

The Bedford Park Society
Minutes of the 57th Annual General Meeting of the Bedford Park Society
held on 25 May 2022

The President, Nigel Woolner, opened the meeting of the 57th AGM of the Society.

In attendance: 35 members of the Society.

1 **Apologies:** Frances Hall, Paul Jameson and Martin Landy.

2 **Approval of the Minutes of the 2021 meeting**

The minutes of the 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.

3 **The Chair's annual review and questions**

Helen Jameson, Chair of the Society, welcomed the members present to the meeting. She was delighted to be able to hold the AGM "in real life" after two years of "virtual" AGMs because of the Covid pandemic. She said that the Society had been able to turn our traditional Winter Party into a Spring Party, which provided the first opportunity to get together as members of the Society for quite some time, and it therefore felt very special to all be present in person at the AGM.

During 2021 the Executive Committee had to continue working remotely, but having honed skills during 2020, were able to continue to work effectively on behalf of Bedford Park. The Chair was most grateful to all the many volunteers for keeping the show on the road even though volunteers were missing the opportunities to meet and concluded that Zoom meetings, although effective, really were not as enjoyable as face-to-face meetings.

Planning

The Chair focused first and in some detail on planning matters, which by their nature were key to one of the Society's main objectives to preserve and enhance the architectural heritage of Bedford Park. During the year the Planning Committee was exceptionally busy commenting on a record number of over 90 applications, 50% higher than the previous year. This involved a huge amount of work; each application being considered very carefully by the Committee. The Society was very fortunate to benefit from the extensive knowledge and experience of a strong team of heritage architects who give their time voluntarily, and the Society was extremely grateful to the individuals involved.

Five applications were withdrawn, and of the 73 decisions made by the local authorities, 59 were approvals. This success rate of over 80% indicates on the whole the straightforward working of the planning process in Bedford Park. Both local authorities publish clear guidance, and applications which are consistent with this guidance can be reasonably certain to be approved by the local authority. In a number of cases the applications were modified in response to comments made by the Society, enabling applicants to achieve their desired results whilst also preserving the character of the building. Many applicants consulted the Society's Planning Committee prior to submitting an application in cases of doubt.

It was unfortunate, however, that there were a small number of cases during the year where some borough planning officers consented to applications which infringed their borough's own planning guidelines. These consents endangered the heritage significance of individual buildings and of the Conservation Areas as a whole. It seemed that the problems in Ealing began around the time that they decided to stop employing their own specialist Conservation Officers. There had been a more consistent interpretation of the planning guidelines in Hounslow, where Conservation Officers had been retained by the borough. The Society engaged with the Ealing planning team to discuss how these important issues could be resolved and had offered the expertise of the BPS Planning Committee. The Society looked forward to progress being made on this issue by joint working with Ealing planners during 2022.

The Planning Committee also participated actively in Ealing's comprehensive review of all its conservation areas including, of course, Bedford Park. The proposals went out for public consultation in early 2022, and there would be further work on the management plans for individual conservation areas. Indications from the programme were that the role of Conservation Area Advisory Panels should be enhanced, providing more expertise in the handling of planning and listed building applications, which would be of particular benefit to Bedford Park.

Infrastructure and Environment

This year the Infrastructure Committee had been as busy as ever on a number of fronts. It had kept members informed on various traffic and cycleway schemes and how members could provide their views and feedback on these schemes. On trees, the Society sought improvements in tree management by both boroughs, recognising that budgetary constraints and redirecting resources having inevitably exacerbated problems.

Good working relationships with the teams in both boroughs were re-established, walkabouts were undertaken with the team in each borough, problems uncovered, and the Society sought to help find volunteers to take responsibility for watering new trees which have been planted.

The Chair asked members to take up opportunities to give their views. The Society continued to work hard tackling issues, but it was clear that it remained the case that a high volume of formal complaints or survey responses from residents was always more effective in influencing local council or government policies than a single response from the Society.

Heathrow had remained mercifully quiet all year on the expansion front, but the Society remained in close contact with the Coalition Against the Third Runway about the latest state of play and their initiatives, keeping members informed when there was news or a need to comment.

Events and Merchandise

The normal programme of events was once again suspended in 2021 because of Covid restrictions but the Events and Merchandise Committee organised two very well-received online lectures, both attracting a new audience from outside London and the UK. The first by Sarah Hardy of the De Morgan Foundation, focused on the beautiful Bedford Park tiles designed by William De Morgan. Her account of the lives of William and his wife and distinguished artist Evelyn, was fascinating. The second lecture by Nicholas Friend explored Norman Shaw's crucial influence on the architecture of Bedford Park, setting a standard for the estate which was followed by later architects. His enthusiasm for Norman Shaw was infectious, and his extensive illustrations showcased brilliantly the beauty and variety of Bedford Park architecture.

Unfortunately, there was no Winter Party in 2021 due to Covid restrictions, and the Society was unable to participate in the scaled down Green Days online event which the Church was able to organise at short notice.

The Events and Merchandise Committee worked hard to make merchandise available as Christmas gift ideas and arranged free delivery to members within Chiswick. New merchandise had been developed and sourced for Green Days 2022.

Heritage

The Society had a number of heritage projects in development and was able to progress all of them to some degree in 2021, although more slowly than planned due to the pandemic.

The original Tabard pub sign, discovered fortuitously during a refurbishment of the pub some years ago was gifted to the Society by Greene King. A condition survey commissioned by the Society concluded that one side of the sign could be conserved but the other side was sadly beyond repair and could only be stabilised. The Society was delighted to have secured the support of The Pilgrim Trust for this conservation work with a grant of £3,600 and was in the process of seeking to raise the balance of the total costs of £11,000 of conserving and hanging the sign. BPS was very grateful that St Michael & All Angels Church had agreed that the completed sign can be hung in the Michael Room of the Church Hall and to local architect John Scott who had given us significant help with this project.

The Society was also pleased to report success in its efforts, on behalf of the Bedford Park Community, to facilitate the restoration of the Grade II listed Bedford Park War Memorial which was vandalised during 2021 and the plaques naming the service men removed. The Society was most grateful for the enthusiastic support of all the Homefields ward councillors, who helped secure funding for this work from the Hounslow Thriving Communities Fund. This grant, together with an anonymous donation received, covered the cost of the work. The Society was very grateful also to Georg Butlin for working with local specialist supplier Rivermeade to source a suitable replacement plaque.

Some progress was made on the long-term project to update the Bedford Park logbooks. Inevitably it had not been possible to progress the oral history project, but the work would be revived now that restrictions had been lifted.

The Society continued to maintain regular contact with members through regular E-news, which as well as news featured fabulous photographs contributed by members and stories of the many interesting people who have lived in BP. The Society also produced the annual Bedford Park Journal celebrating the architecture, people and history of the garden suburb, which this year included features on William Morris wallpapers and the BP contemporary artist community, amongst others.

Although not a Society led project, members will have been aware of the plans which were coming to fruition for a memorial to WB Yeats designed by Conrad Shawcross to be located on The Triangle by St Michael & All Angels, for which Hounslow had given planning permission and contributed to the fundraising appeal made by the project sponsors. The Society commented on the application through the normal planning process and expressed some concerns about the precise siting of the sculpture in relation to the Grade 2* listed Church and had been discussing questions relating to safety, resistance to vandalism and maintenance needs with the Yeats Bedford Park Artwork Project team. The Society was supporting the Discover Bedford Park with poet WB Yeats educational heritage project which would include a smartphone guided walk and school-groups' creative workbooks.

A member expressed dismay that planning permissions had been granted by LB Hounslow for the Yeats sculpture. The Chair noted that this was a highly unusual application outside the normal pattern for a sculpture in a prominent public space, that the proposal raised issues of taste and opinion and views were bound to differ. The Society's main concern was the setting of the grade 2* listed Church. In the comments made on the application the Society referenced the National Planning Policy Framework for the Conservation Area, proposed an alternative location for the sculpture on the Triangle, which would have less impact on the view of the Church and raised a number of questions about the construction, maintenance and safety which the sponsors had confirmed they were committed to resolving. The application was approved by LBH for the sculpture in its original proposed position.

Finance

This year the Society was pleased to welcome Libby Basset to the role of Honorary Treasurer, and very grateful to her for taking on the role. She had taken the opportunity to update and streamline some of the financial processes and the way the accounts were prepared. She would present the accounts and take any questions in the next agenda item.

Membership and volunteers

The Chair thanked all the many volunteers who had worked again so hard and flexibly during the year in very unusual circumstances to ensure that the priorities of the Society could be achieved. She thanked in particular Raj Parkash who stood down from his roles during the year due to other charitable commitments. Raj worked hard for Bedford Park as Chair of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee and was greatly valued as a Trustee. The Society was grateful to David Blackburn for volunteering as a Trustee and as Chair of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee.

The Society also said farewell to Ruth Clarke who was moving so had stood down for practical reasons. The Society was most grateful to her for the huge amount she had undertaken for the Society in various roles, as a member of the Executive Committee, as a very active member of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee and chairing the Events and Merchandise Committee. Enormous thanks were also expressed to Jacky Cowell who had stood down from the Events and Merchandise Committee for her invaluable contribution over several years.

Membership of the Society remained broadly stable in 2021. The Society was conscious that many people had moved away from the area, and new residents arrived, and hoped to encourage those who have moved to the area to support the work of the Society by becoming a member. Members were encouraged to persuade new neighbours to join and the Society would also be delighted to hear from members who wished to volunteer.

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

For the past few years the Society had been examining the benefits and implications of changing the Society's legal form to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and had tabled a proposal for members. The Honorary Secretary, Nick Mesquita, would introduce this motion and he and Paul Walker would take questions before a vote on the proposal. The EC believed this change in legal status to be in the long-term interests of the Society, and the Chair encouraged members to support the proposal. She thanked Nick Mesquita, Paul Walker and Raj Parkash for the considerable time and attention they had given to this proposal.

4 Treasurer's report, questions and adoption of the Accounts of the Society for the year ended 31 December 2021

The Honorary Treasurer, Libby Bassett, took over as Honorary Treasurer about a year ago. She had lived in the area for over 25 years and was a chartered accountant by training.

Accounting Policy

The Trustees agreed during 2021 to change the accounting policy to a Receipts and Payments basis. This approach should be more appropriate for a charity of this size, it would make the accounting simpler and the accounts easier for members to follow. This meant that income and expenditure would be recorded when received or expended so there would be no accruals at the year end and there would be no stock value carried in the balance sheet. The costs of anything purchased, such as merchandise, would be written off when bought. The Society would of course keep management accounts to ensure that the finances at least break even, and hopefully make a small profit on events and sales of merchandise as this provided a welcome source of income to support the activities of the Society.

The change in accounting policy meant that a handful of items which were accrued at the end of 2020 but paid in early 2021 were included in the costs for the year.

Income and expenditure

The annual income of £14,276 was slightly higher than 2019, the last full year before Covid, and nearly 50% higher than 2020 which was of course heavily impacted by Covid. Subscription income remained steady. There were two successful online lectures, and a good take-up of Christmas merchandise offers. There was an increase in other donations during the year. Much of this came from film companies who used locations in Bedford Park and who made a donation towards the Society. The Society was grateful to those members who kindly added a donation to their annual subscription each year. The restricted income of £1,000 was the anonymous donation received during 2021 towards the restoration of the War Memorial which would be completed in 2022.

Since the lockdown restrictions were lifted the Society had been able to catch up with some outstanding Gift Aid claims and made two late last year. The final three outstanding claims were made in this calendar year and so the Society was now up to date with Gift Aid claims. The aim was to make the Gift Aid claim as soon as possible after the year end. The Society was grateful to all members who had signed a Gift Aid form which made a big difference to the Society's finances.

The Society's expenditure in 2021 of £12,774 (without the one-off legal charge relating to our constitution which is referred to below) was slightly less than the equivalent expenditure in 2019 (the last full year before Covid).

There was greater expenditure on merchandise in 2021 compared with the prior year although this was more consistent with 2019. This expenditure related primarily to two items: the new mugs and chilly bottles all of which were purchased during 2021. The apparent increases in the costs of insurance and member communications were as a result of the change in accounting policy. The actual costs remained consistent with prior years. All expenditure had been consistent with the budget which was agreed by the Trustees.

Balance Sheet

The total funds available at the end of 2021 were £56,555 which was almost the same as the funds at the end of the previous financial year despite the one-off legal charge during the year and the change to our accounting policy. All those funds were in the bank and so visible and accessible.

Included in these funds was a Strategic Reserve of £30,000 which the Society continued to maintain. The purpose of this reserve is to deal with any exceptional expenditure that might be needed to protect the architectural heritage and amenities of Bedford Park. The Executive Committee had reviewed this reserve and believed it remained adequate and appropriate.

Tom Greeves Bedford Park Society Fund

The Society also held £14,001 of accumulated income from capital held by the Charities Aid Foundation and donated by the late Eleanor Greeves in memory of her late husband Tom. The purpose of this fund is the appreciation and preservation of Bedford Park, including historical and present day architectural and design matters. The Fund is administered by an Independent Advisory Committee, and the accumulated income was therefore shown as a Restricted Fund on the Society's balance sheet.

Colin Airey of George Hay & Co, accountants, who had independently examined the financial statements was thanked for fulfilling this role.

The accounts for the year ending 31 December 2021 were approved unanimously.

5 Approval of the appointment of George Hay and Co. as independent accountant of the Society

The members approved the appointment of Colin Airey of George Hay and Co. as the independent accountant of the Society.

6 Election of members to the Executive Committee of the Society

Two nominations to the Executive Committee had been received: David Blackburn and Nick Mesquita who were elected unanimously.

7 Conversion of the Society into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

The Honorary Secretary, Nick Mesquita, explained that it was proposed to convert the Society into a CIO. The change would not affect the Society's objects which would retain the wording of the current constitution or its activities or the way in which the Society was managed.

The Society had functioned for at least 35 years as a charity registered under the Charities Act, in the form of an Unincorporated Association which enabled the Society to enjoy all the convenience of charitable status and to be subject only to the very simple reporting obligations of the Charity Commission. However, in 2011 legislation was passed which defined a new charitable format, the CIO, which appeared to retain the main advantages of the existing format while offering some additional attractions.

A problem of the Unincorporated Association was that trustees can in theory be held personally liable for contracts and obligations entered into on behalf of the charity. The CIO can, unlike the Unincorporated Association, enter into contracts in its own name thus resolving this difficulty. The nature of the activities of the Society had meant that there has been virtually no risk of trustee liabilities arising. Nonetheless, this remote risk had sometimes meant that individuals had been reluctant to take on the trustee role. The Executive Committee believed that, as the CIO format becomes widely used in the charity sector, any charity with trustee liability is likely to find it increasingly difficult to recruit trustees.

A second advantage was that, if the Society wished for instance to enter into a contract of employment or to acquire property, this would present difficulties with the existing structure. While the Society did not currently envisage doing either of these things, the new format would offer the Society this flexibility in the future.

Over recent years with an increasing number of charities becoming CIO's, the process of conversion to CIO had been clarified and was now well established. Following a detailed consideration of alternative organisational structures, the Executive Committee took the decision to take initial steps to prepare for a possible conversion to a CIO. A draft constitution had been drawn up and application made to the Charity Commission.

The Society now sought formal approval from its members. If this was granted the next step would be the transfer of the Society's activity to the CIO and eventually the winding up of the existing charity. The Society had been advised on these steps by lawyers from the Charity and Social Business team at Russell-Cooke LLP. Especial thanks were also due to Paul Walker for his advice and assistance.

A member asked whether there were any disadvantages in the CIO proposal, whether there would be additional costs and whether the reporting requirements would be changed. In reply, it was pointed out that the wording of the CIO was prescribed but that the administrative requirements would be simpler and particularly that trustees would be protected financially. The cost would be in the region of £6,000 in legal fees. A question was asked about the timetable and the response given that 1 January 2023 had been set but that this depended on the approval of the new constitution by the Charity Commission.

The members present passed the following resolution to which Rule 28 of the Society's Constitution applied:

"The Trustees of the Charity are hereby authorised to procure the incorporation of the Charity into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) by carrying out all necessary actions to do so, including but not limited to:

- a) forming a CIO with the Charity Commission;
- b) procuring the transfer of all assets and liabilities of the Charity to the CIO on terms to be decided at the trustees' discretion;
- c) thereafter, winding up and closing the Charity and notifying the Charity Commission of such, on the basis that all of the Charity's operations will run through the new CIO".

The proposal to convert the Society to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation was therefore approved unanimously and the formal business of the AGM concluded.