

THE LETCHWORTH SETTLEMENT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 2.00 PM MINUTES

PRESENT:

J Bird (President)

Committee members:

P Burn (Chair)

E Barber

P Chapman

T James (Minutes Secretary)

B Neale

S Pike

Staff:

R. Lawrence-Hyde (Publicity and
Marketing Officer)

S Rogers (Assistant Manager)

Also present:

W Armitage, P Baskerville, R Burn, S Charles, R Evans, C Garvie, J Hall, B Heaton,
I Holland, A Lupton, J Trollope

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

K Chapman, E Marten, R Thorogood, S Weston (Manager)

2 CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 2018

B Neale proposed that the minutes were a true record of the meeting; this was seconded by P Chapman and the minutes were signed accordingly.

3 MATTERS ARISING

The were none

4 FINANCIAL REPORTS

The President explained that regrettably it has still not been possible to appoint a Treasurer. The day-to-day financial records were maintained by the Manager, whose responsibility it was to prepare the accounts for the external audit. She has been supported in her role by a Finance Committee, chaired by P Chapman.

J Bird regretted It has been a difficult year and reported a deficit of £20,000, principally caused by two exceptional items: net course fees being down by £10,000, mainly due to an unusually large amount of sickness to several tutors last winter, causing a number of courses to be cancelled and refunds needing to be given. Secondly, there was a major problem with the central heating which cost nearly £8,000.

However, due to past prudence, substantial reserves have been accumulated and the deficit was able to be covered on this occasion.

The balance sheet shows net assets of £63,000, which is mostly cash. Within this figure about £7,000 has been earmarked for future planned major maintenance as per the lease, such as external decoration and replacing the boiler. This is added to each year.

A balance of about £55,000 is maintained for a disaster scenario; to enable the Settlement to run down over a period of six months, including redundancies. It should be noted that these two amounts total £62,000 which is very close to our current balance. The £55,000 is for an extreme case and most blips are - as this year - much less than this figure but there is a need to rebuild these net assets.

For the time being the Settlement is solvent and doing well.

QUESTIONS: It was asked whether the Heritage Foundation were responsible for the external decoration but the President explained that as from 2014 the previous lease had expired and the LGCHF had sought to renegotiate terms and increase the rent to a market rate. In return for a peppercorn rent, it was agreed that the Settlement should take on the responsibility for the external decoration.

J Bird proposed the adoption of the accounts; this was seconded by B Neale and approved unanimously.

5 **MANAGER'S REPORT**

Sonia Weston had produced a written report, which was read by S Rogers and indicated that the last year has been challenging. There had been quite a lot of tutor sickness which affected enrolment numbers. Also, the climate of uncertainty in the country has had an effect on our business.

Enrolments for 2018/19:

Total enrolments for all subjects were 2037, down from 2104 the previous year.

Of these enrolments:

709 were for special interest courses, an increase of 3%

862 were for art and craft courses, a decrease of 6%

466 were for languages, a decrease of 6%

We ended the year with 984 Settlement members. This was 41 more than the previous year

Lettings

Total rental income was up by nearly 5% this year. This is partly due to an increase in rental rates (whilst remaining competitive) and to getting more one-off bookings.

Fund raising

A Quiz Night, an Art Sale, the Settlement Fair and a Spring Raffle were held last year which made £1,200, £1,700, £2,000 and £900 respectively. Nearly £1,500 was raised on lectures by visiting speakers; £800 on musical events and £600 on French film evenings. The Manager thanked everyone who helped in any way with these events, which would have been impossible to run with this support.

Reaching Out

We are continuing with a diverse programme of workshops and daytime one-off lectures to tempt people who cannot commit to an ongoing course. We had 525 enrolments on these over the last year, down 10% on last year.

Staffing

The Manager thanked the staff for all their hard work over the past year, namely Sally, Rachel, Sue, Iain, Laura and Diane who left during the year, and we welcome Jacqui in her place. They are all very valuable members of our team and play their part in keeping the Settlement running smoothly.

Sonia also thanked all the volunteers who do so much for The Settlement. Most of their work goes on behind the scenes and does not get the recognition it deserves. Volunteers

that have helped over the last year are: Carola Garvie, Roy Evans, Ivor Davies, Val Aitken, Roberta Bird, Mo Mutton and many more. The Management Committee are all volunteers of course and she thanked them for their time, efforts and unfailing support.

P Chapman spoke on behalf of all members to convey thanks to the Manager for her hard work throughout the year.

5.1 PR REPORT

Rachel Lawrence Hyde described how she had worked with Sonia, the Management Committee and tutors throughout the year to identify and respond to opportunities that promote and celebrate The Settlement.

She explained that her role is to build and enhance the Settlement's reputation and profile through the use of different media platforms. A key part of her strategy is to continue to develop a strong identity around the 'community feel' of The Settlement and to raise confidence levels with those without previous experience to sign up to our courses. This is done through the use of inclusive language and the use of student work on Facebook and Twitter to showcase learning 'possibilities' and recognise achievement more widely.

Working for a charity like The Settlement is a challenge in terms of the options and decisions around securing publicity and, over the last few years a solid network of community contacts has been established.

Her thanks were offered to all the small publications and local societies who support what is done every week through free promotions and listings services. These include the Letchworth Arts and Leisure Group, the Comet newspaper, Love Letchworth, the Tourist and Local Information office, Muddy Stilettoes and Townhouse Publications who have promoted our events when we have needed an extra boost at short notice and with little fuss.

She has continued with reach-out work in the towns and villages just north of us in Hertfordshire, which has involved seasonal leafleting to promote summer and autumn courses and workshops. Feedback on the doorstep has been positive and hopefully has helped to raise the profile of the Settlement in communities that do not receive local newspapers.

This work has also involved dropping off course brochures to outlets in Bedfordshire including Shefford Library and giving a raft of posters and brochures for wider distribution across key towns in Hertfordshire including Stevenage, St Albans, Baldock, Harpenden and Royston.

Looking forward, she has already begun planning the communication for our centenary year and looking for further opportunities to promote the work we do.

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

Pam Burn reported that it has been a challenging year in terms of unexpected events, resulting in a net loss for the year of £20,000 but explained that this was one of the reasons why reserves are kept, so it has been possible to weather and remain stable. The Chair observed that there are a number of issues in the background which will need funding at some point in the near to medium term and it is necessary to prepare for them.

She explained that the Settlement is a registered charity with the Charity Commissioners which does not receive *any* grants towards its operating or running costs. What it earns is 'what walks through the door'. In order to keep the cost of courses affordable it is necessary to fundraise regularly throughout the year. This requires a massive effort from very few people and it is mostly the same people all the time, people who value and love the Settlement and who want to see it survive well into its second century. These people give freely of their time and their energy and are therefore perhaps understandably frustrated when other Members fail to support events by coming along, purchasing tickets or even by just buying a book of raffle tickets.

Pam asked everyone to please remember that fundraising requires support from the whole Membership, both in terms of giving a hand on the day and buying tickets or making donations of goods if asked. The Settlement is a community-led organisation, not a small band of people just working voluntarily for a very much bigger group of people. Her warmest thanks were offered to all her fellow Trustees and the willing and cheerful volunteers – without whom - quite literally - it would not be able to survive.

The Chair explained that she was coming to the end of her fifth year as Chair and 2020 will be her final year in that position. Barry Neale will be taking up the Vice Chair's post with a view to standing as Chair at the next AGM. Next year will be our Centenary and we plan to celebrate this special occasion as fully as possible. One of the main projects is a book on the life and times of Letchworth Settlement and we plan to offer this as an advance purchase for which subscribers can have their names listed in an Appendix. She urged Members to watch out for various other events as they are advertised and support us as fully as possible.

The Settlement is very ably served by a very small number of paid staff, most ably led by Sonia Weston. On behalf of the Management Committee, Pam extended warmest thanks to Sonia, Sally, Sue, Laura, Iain and Jacqui and all our wonderful tutors without whom there would be no Settlement to come to.

7 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

The President reminded the meeting that it has previously been explained that a regrettable loss of £20,000 has been incurred over the past year and asked Members to appreciate that maintaining a building which is over 100 years old is a financial minefield, despite the prudent stewardship which had built up a contingency to cover extraordinary events. Trustees were truly grateful for the generous contributions that Members have given, both in terms of gifts and by support for our fund-raising efforts which help to keep us running and able to provide our varied programme.

However, he explained that it would be unwise of the current Management Committee not to seek to replenish the reserves which have needed to be used in the last financial year. Costs have been kept as low as possible and staffing hours have been adjusted commensurately. The President explained that the Committee had to be mindful that course fees and tutors' salaries need to be kept at a reasonable level and we have sought to do this. This has left little room for manoeuvre in ways to regenerate the income. With that in mind, Trustees have recommended a small increase of £2 per annum on the membership fee. It was recognised that there had not been any increase in the cost of membership for almost 20 years and the Committee believed that such an increase is not unreasonable, bearing in mind that the fee not only grants access to all the courses the Settlement provides but also discounts in a significant number of businesses in Letchworth and beyond. Any such increase required the approval of the AGM and John Bird asked for support for this small rise.

QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS:

It was asked if the number of members entitled to a concessionary rate was known but it was not possible to give a figure in the absence of the Manager. However, it was acknowledged that it would be the majority and the President explained that a significant majority of members were taxpayers their membership fee attracted Gift Aid.

P Baskerville feared that as course fees have gone up, an increase in the membership fee may be off-putting and she added that day courses and shorter courses could be seen as being more financially attractive.

A Lupton enquired whether research had been undertaken to ascertain how many members might be lost by such an increase and explained that he continued to retain his membership through a combination of inertia and sentiment. Her further asked whether any discussion had taken place regarding the disparity of hire rates between certain types of group hire so that there should be no inequality and course members should not be disadvantaged. The Chair explained that trying to equalise historical rental differences so that such differences can be normalised.

Disappointment was expressed that as the Settlement has had to become more of a business, members no longer felt that they 'owned the place'. It was difficult to explain to certain interest group members that they needed to be members of the Settlement to make use of the facilities. It was also saddening to hear that the Heritage foundation no longer took responsibility for the external decoration.

P Chapman observed that incremental fee rises were necessary to pay tutors and these had to be set at a locally benchmarked rate in order to retain a high quality of provision. He was confident that the fees provided good value for money when considered on a weekly basis. Certain organisations that charged lower fees are likely not to have responsibilities for upkeep of premises. This was endorsed by other speakers, who suggested that it was sometimes necessary to pay the rate for a term's course for a one-day event elsewhere and that the costs of provision of language courses locally was considerably more expensive.

C Garvie explained that the Heritage Foundation still took responsibility for major works to the structure of the building but internal and external decoration had passed to the Settlement in the most recent lease negotiations.

J Hall asked that the Committee should consider raising the age at which the concessionary rate should start from 60 to 65, as the pensionable age had been raised to this figure nationally.

8 PROPOSAL

P Burn proposed that the Membership Fee should be increased from £18 to £20 and increased from £13 to £15 for concessions. This rise should be introduced from June 2020. The proposal was seconded by B Neale and adopted, having been supported by 11 members, with two against and two abstentions.

9 MOTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

There were no further motions or resolutions.

10 APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

The President proposed that UHY Hacker Young should continue as auditors and explained that a member of the company also produced the final accounts. B Neale seconded the proposal and it was approved unanimously.

11 ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES

J Bird was proposed as President by P Burn, seconded by E Barber and approved unanimously.

Election of the current Trustees (with two exceptions noted below) was proposed by J Bird, seconded by B Burn and approved unanimously. It was explained that K Chapman and E Marten were standing down as Trustees and B Neale had kindly offered to undertake the role as Vice-Chair.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A Lupton requested an explanation for the reasons that tea and coffee was no longer made for the Monday evening event which he attends as he believed that this was something that should be included within the hiring fee. S Rogers commented that there had been some adjustment in office hours in an attempt to reduce costs for the aforementioned reasons and undertook to discuss the matter with the Manager and report back.

C Garvie offered her thanks to the Staff and Committee for all that they do and this sentiment was Warmly supported.

The President thanked all for attending and the meeting closed at 2.50 pm

Tony James
Secretary

These minutes were approved at the 2020 Annual General Meeting, and signed by the Chair, on 24 November 2020