

Report For Members - The last Year

Dear Members

The Trustees of the Society have been rather locked down, in the last year, as have we all.

We were also hit hard by the unexpected death, in lockdown, of one of our stalwart and long-standing Trustees, Professor Ron Johnston. Ron, as a professor and author of many books and papers, was a consummate writer, so his contribution to our papers and public letters is sorely missed, as well as his wry sense of humour at our Committee meetings.

It was with great regret – but with no alternative – that we cancelled last year's AGM and annual lecture. The latter of these was particularly disappointing as we had a professor from Cambridge University, Philippa Hoskin, to deliver it, who is probably the greatest expert on Bishop Poore and the medieval scene – the subject of the lecture. Very appropriate to have a talk in the year of the Cathedral's 800th anniversary on the man who helped make the Cathedral happen.

But, the Trustees have continued our day to day activities all through the lockdowns, the major one being reviewing all planning applications relating to The Close and the Liberty of The Close (map of the Liberty attached for your interest).

We also look at the High Street by the High Street Gate, Exeter Street, New Street and Crane Street. These last few streets abut the Close Wall (Grade 1 listed) so anything happening there is important.

We will be sending out an update about the last year shortly and all the information you would have received for the last AGM.

We are now planning how to hold an AGM this year – more of that soon and items for consideration, including an update of our rather elderly constitution. The notice will be accompanied by a report of our activities in this financial year just gone - for the AGM. It is likely the AGM will involve a Zoom – or equivalent – element. We have yet to work out if we can include a talk on a relevant topic as is our usual ambition – but at the moment, usual is not very evident. More anon.

Good News

In the meantime, the Trustees wanted to mention one planning application that we have been monitoring for a long time, which is now coming to fruition. That is the replacement of the traffic hut which is the shelter and HQ for the marvellous traffic team in The Close. The first design was thrown out as too grand and imposing and in a style that would fight with the listed buildings all around it.

In the light of that, a member of the Society, Nico Villeneuve, who lives in Sarum St Michael in The Close, decided to offer to help. Nico is a designer – primarily of interiors and very much contemporary ones – but has designed outdoor structures for clients and is well versed in what would be acceptable to the planning authorities in a special space such as The Close. He produced a very clean and unfussy design for a new kiosk, not in black non-natural material (as did the first application) but in wood – unpainted, and which would fade down to a light grey colour within less than a year. This design found favour with the planners. All was looking good and then – the pandemic struck.

After that, with the Cathedral closed and income cut off, the Cathedral concluded that this project, which was set to go ahead, should be postponed due to lack of funding.

Thankfully, an anonymous benefactor came forward and offered to pay half of the cost. This meant that the Cathedral might look again at re-instating this key project. The old hut was very definitely becoming an eyesore.

An approach was made to the Society as to whether we could help with the funding. The Trustees had had in mind to do something, last year, to acknowledge the Cathedral's 800th anniversary, but lockdown struck. So, this project was the perfect opportunity to fulfil the recognition of the 800th anniversary and help deliver the new kiosk. We concluded that, as a one-off contribution, the Trustees would make a payment on behalf of the Society of £3,000 towards the cost of the Kiosk, to ensure it would go ahead. This is a major commitment for us, but towards a very high profile project that would really enhance the look of The Close, which is the whole tenor of our charitable objects. Indeed, a number of trustees and members wished to give specifically for this project in their own right, if this would get the long overdue Kiosk replacement. So, it is going ahead.

So, the great news is that the new Kiosk is to be installed in July, supported by the Society and some of its members and also by members of The Close Residents' Association. We are delighted that the traffic team will spend their next winter in a well-insulated, heated and double-glazed kiosk which will last for many years.

Our thanks, in particular, to Nico himself, who gave of his expertise and time very freely and at no cost to the Cathedral for this important project. It will transform the entry into The Close and the sense of welcome. Much praise to him.

Dear members – I do hope you are all keeping well and safe. Today, I got vaccination number two. Strange times.

Heather Olsen - Chairman