

NEWARK CIVIC TRUST

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
held on Thursday, 24th September 2020 via Zoom

1. Chairman's Welcome

The meeting was opened by Chairman, Michael Knapton. There were 13 members present online. The Chairman welcomed all those present and thanked them for attending and for their support over the past year. This was an historic AGM, our first, and hopefully last, virtual AGM. The Secretary had e-mailed an agenda, copy of last year's minutes and copies of the accounts, but if anyone hadn't received them they could be shown on screen. Voting on committee positions etc could be voted on through the thumbs up facility on Zoom.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Michael Hawes, Debbie Smith, Mick Gill, Andrew Fearn, Suzanne Mearthy, Bill Davidson, Jane Williams, Isobel and Dave Turner, Christine Smith, Laura Walsh, Joyce Martin and Len Davis.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last AGM held on Thursday 26th September 2019 were agreed with no amendments. Proposed by Terry Wilshin, seconded by John Reid and accepted unanimously.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Chairman's Report

The Chairman gave his report on the past year. It had been a strange year, but Michael thought back to how things were and reported that we had been able to have 4 of our regular talks at the Library, with a good mix of subjects, such as Georgian Nottingham, Lost churches of Nottingham, Old Tyme Punishments and Sydney Race's Nottingham Nights. Thanks to Paul Moore for organising the talks and also some of the talks and visits that had to be cancelled due to Covid 19. We will monitor the situation, but would like to arrange some sort of visit as soon as it is safe to do so. For now we may have to look at delivering some of the talks, and possibly events, virtually. This might not be ideal for everyone, but at least we can deliver something for members. Paul has been speaking to James Wright, who spoke to us before about Medieval Graffiti, and is happy to deliver a talk on Medieval Building Myths online on the 29th October. Details will be sent out via e-mail or posted on our website. Michael had been looking at virtual tours recently, which would be guided video tours of local places, which could be viewed live or recorded so they could be viewed at members' convenience. Virtual tours might help member's access places that can't currently be accessed in person. This week Michael had visited the Pyramids at Giza, the Terracotta Warriors and Ann Frank's house online. He was talking to Nottinghamshire County Council about what events might be happening in the county. They have said they could open up the church tower at Bramcote for small groups of 6 and at the same time run a tour of Bramcote Hall, so one half of a group of up to 12 could tour the tower, whilst the other conducts a tour of the Hall before swapping over. They did this over Heritage Open Days weekend, when it worked well and within Covid 19 secure guidelines. They can take more than one booking for consecutive hour slots, so Michael will discuss this with the committee and we might be able to do this before Christmas, weather and light permitting. We will keep members informed of any developments.

Michael hoped everyone had received the latest copy of our magazine and thanked all those who helped put it together, and then deliver it to members around town. Now more than ever it is important to keep members informed of what is happening and provide a good quality magazine as a benefit of membership. He encouraged anyone to get in contact with ideas or articles that could be included in the magazine. These might include articles seen in other publications that might be interesting to members. We are not looking for an essay, just a few paragraphs and photos of something you think might be of interest.

What should be of interest to all is the town centre of Newark, with suggestions over recent years that this was in decline. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody, nor is it a situation unique to Newark. The state of the commercial centre has naturally been hit over the last few months, with national retailers, such as Fat Face, Zizzi's and Superdrug shutting up shop as part of streamlining or restructuring. Whilst he did not intend to look at the impact on the national and local economies, one concern, which most members would share, was the impact on some of our most treasured buildings and the wider heritage impact on the town. The loss of Zizzi's from the Ossington meant that a significant property, familiar to all when entering or leaving the town would now be empty. Having the ground floor abandoned is not a good message for the town to be giving. There are ongoing issues with the Corn Exchange, and members will be familiar with the problems Newark & Sherwood District Council had in the past with getting in contact with the owners. This had now been resolved, but members would be aware that the owner had failed to get the licensing hours he wanted, with alcohol being allowed to be sold until 0245 rather than 0430. The owner says this now puts the viability of the venue at risk. Michael was not sure about this or that the owners were trying to do their best for the town, as reported recently. Whatever the case the building remains out of use, so is it being maintained? The Conservation team have been on the roof this week with the owners, so discussions appear to be ongoing, however what we really want to see is the building back in use and benefiting the whole town, not just the late night revellers. On a more positive note the former Nottinghamshire Building Society had recently been purchased, however nobody is yet sure by whom. Hopefully this will signal the building being returned to use. Work at the former Robin Hood Hotel, or what remains of it, are now well advanced and don't appear too far from completion, with Travelodge due to open in February 2021. All of these building and many others face uncertain futures given the economic uncertainty for the country as a whole; that is an unfortunate fact of life. Michael thought that, in all honesty, he would be talking about all these buildings again next year, but hopefully in a positive light.

On positives there has been an announcement that Newark will receive part of £17.5 million as part of the High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme, delivered by Historic England 'which is set to unlock the potential of high streets, fuelling economic and cultural recovery'. Newark's share is £275, 000, with both Grantham and Lincoln receiving much bigger sums. Initially it might be thought that £275, 000 is a drop in the ocean, but it will help to provide a focus on how it can best be used to benefit the town. Michael will be talking to NSDC about what their plans are, but is expecting an announcement in the Advertiser next week, when members should be able to read about them. On the other hand the Town's Fund of up to £25 million can be used for a much wider range of purposes, such as education, transport, and infrastructure or pretty much anything that might be submitted. Michael hoped that we would be awarded this by the Government and that it would be spent in the right way. The Castle Gatehouse Project is one that Michael would love to see come to fruition to 'maximise the potential of this heritage asset'. The Towns Fund was originally heralded as a way of driving economic growth and productivity, investment and connectivity, but also investment in cultural assets and skills. He hoped Newark would receive the biggest grant possible and it is used in the right way. He had heard that an announcement might be made early next week.

On the subject of grant funding, next month the Gilstrap Charity would decide on our application to

fund the updating of the Town Trail leaflets, something we had been working on for a couple of years. All of the trails that we were going to update have been updated and the Graffiti and Wall Painting's trail has been written, but still needs a few photographs to be obtained. The Gilstrap Charity meeting to decide on our application had been put on hold due to Covid 19. We first applied late last year, but this had to be resubmitted in spring this year. Michael had been contacted by them to run through the application and we should know next month whether we have been successful. You can watch the meeting live on YouTube, if you want to know how we get on.

Finally the Chairman wanted to remember two of our members who had recently passed away. Tony Colton had passed away in May at the age of 81. Tony was a former captain of Newark Rugby Club in the 1960s, Chair of Newark & Sherwood Community Voluntary Service, as well as Newark Sports Association. Paul Baggaley from Newark Sports Association had joined us this evening. Whenever Michael met Tony he was always generous in his praise for the Trust, the work we do and especially the magazine and was always very encouraging. Paul Baggaley had said in a tribute in the Newark Advertiser that 'without many realising, the people of Newark had benefited greatly from his resilience, knowledge and understanding. He set a high bar for public service that many will aspire to, but few will reach. He was a Newarker through and through and we need more like him.' Michael also wanted to say a few words about John Oldham, who was a Life Member and former Treasurer of the Trust. Michael had never met John, but Richard Bingham, who is another Life Member, had called him to let him know that John had passed away at the beginning of August, at the age of 95. John had helped to run a local venue called the Blue Rooms, which was lost when St Marks Precinct had been redeveloped. His family was also known for owning Oldham's Bakery and he was a past President of Newark Amateur Operatic Society and a Director of Beaumont House. Michael had put out an appeal on Facebook for any memories of John and received dozens of responses, all of which described John as a warm, kind and generous individual, who was a pleasure to know. Both John and Tony will be sadly missed, but will be remembered for all they have done for the town.

Kevin Winter added that the £275,000 received for the High Street Heritage Action Zone was being matched by NSDC. So the total amount for work to take place was around £550,000. This was primarily aimed at bringing historic properties back into use both commercially and domestically, with accommodation above the shops brought into use.

6. Treasurer's Report

Louise Knapton-Carter read the Treasurer's report, copies of which had been e-mailed to members and were shown on screen.

Income

£2122.90

Income had increased as we had received a donation of £500 from NSDC for the Town Trails and also £100 from Guy Taylor Associates for the same purpose, plus a further £33 donation. Income from subscriptions was slightly lower, as membership numbers had fallen slightly. There were now 54 single and joint members, 25 life members, 7 corporate members and 2 children. There are now 122 members, with 8 new members this year. Gift Aid of £62.67 had been claimed back.

Expenditure

£1,606.28

There were no website expenses, despite the Chairman having chased them on a number of occasions. They are still maintaining the website, but have not billed us for some time. Michael has investigated whether it could be transferred to a new provider, but it would not be possible and would have to be rebuilt. Therefore we will continue chasing them to try and pay them.

Income/Expenditure

£516.62

The Trust currently has assets of £3,656.36.

The accounts had not been sent for auditing this year due to Covid 19, but hopefully next year we will return to normal.

The Nottinghamshire Building Society account had been closed down, as we were receiving very low interest and it was difficult to maintain and even to close down.

It was proposed to agree the Treasurer's report by Terry Wilshin, seconded by Chris Lester and accepted unanimously.

7. Election of Officers

All the officers were standing for re-election so the following officers were elected. Proposed by Marion Knapton, seconded by Paul Martin and unanimously approved:-

- Chairman – Michael Knapton
- Vice-Chairman – Kevin Winter
- Secretary – Kevin Winter
- Treasurer – Louise Knapton Carter

The above were elected en-bloc.

8. Election of Executive Committee Members

In addition to the officers elected above, the following were unanimously elected to the Executive Committee. Proposed by Marion Knapton, seconded by Barbara Kramer and unanimously approved:-

- Planning Chairman – Michael Hawes
- Planning Vice-Chairman – Paul Moore
- Membership Secretary – Debbie Smith
- Recruitment Secretary – Debbie Smith
- Conservation Watch Co-ordinator – Mick Gill
- Awards Co-ordinator – Michael Knapton
- Events Co-ordinator – Paul Moore

The above were elected en-bloc.

The Chairman invited anyone who might like to be involved to volunteer for the Executive Committee. Members were welcome at committee meetings even if they weren't members of the committee. There were no volunteers forthcoming.

9. Any Other Business

Paul Baggaley had sent the Chairman a link to a National Lottery Heritage Fund scheme that he thought the Trust would be ideal candidates for. He thought there were a lot of buildings in the town that required work and might be likely candidates. Whilst Paul couldn't join our committee, as he is involved with so many others, he would be willing to work with someone to formulate a bid. Michael thanked Paul and mentioned that we had received HLF grants in the past for the Town Pump, for example. One of the issues with applying for money for buildings was that you could only apply if you owned the building, or were working in partnership with the owner. This was the case for the Town Pump, as it is owned by Newark Town Council, so we had to work with them. Michael will be talking to Oliver Scott next week, once more is known about the various grants coming into the town, and would then look to see whether there was potential for bidding for any extra funding for projects that might fall outside the grants awarded.

Kevin Winter reported that for this year's Heritage Open Days most events were online, with Newark College giving a guided tour of their gardens and both the Palace Theatre and the castle also giving guided tours. It had been possible to conduct three live events, with the Ranger conducting a tour of Sconce & Devon Park, Kevin conducting two Civil War tours and the Tudor garden at the rear of the National Civil War Centre – Newark Museum being open. Visitors could see the planters, with plants and herbs that might have been taken by the Mayflower, with guides available to explain their purpose. Over 100 people had taken advantage of this. It was hoped that next year we could return to a full range of events. Because numbers were restricted for the Civil War tours Kevin suggested that maybe this was something that members might be interested in.

Michael mentioned subscriptions, as normally a lot of people pay in person at the AGM, by cheque or cash. Subscriptions are our lifeblood and our corporate sponsors subscriptions were vital to us and allowed us to produce the magazine twice a year. Individual subscriptions pay for the day to day running of the Trust, such as paying for room hire, speakers' fees and events. Subscriptions are currently £15 for an individual or £20 for two family members. A lot of people pay by Standing Order, with a few still paying at the old rate. We would be contacting these shortly, but if you do pay by Standing Order please check it is set to right amount. Michael said that if you wanted to pay by cash to let us know and we could arrange for someone to pick it up or you can send a cheque to the Treasurer, whose address is at the front of the magazine or they can be paid by BACS transfer.

This concluded the AGM, so Michael thanked everyone for attending and looked forward to seeing everyone in person in the not too distant future.