Harlow Civic Society

25th Annual General Meeting
Council Chamber, Civic Centre
Tuesday, September 24th, 2024, 7 PM
Minutes

1. Introduction and opening remarks from the Chair.
   Present: 21 attendees: Tony Evans, Phil Hardcastle, Annalise Taylor, D. M. R. Wright, John Curry, Lesley Perry, Erleen Anderson, Thomas Newens, Barbara Burge, Robin McCartney, Maurice Anston, Jenny Lushington, Pat Larkin, David Devine, David Brace, Peter Mountsteven, Patricia Mountsteven, Andrew Webb, Frank Jackson, Moira Jones, Shobha Edgell

   Apologies: Pauline & Chris Hockley, Moira Bridge, Jean Wright, Sandra Newens, Geraldine Tolington, Mag Barrett, Jake Shepherd, Gill Atkins

2. Minutes of the 24th AGM of Harlow Civic Society, October 2023. Agreed as a correct record of the 2023 AGM.

3. Talk. Rowan Gilbert TCPA ''Building the Future: Lessons from the New Towns'

4. Q and A

5. The Secretary's Report – see Appendix 1 below. Tony Evans thanked Phil and Annalise for their contributions to the social media accounts.

6. The Treasurer's Report – see Appendix 2 below. Frank Jackson tendered his thanks to Phil for managing the accounts. David Wright queried the costs of the memberships that we have let go eg C20th Society. There was a query as to whether we could call for gift aid but we would need to become a charity which brings it's own costs.

7. The Election of officers and committee members.

   Chair: Tony Evans nominated by Moira Jones and seconded by Patricia Mountsteven
   Vice-Chair: no nominations – vacant
   Secretary: Annalise Taylor nominated by Moira Jones. Seconded by David Wright.
   Treasurer: Phil Hardcastle nominated by Moira Jones. Seconded by Jenny Lushington
   Committee: Barbara Burge, Frank Jackson, Peter Mountsteven, Robin McCartney, Jake Shepherd, Moira Jones nominated en bloc by David Devine. Seconded by Shobha Edgell.
   Auditors: Frank Jackson and Derek Humphrey agreed.

8. AOB
   Moira Jones: MARS Group (Modern Architectural Research Group) were post war architects which Frederick Gibberd was very involved with. Their work included prefabricated building systems and competitions which resulted in exciting architecture. Moira felt that we need a group like this again to take on the current challenges of planning, housing and design. This could be the topic of a future meeting.

Sandra Newens (raised by Thomas Newens on her behalf) Concern about general appearance of parts of Harlow, especially the Market Square, Broad Walk, West Gate etc. Phil said we were all in full agreement about that area. We did meet with council earlier this year and asked about Strawberry Star. We will be meeting with the Planning Department next month. Work has begun on the upgrade work. David Devine mentioned that the Strawberry Star showroom is a mess and that the Market Square work seems to be predominantly paving with a lack of building.

John Curry – Town Centre Management Team is available in the Harvey Centre Hub 10 – 3pm. Post Office Road has been approved as a temporary bus depot. We need to watch this area. Add to list for meeting with Planners.

John Curry – Ron Bill's Blue Plaque still needs a home. Possibly the house Ron lived in in Collins Meadow could be an appropriate location. Committee members raised this with Dan Swords last year and will push this again at the next meeting. David Wright suggested that we approach Chris Vince to get him to speak on behalf of Ron Bill's plaque. Thomas Newens queried the sense of a 'policy' that precludes a blue plaque being placed on a council building.

9. Concluding remarks.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Secretary's Report

Secretary's Report Harlow Civic Society, October 2024.

The Harlow Civic Society's stated aim is:

'To celebrate and protect the built environment of Harlow'

and so, our years' activities reflect that.

Since our last AGM in October 2023, the Harlow Civic Society Committee has met 8 times.

Our membership of organisations such as Civic Voice and the Town and Country Planning Association keep us informed of current issues and proposed changes to government policy in Town Planning. For example, earlier in the year we signed up to the TCPA's Healthy Homes Pledge and will keep that at the forefront of our minds when considering local planning proposals. We have also contributed to consultations such as the current proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Planning

We encourage members to be informed about the Local Plan and to submit on planning applications directly and via the Society. HCS is a 'Designated Local Consultee' meaning that our submissions are made directly to the council. Before submitting to a consultation we consider issues such as whether it achieves 10% Biodiversity Net Gain and whether genuinely affordable housing is included in the plan along with transport and design considerations.

In the last 12 months we have submitted on proposals including:

- Housing on the Harlowbury School site
- The Latton Priory section of Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)
- Harlow Arts and Cultural Quarter
- Harlow Museum
- Market Square

We also keep a watching brief on various sites around the town such as Parndon Hall and field suggestions from members for the Local List.

Blue Plaques

This year we have received funding and commissioned plaques in memory of John Graham, Stan Newens and Lord Stephen Taylor, the last of whom has been unveiled on the MUN building in Old Harlow – the other two will follow soon.

Early in the year we reviewed our approach to Blue Plaques and devised a criteria to be applied to future suggestions which is as follows:

The subject of the plaque must:

- Have been resident in Harlow for a significant period of time
- Be of good character
- Be deceased

And have

- Made a significant contribution to the development of Harlow

And / or have been

- Notable in their field

These criteria could be applied to an individual, a group or a location.

The Civic Society acknowledges the imbalance of representation in the existing plaques, eg gender, and will take this into consideration when considering future plaques.

To begin to redress various imbalances we also need to find a way to fund plaques that don't necessarily have the support of a benefactor. Therefore, we plan to choose one plaque per year to crowdfund. We have begun gathering suggestions for appropriate women for future plaques via social media and the community fete and we and will pursue this further in the new year. Current suggestions include Paralympian Isabel Newstead, Councillor Sonia Anderson, Champion of the Arts Patricia Gibberd and Welfare Activist Sue Jones.

Promotion

We have increased our social media focus this year in order to promote events and spread awareness of what we do, along with a general goal of raising civic pride. Our Facebook group is well established and we launched an Instagram account in January of this year.

Our weekly posts on both accounts have included celebrating specific neighbourhoods, green spaces, blue plaques and sculptures in Harlow along with promoting events and raising awareness of planning consultations.

Our Instagram account has 161 followers and Facebook has 361. The next step will be to build on this following to increase membership.

We have also promoted our activities through the CM17 magazine, Your Harlow and at the Harlow Museum's Community Fete in August where we spoke to a lot of people about the society and our future plans for Blue Plaques.

Events

In April this year PhD student Chris Skipworth hosted a successful film showing at The Playhouse, related to his thesis on Amateur Film. HCS collaborated with Chris on the event and provided promotional support. Chris will be returning to host another programme of films at The Playhouse next year.

Walks. HCS member John Curry led two walks this year: The Town Park and Beyond and another starting and ending at Bush Fair. In both cases participants were taken to areas of the town that many were unfamiliar with and treated to John's broad knowledge of history, architecture and sculpture. The walks are also a great opportunity to socialise and many rewarding conversations were held. Thank you to John.

As mentioned previously we took part in the Harlow Museum Community Fete for the third year in a row.

We have worked on improving awareness of the organisation this year and hope that in the coming 12 months we can use that awareness to promote civic pride in the built environment and green spaces of Harlow, monitor and submit to future planning consultations, celebrate the contribution of more Harlow residents through Blue Plaques and increase our membership.

That concludes the Secretary's Report for the year 2023 - 2024

Appendix 2

Treasurer's Report – 2023 Finances

I'm happy to report that after a couple of particularly difficult years for the society we have succeeded in returning finances to a positive number and ran 2023 with a positive operating balance of £314.

This has been achieved by a continuing policy of austerity in spending and some generous individual donations from members. Our two largest outgoings for the year are now our memberships of Civic Voice and the TCPA which amount to around £200 a year and the upkeep of our website which is something similar. The previously high costs of meeting rooms has been eradicated by the help of the Memorial University of Newfoundland who offer us very generous rates for our meetings and I'd like to thank them on behalf of all of us for that. It really does make a big difference and they have been exemplary hosts over the past year or so.

However, it must be said that our ongoing financial position continues to be fragile and dependent largely on the generosity of individual donations rather than a healthy income from membership fees. Our membership has stagnated at around 90 total members over the past few years and this brought in an income of just £456 in 2023. The reason we were able to run at any meaningful surplus, even allowing for our reduction in spending, was £292 of donations we received. £138 of which was donated via the basket on the night of last year's AGM. Frankly, it was a financial life saver for us and you will notice that we have another basket on the table for this year and I thank you in advance for any donation you feel able to make to help the society continue to do its work in the coming year.

Clearly, for the society to thrive going forward we need to expand our membership numbers so please consider these 3 calls to action:

1. If you are not a member please sign up today
2. If you have allowed your membership to lapse, please renew for the coming year
3. Spread the word amongst friends and family and anyone you think might be interested in the work we do.

As a committee, we have instigated a number of activities to try and raise our profile but everything you can do as members to help will be much appreciated and very valuable.

We have deliberately kept membership fees at the same rate as we are aware of growing costs elsewhere and try to protect our members from any further burdens. I can't guarantee we will be able to maintain that forever but we are definitely committed to that for the coming year at least.

Our annual accounts have been checked and passed by our usual auditors, Derek Humphrys and Frank Jackson and these are available for members to see.

Thank You