

LETCHEWORTH SETTLEMENT

AGM NOVEMBER 2017

CHAIR'S REPORT

The financial year to the end of July 2017 was a very successful one for the Settlement in a variety of ways:

Income was up by £20, 000 and reflected a huge amount of hard work by our Manager, Sonia Weston, and her team in the office, supported, as always, by the Management Committee and our trusty band of volunteers. This year the efforts of the latter included an Open Gardens event which earned us a superb £800. We are enormously grateful to all those who participated in this event. The increase in expenditure can be seen in improvements to the Spinks and Cruse, which we have continued in the current financial year in the Common Room and which we will report on next November!

I should like to pay particular tribute to Nigel Carrick and Bob Thorogood for all their commitment and much hard work on *all* our premises related matters – both maintenance and refurbishment. We could not have achieved all that we have in recent years without their enthusiastic efforts. My sincere thanks also go to Roy Evans who gave us a very generous donation in the course of this past financial year which enabled us to do a lot of refurbishment work (and bought the leaf buster!)

Sonia has covered operational activities in her report and I would like therefore to spend a little time explaining a couple of changes which the Committee has decided are both necessary and appropriate:

From time to time, it's a good idea for all charities to review their governing documents – in our case, the Constitution – last looked at in 2008 when several major changes were made. This time the changes are much less significant and really amount mostly to a reflection of the way in which we now work. It is fair to say that the world moves on fast these days and with system changes and the need to respond quickly to changing market conditions, reviews will become more frequent in the future. This review of our Constitution has been the subject of discussions within the Management Committee in recent months and all members of the Committee have been party to the redrafting. I will explain the proposed changes to the overall Constitution under Motions and Proposals.

But if I may I will explain first about the proposed Honorary Fellowships as they feature in the revisions to the Constitution and are a more substantial matter.

Honorary Fellowships

The Settlement does not have a formal means of acknowledging the significant contribution of members and staff. There is provision in the existing Constitution for up to a maximum of three Honorary Vice-Presidents but these positions are not

written in the document as being awards for significant contribution or service and they have not been 'occupied' to my knowledge for some time. We also think that the title of Vice President *implies* some sort of functional role within the organisation which, constitutionally, it does not have and is therefore misleading.

We therefore propose the creation of a new category of membership – that of **Honorary Fellowship** of the Letchworth Settlement. This category would carry with it Life Membership of the Settlement, together with free attendance at any evening or lunchtime lecture. Candidates can be proposed by Members 'in good standing' and proposals will be considered and ratified by a majority vote of the Management Committee, which must always include the Chair's vote.

The criteria for awarding Honorary Fellowships will be broad enough to encompass a mix of service, commitment, contribution, loyalty and engagement on the part of members, tutors *and* staff. It should be seen as a way of acknowledging the *very best* spirit of the Settlement in which volunteering, supporting events and activities and going above and beyond the limits of a job or role are key to the success of the organisation. It is not anticipated that the number of Honorary Fellowships will be large. In considering who might qualify at present we have identified perhaps six individuals. It is intended to be a truly meritorious award and not simply 'time served'.

The award of Honorary Fellowship would normally be made when an individual stands down from a job or role but there may perhaps be exceptional circumstances in which the Committee wishes to give it sooner – in the case of illness or incapacity for example, when it is uncertain whether someone will be able to continue in post due to illness.

The Management Committee have discussed this proposal in depth during meetings in recent months and commend it to the Membership.

General Progress

You will recall that the Management Committee held its first ever Awayday in November 2015 and the conclusions of that meeting informed the development of our Strategic Plan and subsequent operational plans in 2016 and 2017. Earlier this month the Committee sat down to review progress against that Strategic Plan.

With the notable exception of appointing a Treasurer, we have seen success across all key objectives. The increased offer of more diverse courses of shorter duration, together with a significant expansion of workshops of various kinds and the increasing attendance at our Twilight Talks have all been highly successful. Particular thanks are due here to Peter Chapman and to Sonia for tracking down such a good range of speakers and tutors. The general course programme is bigger than ever before and now offers a wide range of language classes as well as many new offers from new tutors. For this I pay tribute again to Peter and Sonia and also to Elizabeth Barber who is an enthusiastic member of the Programme sub Committee.

So I think we can say that we are, without a doubt, achieving the aims and objectives that we set ourselves two years ago. But we cannot rest on our laurels – there is always competition, especially from organisations like WEA and U3A which, unlike the Settlement, do not have Grade II premises overheads to worry about! And of course, the British economy faces many challenges and when times get hard, people give up the things they don't actually *need* before anything else. But we press on with a weather eye to all that may assail us!

The Committee has also agreed a series of policy documents which codify our Governance status, Terms of Reference for Trustees and a Feedback process for users of the Settlement (there will be a separate one for Tutors). These, together with brief biographies of each trustee will shortly be going up on the website in the interests of transparency and good governance. We shall include the minutes of the AGM and the bi-monthly Management Committee meetings on the website in future so Members will always be up-to-date.

We are also starting to plan celebrations for our Centenary Year in 2020 and suggestions for events will be most welcome alongside offers of help to translate them into reality! Celebrating the past but looking towards the future is the theme!

On the Trustee front, this year we have welcomed back Tony James who has taken over as a very efficient and speedy Minutes Secretary as well as becoming a founder member of the F and G P sub Committee. We have been grateful too for the enthusiastic and innovative input from Sarah Halfpenny in our Marketing and PR sub Committee with Rachel and Elizabeth. Louise Reeder spent a year with us as a Trustee and we learned much about the needs of those with disabilities from her. Our thanks to Louise for her contribution. And today the Management Committee welcomes Akua Obeng-Frimpong who has been nominated as a Trustee and who brings a great deal of experience in organising arts events of various kinds, including this year's Letchworth Festival. Welcome aboard Akua!

And last but by no means least, I should like to thank our President, John Bird for his wisdom and calm good sense. John was Settlement Treasurer for ten years and has been our President for the past three years. He has very kindly agreed to stay on with us for another three years. This will give us on going stability as we move towards our centenary.

The Settlement has always been about co-operation between staff, tutors and volunteers and especially between staff and the volunteer Trustees who form the Management Committee. I am personally very proud of both our staff and of this Committee - their commitment and contribution, and the respectful and friendly way in which Trustees and staff work together. It has been my privilege to work alongside them all for the past three years and I look forward to continuing into the future. Thank you.

Pam Burn - Chair