



EX CORDE VITA.

## **KING ALFRED SCHOOL SOCIETY**

### **MINUTES OF THE 123rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**HELD ON 9<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2021**

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 9th February 2021 at 7.00 p.m. via zoom.

<u>Present:</u>	Kara Conti	President
	Annabel Cody	Chair
	16 Council members	
	58 other KASS members	

<u>In attendance:</u>	Robert Lobatto	Head
	Julie Saunders	Secretary

#### **President's welcome**

Kara Conti, President of KASS, welcomed members to the 123rd Society AGM, and the first via zoom. Kara reflected that it was her honour and pleasure to be serving as President of the Society, with the coming year being her 21<sup>st</sup> year, if reelected at the meeting.

Kara explained to the meeting what the Society was responsible for, reminding everyone of the founders' dream and the need to keep their ideals in mind throughout all deliberations. In summary, the Society was founded to provide an education for the whole child, based on independent thinking and research into how a child develops and not geared to the requirements of examination bodies. Kara noted that the school fostered the aims of our founders, staying true to their ideals, while progressing forward in the modern world.

Kara outlined that the Society committee used subscriptions to offer research grants to teachers, to organise conferences and to share ideas. Kara reflected that the founders wanted us to be a demonstration school and this time last year the school was about to mount a day of Outdoor Learning, sharing the Village, the forge, the boats and the farm, not expecting to be starting a year of Indoor Learning due to the pandemic.

Kara reflected, however, that a positive consequence of the pandemic had been that it had put assessment back into the hands of those who know best, the teachers. She also reported that Robert, together with the brightest minds around, was taking that further and investigating alternative ideas to GCSEs. Kara noted that, throughout the pandemic, the school had discovered it had the most excellent war time heads in Robert and Karen, with all the staff really excelling themselves. The feeling of the KAS family uniting to survive had been tangible.

Although conferences had been put on hold for the moment, Kara reported that the Society committee, together with Zah, had continued with preparations for another TEDx event, meeting a mix of students, parents and staff again by zoom. Kara announced that the date of the event was shifting according to what was being allowed and was at the time pencilled for April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Before closing Kara asked those standing for Council to introduce themselves to those attending the webinar, in advance of the ballot to elect new Council members.

### **Chair's Introduction**

Annabel Cody, Chair of Council, welcomed everyone and noted that she would be updating the meeting on the past year from Council's point of view.

Annabel explained that Council was the name given to the school's governing body. This comprises a group of up to 21 elected members whose role is to oversee the financial, educational and strategic direction of the school. Annabel thanked all the nominees for putting themselves forward for election.

Annabel noted that the work that Council does is underpinned by the aims of the King Alfred School Society, of which everyone present was a member. The Society founded the school in 1897, as a reaction to the Victorian school system, in order to provide a new model of education and to influence the educational landscape. The school's focus was to be on educating the whole child. Learning would take place in a non-selective, co-educational setting in which staff would work collaboratively with pupils using teaching based on the latest scientific methods in an environment free from unnecessary pressures.

Annabel reflected that although the world has changed, these principles have remained constant and are at the core of the King Alfred approach. And now, with the country in a state of upheaval, the commitment to generating innovation in education was as urgent as it was almost 125 years ago. In terms of Governance, the pandemic had without doubt presented challenges but at the same time opened the way for new opportunities.

Annabel noted that when school sites were forced to shut their doors in March 2020 due to COVID-19, KAS entered a new chapter. With our gates closed for the first time in memory, Council and the Senior Leadership Team worked closely together, with two key priorities: maintaining the education of our pupils and keeping our community together.

Annabel reflected that the toll of the pandemic on families was considerable: Children not in school, everyone cut off from their friends and loved ones, widespread economic instability and nothing concrete on the horizon but she emphasized that Council had not underestimated how challenging it was for all parents and staff alike. Annabel emphasized that Council continued to work closely with Robert and the SLT on the daily challenges thrown up by the situation whilst also considering long term planning to be able to deal with any financial, educational and operational challenges that might arise due to the pandemic in the coming months and possibly years.

Annabel also noted that Council had been developing the school's educational approach at a strategic level and reviewing how best to use the school site to support this. In parallel it had also been reviewing the school's outreach or public benefit to create a strategic approach to fulfil our founders' commitment to benefit the wider landscape.

Annabel reflected that Council had continued its work to improve the governance of the School. The committees had gone from strength to strength and a new Council committee had been formed, the Community Committee, to offer oversight to key groups within the school community and beyond, including the newly-created Development Office.

Annabel went on to thank retiring Council members, Ian Laming, Sheila Jaswon and John Nevin for their outstanding contribution to Council and to Fiona Hackett, our Chair of Grounds and Buildings who is retiring and re-standing (with Annabel) this year.

Annabel summarized that last year, the school could not have achieved so much without the continued support of members and the School's staff and parents. On behalf of Council she thanked everyone for being a vital part of the Society and enabling it to continue its work. In summing up Annabel particularly thanked Robert, the SLT and all staff for their outstanding contribution and commitment as the school navigated the pandemic.

Annabel summarized that it had been a challenging and eventful year. There would without doubt be hurdles still to come but, as the school approached its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary with new initiatives and an increased sense of focus, there would also be a lot to look forward to.

Annabel closed by reminding Council Members that the next meeting was to be on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March at 6.30pm.

**Apologies:** No apologies were recorded.

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 11th February 2020:** There were no matters arising and the minutes were adopted unanimously.

### **Chair of Grounds and Buildings' Report**

Fiona Hackett, Chair of Grounds and Buildings (G&B), gave her report. She explained that the role of G&B was to support the work of the school by discussing new projects and thinking about the wider context and the design of any new buildings to ensure they enhance the school and the experience of staff, students and parents.

Fiona reflected that the last year had been very different and she recognised how much effort the Estates team had put in, much of it not visible, in keeping the school safe and functioning.

Fiona went on to explain that although budgets had been cut where possible, because of financial uncertainties, projects had still taken place over the summer, notably the refurbishment of the lower court which was part funded by donations and had been a great success.

Smaller projects, including a new kiln for the art department, had also continued to take place. Fiona reported that the temporary building was going to be repurposed for the Year 6-8 project to support innovative ways of teaching and, being temporary, will inform the school how it might develop this educational experience in the future.

Fiona was delighted to also report that despite COVID the building of the new 6<sup>th</sup> form was going very well and was on schedule and on budget. Fiona reflected that it was going to be an exciting addition to the school and she hoped it would be ready for use at the beginning of the summer term.

Fiona reflected that, in line with reducing costs during the pandemic, the budget for planned and preventative maintenance, had been kept to a minimum, with the intention of reverting to normal levels as soon as possible. Fiona noted that, because of the work done on the school in the previous years, the buildings were in a good state of health and there were no current concerns.

Fiona drew her report to a close by particularly thanking Zah, Julie and all of the Estates team who always went above and beyond, never more than this year.

## **Treasurer's Report and Adoption of the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st July 2020**

Nick Friedlos, Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee, gave his report on the finances of the school.

Nick explained that the Finance department in the school was led by the Director of Finance and Operations, Julie Saunders. The Finance Committee is the main mechanism for Council to interact with the executive team on all matters financial. It oversees and monitors the basic financial operation of the school. It is also a forum for debate and discussion to consider the financial aspects of the school's operation. Nick reflected that over the last year, this had been a particularly important part of its function. Finance Committee does not generally itself take decisions on major issues, but will make recommendations to the full Council.

Nick reflected on the outcome for the financial year ending last July. Nick noted that the final term of the year had been materially impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. As the spring term last year drew to a close the school had to rapidly think through the financial consequences of what was happening. Nick reflected that King Alfred was not a wealthy school compared to some other independent schools - it does not have endowments or investments to fall back on, and therefore has to "pay its way" ie fee income each year must cover running costs and also create some headroom for maintaining and investing and improving the fabric of our facilities.

Nick reported that over the last few years, through careful financial management by the finance team, the school, whilst not wealthy, had managed to establish a small financial cushion to enable the school to operate with confidence during the Coronavirus period. The finance team continued to manage the school's finances during the pandemic in a way that kept the school community together and at the same time did not jeopardise the school's longer term financial stability.

In recognition of the financial impact of the crisis on our families, Nick noted that a fee reduction had been given for the summer term last year and also, in recognition that for some of our families additional short term financial help with fees may be needed, plans to provide this were made. On the cost side, budgets were reviewed for opportunities to make savings and some quite severe deferral decisions were made around the school's small capital works program and maintenance spend.

Nick reported that the result of such careful financial management by the finance team was that the results for the year gave a surplus of just over £900k. He went on to explain that, having discussed this at Council, it had been agreed that £835k of the surplus should be set aside to provide a fund to help towards the expected financial impact of Coronavirus in the current academic year and in future years. Nick further reported that Council had also taken the decision that, whilst not immediately required, the school should take up the offer of an additional £1m bank loan, alongside its £1m overdraft, to provide some financial flexibility should it be needed in the future.

Nick went on to explain that although last year, Coronavirus notwithstanding, the school had shown a surplus, the budget for the current year was a deficit. This reflected the decision taken back in July that the school should not implement an annual fee increase for the 20/21 academic year, whilst also wanting to recognise the work of our teaching and support team, who had done an outstanding job for us and without whom there would be no KAS, and to be able to support those families most severely impacted in financial terms by the crisis. Nick reflected that, whilst this was not sustainable on an ongoing basis, it would be manageable this year because of the surplus that had been set aside from last year.

Nick reflected that although there was still significant uncertainty as to the future impact of the pandemic the situation was constantly being kept under careful review, with consideration being given to balancing the burden on parents, the need for operational resources and ensuring the longer term financial future of the school is maintained. In achieving this balance the school is very focussed on keeping our community of parents, staff and children together. Nick summarised that he hoped that thus far the school had been able to do this and that going forward it would continue to do so.

### **Adoption of the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020.**

Nick proposed the adoption of the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31st July 2020. This was seconded by Sarah Phillips. The Report and Financial Statements were unanimously approved.

### **Election of Officers and Members of Council**

The Secretary reported that Kara Conti had been nominated for the office of President. There being no other nominations, she was elected unanimously as President.

The Secretary reported that Nick Friedlos had been nominated for the office of Treasurer. There being no other nominations, he was elected unanimously as Treasurer.

The Secretary noted the retirement of Ian Laming, John Nevin and Sheila Jaswon and reported the nominations for Members of Council as follows: retiring by rotation; Annabel Cody and Fiona Hackett; new candidates; Amy Chapman, Jacob Durkin, David Gossen and Sam Walsh. It was noted that voting would close at the end of the webinar.

### **Appointment of Auditors**

Nick Friedlos proposed that Haysmacintyre LLP be appointed as the school's auditors for the year 2020-21 and that their remuneration be fixed by Council. The proposal was seconded by Philip Whale and carried unanimously.

### **Confirmation of Borrowing Limit**

The resolution to reconfirm that Council is authorised to exercise the Society's power to borrow up to an aggregate limit of £2 million was proposed by Philip Whale and seconded by Nick Friedlos.

### **Any Other Business**

There being no other business, the meeting was closed.

Julie Saunders Secretary

Following the AGM Robert Lobatto gave his report