**KAS AGM - 9th February 2021 – Summary Report**

The past year has been one full of firsts. One such occasion was the King Alfred School Society’s 123rd Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 9th February, held online for the first time in the school’s history. The virtual meeting, whilst a departure from the past AGMs which have been traditionally held in the Old Hall, also created new possibilities, allowing members who live further away and even overseas, to join and the introduction of an electronic ballot saw a 34% increase in engagement via voting.

Society President, Kara Conti welcomed everyone to the AGM, introducing the panel of Council members who would speak during the webinar. Kara reflected on the Society’s principles over the 40 years of her involvement with Council, and her wish to continue to uphold our Founders’ ethos as a school. Kara explained that members’ subscriptions to the Society support the educational research undertaken by King Alfred School staff and the promotion of these principles to an audience beyond the school gates. Events run by the Society include educational conferences as well as the recent, successful TEDx events involving pupils, parents and staff.

Chair of Council, Annabel Cody reviewed a year like no other, during which King Alfred School’s principles remained steadfast in a rapidly changing world. She explained that at the start of the pandemic Council identified two priorities: maintaining the education of the pupils and keeping the community together. KAS Connected, the name given to the school’s online programme of education, pastoral and community support, was launched, building on the established strong relationships between pupils, staff and parents. The transition to teaching online allowed independent education to demonstrate its value. KAS acted swiftly by being one of the first schools in the country to bring all primary age children successfully back to the school site for the second part of the summer term. Annabel recognized the difficulties of the current lockdown however, she explained that as well as working on the daily challenges thrown up by the pandemic, Council would continue to focus on the future, with key strategic reviews planned for the coming months. The addition of the Community Committee to oversee key groups within the school community and beyond had been an important development, as well as the continued growth of the Old Alfredian network. Annabel thanked all candidates who had put themselves forward for election and thanked retiring Council members, Ian Laming, Sheila Jaswon and John Nevin for their outstanding contribution to Council.

Fiona Hackett, Chair of the school’s Ground and Buildings Committee presented her report, covering the new Sixth Form Centre, the new Astroturf surface on the Lower Court, and numerous smaller projects such as the completion of Phase 1 of the Treehouse, a new kiln, and new storage facilities at the Phoenix theatre. She explained that, under normal circumstances, the school’s maintenance programme is key to sustaining the school site but given the financial uncertainty of the past year, budgets had been reviewed whilst new COVID measures had been introduced such as the installation of a testing facility on site and cleaning regimes to enhance site safety. Fiona said that it was a testament to the work of many at school that the Sixth Form building remains on time and on budget. Fiona gave her thanks to the Estates team and acknowledged the support of parents whose donations had enabled the installation of the new Astroturf over the summer.

A review of the financial year was presented by the Treasurer, Nick Friedlos. Nick outlined the role of Council and the Finance Committee: “The Finance Committee oversees and monitors the basic financial operation of the school as you would expect. However, it is also a forum for debate and discussion to consider the financial aspects of the school’s operation. Over the last year, this has been a particularly important part of its function.” Nick explained that the priority for Council was to continue to ensure the long-term financial stability of King Alfred School, whilst recognising the significant impact of the crisis on our families. Following discussions by Council, an adjustment to fees for the summer term was made and Council took the decision not to implement the usual annual fee increase for 2020/21.Nick took the opportunity to give an insight into the rationale behind the school’s financial decision-making: **“**Financial decisions are a delicate balance between managing the burden on parents, ensuring that operationally we have the resources to deliver the KAS education and ensuring that we do not damage the longer-term financial future of the school. In achieving this balance, we are very focussed on keeping our community of parents, staff and children together.”

The AGM resolutions, including adoption of the accounts for FY2019/20 were all passed without opposition.

Once the formalities of the AGM were completed, Head Robert Lobatto shared his thoughts on the past year and looked ahead to next year and beyond. Robert felt that this year of the pandemic had gone as well as anyone could have hoped for the school. He described it as a year in three acts. Act 1, last Spring, was re-inventing the school for the online world. Students were brought back into the Lower School at the earliest opportunity, overcoming obstacles and building confidence in staff and parents. Time was created in school for all the Upper School year groups, running workshops to consolidate learning and supporting well-being. Year 11 and 13 cohorts did exceptionally well in their public exams. This carried over into Act 2, the return to school in the Autumn, when Covid control measures worked well, and there were a very limited number of positive cases. School life continued with some limitations, but everyone was delighted to be back. January was Act 3, on-line learning resumed, with significant improvements in the technology, the quality of lessons and the confidence of students and staff. Students, staff and parents gave positive feedback in online surveys and, we know that our provision has been thoughtful, child-centred and rigorous.

Robert paid a special tribute to all the staff saying, “They have been incredibly committed during the last 12 months, often juggling home responsibilities and other pressures with their work, yet always being so positive and committed with their classes. I also want to say a particular thank you to the Senior Team and the Heads of Year. As a team, we have had to navigate a complex and ever-twisting and changing landscape, and it has been a massive collective effort to make everything work.”

Reflecting on the whole year, Robert felt there had been two main lessons which stood out. The first was the independence of our children and young people. “The older a child gets, the less opportunity they have for independence - it's a downhill ride from the freedoms of Reception to the straitjackets of GCSEs.” The second was about the importance of human connection. He said, “One only had to see the look of joy on the faces of all year groups coming back to school at the start of the autumn term to be reminded of the importance of being with each other.”

Robert outlined changes that will root these twin ideas, that KAS has always embraced, even more strongly into the school.

The most visible example will be a new 6 to 8 curriculum. A team has been appointed, innovative plans are moving ahead for the space, and strong connections have been made with like-minded schools and organisations across the world. Independence and connection are also highlighted in the Sixth Form. The new Sixth Form building will be opening in the Summer Term which will sit alongside the work on vision undertaken by the Director of Sixth Form. The Sixth Form will become an even stronger bridge between school and whatever comes next for the students. The Sixth Form experience will embed the ethos of independent and collaborative working, being part of a community where the students make meaningful decisions, and where they develop and act on a strong social conscience.

In the Lower School, Robert explained, “We continue to press forward with giving our children as much agency as possible in their own learning. What they have shown during lockdown is remarkable - nothing more so than the newsletter proposed, written and published by the pupils themselves each week. What we are interested in is that the learning goes deep, and we know that the more our children own the process, the deeper that learning goes.” And finally Robert spoke about Years 9 to 11 where the conversation is beginning about replacing GCSEs. There are growing voices for change ranging from Robert Halfon, the chair of the Education Select Committee, to Paul Johnson, the Director of the Institute of Public Affairs, to Flick Drummond, who leads the One Nation group in the Conservative party. As a founder member of the Rethinking Assessment group, Robert represents the KAS community, so we are at the forefront of the process of change along with schools such as Eton, St Pauls, Latymer and School 21. It was noted that a new Deputy Head will be appointed in the next few weeks and a key part of their role will be to take this forward, guided by the twin principles of independence and connection.

Robert concluded that the foundations are strong, we can seize the reform agenda, saying, “We can push the boundaries of what is possible for our children and young people, lift that artificial lid which limits ambition, and enable every individual to reach their full potential. And at the same time, we can honour the intention of our founders within our contemporary context. They created KAS to model a different form of education which would influence others in a more rational and enlightened direction, engendering a love of learning, mental and emotional well-being, and genuine preparation for the challenges of the 21st century.

This post-pandemic moment is an opportunity for us to champion a better vision. Just as our founders intended, we can model new ways of working which will bring significant change, not just for our children and young people, but for children and young people everywhere.”

Post the AGM, the following candidates were elected to Council:

Amy Chapman

Annabel Cody (re-elected) and will continue as Chair

David Gossen

Fiona Hackett (re-elected) and will continue as Chair of Grounds & Buildings

Sam Walsh