting with SMBC officers and in Jan 2013 1200 questionnaires were sent to local residents to ask them to complete evidence forms. In February 2013 Ian Simmonds resigned and Leighton Jones took the project over. In March and April 2013, following a public meeting, 800 forms were issued. In April 2013 an initial application was made before the law on registering a Village Green was changed. The initial application had 160 forms supporting Area A, 131 forms supporting area C and 111 forms supporting area D. In May 2013 there was an article in the Parish Magazine and a second submission of an additional 32 forms for Area A, 34 forms for Area C and 29 forms for Area D. In August 2013 SMBC sent formal notification to landowners.

In October 2013 there were notifications of objections to Areas A, C and D being registered as Village Greens. There were 3 objections for Area A including 1 from the landowner and 1 each for areas C and D but none from the landowners of those. In November 2013 the Society instructed solicitors to act on their behalf. The solicitors are based in Birmingham but have a national reputation and have experience in these areas. There was a meeting with the solicitor in December 2013 which was very informative. Also in December 2013 SMBC raised concerns over the evidence and notified its intention to put the application to the Council Planning Committee in February 2014. The Society's solicitor wrote to SMBC in December 2013 to suggest that it was not following best practice. In January 2014 there was a third submission of forms supporting the application to SMBC. The total number of forms in support of each area were currently: Area A – 241 forms, Area C – 186 forms and Area D – 154 forms.

The expected next steps, based on solicitor's advice are that SMBC might decide to send Area A to a public hearing as that has had the most significant objection, however SMBC might decide to also include Areas C and D, or C and D could be decided on the basis of no serious objection.

If a public hearing is confirmed the Society will need to get formal statements of evidence from a selection of those who have filled in forms and Leighton Jones confirmed he would co-ordinate this and did not envisage a problem. He went on to add that there would be a cost involved in attending a hearing and hiring a barrister which was likely to be in the thousands but stated that the amount of spending would be capped. Leighton Jones also noted that as the community as a whole was likely to benefit, not just Society members, the Society would be launching an appeal for funds to give non-members an opportunity to contribute to the

Fighting Fund. Leighton Jones concluded by saying he thought the Village Green Project could continue to run for another year.

One member asked whether there had been any objection to Area D.

Leighton Jones responded that there had been one objection to this area from the council. The reasoning had been that the council managed this land on behalf of its owner and as it had allowed public access it feared being held liable for any reduction in value of the land if an application to register it as a Village Green were successful despite the landowner not raising any objection. He added that the Society's solicitor had advised that the Council's objection was not a credible one.

7. Treasurer's Report: receiving the Accounts for the year ended 30th September 2013

David Watson presented the shortened version of the Annual Accounts for the year ended 30th September 2013. A copy was available on the Society website. Copies of the full set of Accounts were available on request or from the website.

David Watson started by discussing income. He noted that most income in the year was from subscriptions and Gift Aid and was a slight increase on the prior year at £11,142 for 2013 compared to £11,113 for 2012. Although it looked like income had dropped this was because the prior year had exceptional income such as from the calendar and Christmas cards sales which was not repeated in 2013. Comparing usual year on year income the amounts were similar.

David Watson then looked at expenses. He noted that expenses for Meetings, visits and Social events had dropped from £2189 in 2012 to £1068 in 2013 with most visits being self-funding. David Watson acknowledged that the Newsletter was now more expensive to produce but added that the new format had been well received. One point of note was that the current printer had decided not to continue, so a new printer was currently being sought. David Watson noted that this could increase costs next year. An amount of £488 for "Other costs of Generating Income" was largely used for publicity. The expenses for History could be higher in the coming year given the WW1 anniversary. He added that governance costs such as storage, accountancy fees etc. were all increasing year on year. The depreciation charge was for furniture which was being depreciated over 5 years and would depreciate to zero in the current period.

A breakdown of how a £500 legacy from Mrs Hazzard had been spent was then given. This had been used to pay for the inscription of the Eva Wootton memorial, a tree to mark the 50th anniversary of the Society and the remainder had been used to part fund the Library video screen resource.

There had also been some additional expenses for the remainder of the Library video screen but nothing in this year, unlike prior years, for the Waitrose development or Jubilee Celebrations. David Watson also noted that the Society tried to keep administration costs very low.

David Watson then drew members' attention to the Balance Sheet. The total funds for 2012 were £13,563, and in 2013 £12,730. This represents a slight decrease in the cash balance.

He noted that the Society has a Reserves Policy that aims to keep a balance sufficient to cover one year's normal expenditure.

With regards to Subscriptions, David Watson said that in making the decision on the subscription level, the Society keeps a close eye on income and expenditure. He said that the TDs were considering raising the subscription level for the next financial year. David Watson noted that the subscription levels had remained the same for the last 10 years but increases in general costs as well as future projects meant they should increase in line with RPI. He added that the TDs recommended increasing the subscription fees from £3 to £5 for single membership and from £5 to £7 for joint membership from October 2014. David Watson notified members present that this would be discussed more fully at a future Emergency General Meeting.

A member queried why the single subscription had increased by a greater percentage than the joint subscription. Leighton Jones responded that it was felt that it was easier for collectors if the fees were in round numbers. The small difference might also encourage some people who were paying the lower rate to move to the higher.

Proposal: that the members accept the accounts.
Proposed by Gordon O'Connor, seconded by Lilla Baker.
The members unanimously agreed with the Proposal with no abstentions.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

David Watson informed the meeting that he was recommending that the Knowle based firm of West & Co continue to act as the Society's Independent Examiner and that its office remain as the Society's Registered Office. He reported that its services would be as before, and includes its check of the year's accounts and signing them off.

Proposal: that West & Co be appointed to act as the Society's Independent Examiners.
Proposed by David Watson, seconded by Bill Bohanna.
The members unanimously agreed with the Proposal with no abstentions.

Resolved: that West & Co be appointed to act as The Knowle Society's Independent Examiners

Before moving to the next item, Leighton Jones reminded the meeting that proposals for election could be made from the floor and asked if there were any. There were none.

9. Election of Chairman for the ensuing year

The President Peter Ellis took over as temporary Chairman for this item. He reminded the meeting that Officers are appointed on an annual basis. Peter Ellis commended Leighton Jones in his second year as Chairman of the Society for his hard work in what had been a difficult and challenging year. Peter Ellis also noted that the coming year was also likely to place more demands on the Society with the Neighbourhood Plan and Village Green applications in addition to its normal work.

Peter Ellis informed the meeting that there was one nomination for the position of Chairman. Leighton Jones was proposed by Martin Warr seconded by Andrew Marston. There were no further nominations received from the floor.

The voting in favour of the appointment of Leighton Jones as Chairman of the Society was unanimous with no abstentions.

Leighton Jones was duly appointed as Chairman of The Knowle Society. Peter Ellis handed the meeting back to Leighton Jones.

10. Election of Officers for the ensuing year

Deputy Chairman

Leighton Jones informed the meeting that there had been one nomination for the position of Deputy Chairman. Bill Bohanna was proposed by Leighton Jones and seconded by David Watson. As there were no further nominations Bill Bohanna was elected Deputy Chairman.

Honorary Secretary

Leighton Jones informed the meeting that there had been one nomination for the position of Honorary Secretary. Kate Stables was proposed by David Watson and seconded by Leighton Jones. As there were no further nominations Kate Stables was elected Honorary Secretary.

Honorary Treasurer

Leighton Jones informed the meeting that there had been one nomination for Honorary Treasurer. David Watson was proposed by Bill Bohanna and seconded by David Bower. As there were no further nominations David Watson was duly elected as Honorary Treasurer.

11. Election of Trustee Directors

Leighton Jones informed the meeting that in accord with the Constitution there needed to be at least four vacancies for Trustee Directors. He stated that there were 2 co-opted members this year, Kate Stables and Joe McGrain, so their positions now became vacant. One vacancy would also be created by the resignation of John Rowley and two by the resignations, in line with the rules, of the two trustees that were elected longest ago, Dave Pinwell and Charles Robinson.

Leighton Jones reported that Dave Pinwell and Charles Robinson had both expressed their willingness to stand for re-election. He said that they had both been nominated and seconded. He then added that Cheryl Steventon was standing for election for the first time and had been duly nominated and seconded.

Leighton Jones then informed the meeting that as Joe was not standing for election there were two vacancies remaining on the Board of Trustees. He asked if there was any member willing to stand. There was no one. He went on to say that if anyone was interested and would like to know more about what is involved, he would be happy to talk to them after the meeting or at any later time.

Leighton Jones then moved on to the election of Cheryl Steventon:

He noted that Cheryl Steventon and her husband joined the Society on February 2013 and she almost immediately volunteered to help with the Society publicity. She had made a

success of this working with the Trustee Directors to get the message out and increase the profile of the Society. Cheryl Steventon had been involved with Kate Stables in setting up the Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Cheryl Steventon was proposed by Leighton Jones and seconded by Charles Robinson. The voting in favour of the election of Cheryl Steventon was unanimous with no abstentions. Cheryl Steventon was duly elected as a TD.

Leighton Jones then moved on to the re-elections:

- Dave Pinwell, our Newsletter Editor, had been proposed by David Bower and seconded by Lilla Baker. There were no further nominations received from the floor. The voting in favour of the re-election of David Pinwell was unanimous with no abstentions. David Pinwell was duly re-elected as a TD.
- Charles Robinson, Chairman of the Meetings & Social Committee had been proposed by Leighton Jones and seconded by Bill Bohanna. There were no further nominations received from the floor. The voting in favour of the re-election of Charles Robinson was unanimous with no abstentions. Charles Robinson was duly re-elected as a TD.

12. Member proposed Resolutions.

There were no member resolutions proposed.

13. Any Other Business

Leighton Jones reminded the meeting that this item is only to deal with formal matters concerning the Society; he said that there was an opportunity for general questions and discussion later. There was no AOB.

14. Close of AGM

The formal business meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Signed..... Chairman

Dated.....