

## Minutes of a meeting of the Herne Hill Society Committee

held on Tuesday 7 January 2020 at 7:30 PM at Herne Hill United Church

### 1. Welcome and apologies

The meeting was attended by Colin Wight (CW), Chair; Val Suebsaeng (VS), Membership Secretary; Henry Ferguson (HF); Dave Gelly (DG); Jackie Plumridge (JP); Pat Roberts (PR), Secretary.

Apologies were received from Annie Gelly, Martyn Hall and Laurence Marsh,

### 2. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising

DG reported that the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party for Bill Kirby had been a great success, notably the pianist (paid for by the Society).

The availability of the Small Grants Scheme needs to be more emphatically promoted. The Brockwell Railway could be another beneficiary. Action: MH to approach them.

We may still need to recover £55 from Brockwell Park Community Partners as their share of the costs for the Thomas Lynn Bristowe lecture in 2019. Action: MH to please check the account on his return.

### 3. 2019 Accounts and Stocktaking

The annual accounts of 2019 would be prepared by the Treasurer on his return. After discussion, it was agreed that it would be highly desirable to have these accounts checked and countersigned by an independent and competent person, even if a fee needed to be paid. A person who did likewise for the Dulwich Society could be approached to see whether he/she was willing to do this. Action: CW to discuss with MH on his return.

A stock-take of books and maps was now due. Action: CW to deal with this in January.

### 4. The Future of the Society - offers to help and next steps

It had emerged at the EGM on 13 November last year that several individuals, not presently Committee Members, had expressed willingness to advise on possible

alternative structures and ways forward, possibly with some amendments to the constitution, that might preserve the most important features and activities of the Society, including notably its scrutiny of local authority planning applications and decisions. The minutes of the EGM, available on the Society's website, stated that the Committee should "promptly contact those who had indicated a willingness to help". It was felt that some progress on this front would be highly desirable so that he could be reported to members at the AGM in March.

After discussion it was agreed to ask LM if he would be prepared to convene an early meeting of those individuals, on the basis of informal terms of reference and a timetable to be discussed, if he wished, with the Chair and the Secretary.

**Action: CW to discuss as soon as possible with LM.**

Other points relating to the future of the Society and raised at the EGM in November were also debated. Suggestions that the Committee's workload could be reduced by hiring specialists for certain tasks were generally considered to be a risky course of action which could deplete the Society's funds without fundamentally attracting new members - an aim which had perennially failed over several years - or changing its long-term survival prospects.

## **5. Subscriptions in 2020**

it was agreed, after discussion, that members and lapsed members should be actively encouraged to subscribe for 2020, not least because the Society confidently expected to be able to produce at least three further issues of the magazine; and in any case, the definitive next chapter in the Society's demise or survival had not yet been written. **Action: CW and VS to agree wording for emails to members.**

At the same time it was confirmed that new subscriptions should be captured online via PayPal and not by standing order. In addition, the Chair had already muted the option of Life Membership on the website, although the definitive removal of that option would require an amendment to the constitution.

## **6. Issues Log**

PR introduced the latest version of the Issues Log, which aimed to capture the issues needing to be addressed by the Committee in the event of either dissolution

of the society or a merger with another body. The current version did not claim to be complete, and comments from committee members to identify additional issues or indeed solutions would be welcome. Several of the issues had already been discussed in earlier agenda items.

It had been established by a show of hands at the November EGM, and confirmed by a very clear majority among those who responded to a subsequent email by the Chair, that members - at least those who had expressed an opinion - were generally happy for the Committee to engage in early but discreet contact with their corresponding numbers in compatible societies or other bodies in order to establish those bodies' willingness, or otherwise, to negotiate a possible merger. CW emphasised that these discussions should be formal, in the sense that they should be attended by more than one officer of the Society, and should be minuted. Ideally this would reveal whether the Committee - not just the personal interlocutors - of those societies might be willing in theory to pursue a merger. HF noted, nevertheless, that his reading of opinion at the EGM was that that meeting's sentiment did not strongly favour a merger with the Herne Hill Forum, even if the Forum was willing to discuss it. PR commented that there seemed to be another current of opinion, at that same meeting, that was strongly opposed to dilating the particular SE24 focus that the Herne Hill Society could articulate, and which might be diluted if a merger were pursued. Action: CW and PR to open such discussions, and report back.

## **7. Date of AGM**

The chair noted that this was provisionally fixed for Wednesday 11 March, though the room availability had not yet been confirmed. If it was deemed advantageous to find a later date, which might allow more time for preparation of options to be presented at the AGM, this could be explored, but the benefits were not obvious. Action: MH to confirm Church Hall bookings on his return.

Focusing on the procedure to be followed at the AGM, the Chair confirmed that he would only stand for election on the understanding that his chairmanship would be dedicated to winding up the Society or alternatively concluding a merger with another compatible group. PR said that he would stand again on the same basis. CW wondered whether other members of the Committee might want to consider a

similar stance. Of course, if alternative candidates were to come forward, he could withdraw his candidature completely. But if he stood (on the basis described) and failed to secure election, whilst other Committee members were elected, the management of the Society after March 2020 could be problematic. In the absence of a quorate Committee, who could take decisions on of the Society's future at a time of crisis? It was felt that the legal position should probably be explored further.

#### **8. WW1 Memorial at the 7th Day Adventist Church**

PR circulated copies of his letter to the church about the First World War Memorial which had apparently been put out for disposal. No reply to this letter had been received, though on recent inspection the marble plaque had been removed, hopefully for safe storage. VS and HF offered to pursue the issue through personal contacts; meanwhile, PR said he would write again to the church. Action: PR to write to/email the 7th Day Adventist Church.

#### **9. Any other business**

It was agreed that no further public meetings should be arranged during the tenure of the current Committee. The Hall's availability for meetings had not been confirmed, so it was hoped that the Treasurer could do so on his return. Action: MH to confirm room availability.

#### **10. Date of next meeting**

CW emphasised that the next meeting, on Tuesday 4 February, could be a critical one in our preparations for the AGM, so he hoped that all members would be able to attend. Action: PR to email Committee members.