



EX CORDE VITA

KING ALFRED SCHOOL SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE 125th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD ON 7th FEBRUARY 2023

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 7th February 2023 at 7.00 p.m. in the Main Hall.

Present:

Kara Conti
Annabel Cody
9 Council members
42 other KASS members

President
Chair

In attendance:

Robert Lobatto
Victoria Heeley

Head
Secretary

President's welcome

Kara Conti welcomed everyone to the 125th Annual General Meeting of the King Alfred School Society.

She reminded everyone that the School's Big Birthday Party would be held this summer on the 24th June, to celebrate the day the school opened a hundred and twenty five years ago.

Kara explained that the Society was formed the year before the school opened, when the founders sent out a letter seeking support for a new school with a meeting being held in October for all interested parties. The school was formed and named and in February 1898 the Society logo was designed by the Arts and Crafts designer and architect Charles Voysey, one of the first parents.

As custodian of the Society, Kara explained that she Chairs the Society committee on Council and recently they had examined their remit and summarised it in one page with three main areas of action; Preserver; Progress; and Promote.

Kara outlined the aims of the three areas:

- Preserve the KAS ethos, that intangible jewel everyone feels but that is hard to describe.
- Progress forwards with educational research – very much the founders' passion to constantly search for what works best for the child
- Promote - to share and shout about what the school does best and give back to society all it can – The founders wanted a demonstration school!

She noted that progress and promote were easier areas of action and explained that the Society money from subscriptions goes to offer research grants to staff and mount conferences, like the March event with Rethinking Assessment, where the brightest and most progressive minds in education all came together in the Phoenix theatre. Investment has also been made in a research programme with Harvard University and also in the Big Ten, a collaboration with nine like-minded state schools organised by Liz Robinson of Big Education.

Kara reflected that how a committee preserves the ethos was a bigger question. Last month the committee welcomed students to its meeting and were able to discuss with them where they thought the ethos was to be found –including in the passing on of understanding and a bit of history. Kara noted that there were plans to explain to all how the school had evolved over the years, evolved while staying true to its original aims.

Kara handed over to Annabel Cody, Chair of Council. Kara reflected that Annabel had been tireless in her service to Council over the year, working so hard for Council, always taking in the big picture at all times and absolutely ensuring coherence between all the different strands for which Council is responsible. She was approachable and calm, always open to suggestions, clear-minded and enthusiastic. Kara concluded that the Society was very lucky to have her.

Chair's Introduction

Annabel Cody, Chair of Council, welcomed everyone and noted that one of Council's principal roles was to oversee the strategic direction of the school. She therefore felt it appropriate, as the school approach its 125th anniversary, to focus on a couple of the key strategic strands of the ongoing work that Council was doing with Robert and the school team. It was hoped that these will have a positive and long- lasting impact both for KASS students and the wider educational community.

Annabel noted that the first area was the school's charitable status and she explained that the charitable status of fee-paying schools was a subject that had very much come into the political mainstream lately. Annabel explained that the school did have a bursary programme, but the school does not have an endowment to draw on but the school does set aside approximately 5% of its fee income to fund bursary places every year.

In addition to the bursary programme, over the past two years, the school has been able to support a number through the worst of COVID and this year has fully funded five students from the Ukraine to come to the school. Annabel explained that this absolutely sat within the school's long tradition of welcoming refugees – from those fleeing Germany as a result of the Second World War, to those in enforced exile from Hungary, the Balkans and more recently, Syria.

Annabel went on to explain that the school was limited in the level of financial assistance it can give, however, the other strand of its charitable outreach had a broader scope. This was referred to in the School's current School Strategy as its 'impact on the world' -although the initiative has its roots very much in our founding educational principles.

Annabel continued to explain that when the Society was set up 125 years ago, its aim was to become a driving force for wider educational change, to establish more schools than just this one and to spread an approach focussed on the development of the whole child.

King Alfred is a private school, a description which can, especially in the current climate, bring with it negative associations. Annabel noted that she always preferred the term, 'independent' – because the fee-paying nature of the school also gives it freedom. Part of

what parents are buying is independence. And using that independence to benefit young people, has always been at the heart of the Society and the School.

Annabel noted that the ISI inspection last year had been a great moment for the school and really showed the value of this independence– not only was the school judged to be 'excellent' overall but the inspectors articulated very clearly the positive effect of a KAS education on the development of our students.

Annabel congratulated Robert, Karen and all staff members for their hard work over the past few years which led us to this outstanding outcome.

Annabel went on to explain that recognition of the value of the King Alfred approach can be seen in the school's pupil numbers, with the demand for places being at the highest it's ever been and the Sixth Form is now hugely popular with both current students and those from other schools, attracted by the KAS offer.

Annabel went on to explain that it was this value which gave the school the platform to branch out in confidence -to start making that impact on the world which will benefit all students. This will be achieved by building networks to share practice and help work towards a more innovative and equitable education system. As well as last year's Society conference, Annabel noted that the school has become the anchor point for a number of initiatives such as the Schools Directed Courses Consortium, a group of schools developing and moderating their own courses and the school is proud to have become a founder member of Big 10, the only independent school in a group of forward-thinking British schools whose aim is to develop educational thinking and resources which can be shared widely within the system.

King Alfred's is now a valuable voice in the conversation around the future of education in this country, including with the Deputy Head, Al McConville, representing King Alfred's in a cross-party parliamentary group advocating for the quality of learning and assessment for all pupils in the country.

The school is also focusing on Partnership work - supporting other schools in their day-to-day work – this is also very important in terms of our wider impact. The school already has a rich partnerships with Archer Academy and Hendon School. The aim is to build on these partnership works and the school has recently appointed a partnerships director to help widen its outreach.

Annabel noted that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion was also a very prominent theme in public life and one which most institutions and organisations are working on at the moment. King Alfred was no exception. As a school with strong values, it is committed to ensuring the school is as inclusive as possible. Active DEI work has been going on throughout the school and in Council for the past couple of years with a view to thoughtful development in this area. It does take time and needs a good understanding of our community and the impact of DEI areas across all aspects of what KAS does. The school is currently in the process of drawing all the strands together – and Annabel commented that everyone would hear more about this in the coming months.

Council's priority will continue to be to stay as agile and aware as possible, negotiating the challenges ahead whilst staying true to the principles which have guided us for 125 years for the good of our community and those around us.

To close, Annabel thanked all Council members for their work during the year; those who have stepped down from Council recently and to Christian who is re-standing for election.

In terms of the school, Annabel thanked the Lower School and Upper School teams as well as all non-teaching staff for their commitment and hard work during the year. She gave a special thanks to Victoria who works very closely with Council, and Caroline Armstrong, Clerk to Council, who supports Council so brilliantly. Finally, Annabel thanked all the KASS members, and especially KASParents and everyone from the parent community – who all contribute so much to the School.

Annabel then introduced the Council nominees. She noted that there were seven nominations to Council this year. She explained that as there were five available places there would be a ballot, which would close at the end of AGM. Nominees were asked to stand and briefly introduce themselves. In alphabetical order:

Nick Harper -new candidate
Lara McCann – new candidate
Ilana Sarnier – new candidate
Christian Schmidt – standing for re-election
Sophia Senroy – new candidate
Galia Shilo Sum – new candidate
Jo Tang - new candidate

Finally, in terms of Council membership, Annabel mentioned that Sophie Silocchi was stepping down from Council at this meeting. Annabel expressed her thanks to her.

Annabel opened the formal part of the meeting.

Apologies: Apologies were noted from Robert Dye and Jonny Rosen.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 8th February 2022: There were no matters arising and the minutes were adopted unanimously.

Chair of Grounds and Buildings' Report

Fiona Hackett introduced herself to the meeting as Chair of Grounds and Buildings. She explained that the committee helped support the school by discussing and advising, alongside the Estates team, on projects large and small to do with all aspects of the school's environment, from the gardens and field to every building and its infrastructure.

A couple of years ago the school did a major review of the whole school environment, in an exercise known as a Masterplan. The object of a Masterplan was to examine in all its aspects the school site and how it might best be used to support the educational vision. helping the school to decide on future priorities.

Fiona explained that the review was carried out in 2021 by Van Heynigen and Haward (vH&H), a team of architects who had done a number of masterplans for other. The plan looks at the whole of the grounds and how they are used, the quiet spaces and the busy ones. the fringes and the center. They also consult with staff and students on how they felt about the site and the suitability of the classroom provision.

Fiona reported that Council had set up a Masterplan Steering Group. She went on to recall that it was a fascinating dive into the fabric of the school, so varied with buildings going back to the 1930's to our latest addition of the 6th form and just about everything in between including the odd, not so good, 60's construction.

Fiona reported that VH and H were particularly interested in sustainability and were very encouraging as to how to upgrade the older buildings by means of insulated cladding and upgraded windows as two examples. It is a whole new way of thinking – with lots of scope for smaller projects without spending huge sums of money.

We also asked the masterplanners to think about bigger schemes within the school and two particular projects have come to the fore:

Firstly, the entrance to this side of the school has been less than ideal for a long time because it is shared between pedestrians and vehicles. So the masterplan has been looking at ways to separate the two and some interesting ideas are emerging.

Secondly the Early Years in Ivy Wood are requiring more and more work to maintain them to an acceptable standard so this is another project which the masterplanners are giving thought to.

Fiona closed by thanking the Estates Team for all they do to keep the whole site running smoothly from boiler maintenance to tree care and everything in between.

Treasurer's Report and Adoption of the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st July 2022

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

He explained that he would be covering three areas in his report:

- how the school manages its finances;
- the results for the year ended July 2022;
- how the school, from a financial point of view, considers the challenges and opportunities that the school faces.

Nick explained that the detailed work is carried out by the executive, with Victoria Heeley as our director of finance, reporting to Robert, as part of his senior leadership team. Victoria is responsible for both day to day finance, management accounts, monitoring budgets, billing fees etc - and also developing plans and strategies for the future. Council overall has - as part of its legal responsibilities - a duty to ensure the school's financial risks are managed.

Nick explained that he was the Treasurer, which meant that effectively he was the member of Council who has particular responsibility for Council oversight of financial matters. He chairs the Finance Committee - which comprises 5 other Council members. The Committee meets at least twice per term, its role is:

- to review the regular financial results, budgets and other operational matters;
- to provide a forum for consideration with the executive team of the wider financial strategy of the school and how it should plan and react to both the risks and opportunities that lay ahead; and
- to make formal recommendations to Council on financial decisions, for example the annual budget, fee levels, capital projects, which require full Council approval.

Nick noted that the Accounts for the year ended July 2023 could be found on the website. He explained that these had been reviewed and approved by Council and have been audited by our external auditors, Hays Macintyre, who had given the accounts a clean audit opinion.

Nick explained that the school is a charity and not therefore primarily a profit driven organisation. However, unlike many independent schools it does not have any financial endowment to fall back on - this means that it is important for the school to generate a modest surplus each year to be able to invest both in people and in its physical infrastructure to continue to develop and deliver our educational vision.

Nick noted that the school had generated a surplus in the year under review, although quite a bit smaller than in the previous 2 years. 2020 and 2021 were the years most directly impacted by Covid and lockdowns. The school numbers had held up well during these years, and even though the school held down fee increases and provided financial

hardship support where it was needed, nonetheless the savings we achieved from clamping down on expenditure, particularly around site maintenance, were considerable. So looked at purely on the numbers, 2020 and 2021 were strong years. However, Council were fully aware that this would unwind and that there would be "catch up" on costs once things got back to normal.

Nick went on to explain that the effect of that "catch up" was reflected in 2022, and continues to impact the current year, particularly around site costs which are running higher than pre Covid; and also of course the impact of inflation. These things combined to give a lower surplus.

In terms of the balance sheet, Nick explained that the school continues to have a good cash position. There is a £1m overdraft facility which the school has not needed to use in 2022. In 2020 the school also took a £1m loan to give financial flexibility in case it was needed. This will be reviewed by Council in the current year to decide whether to repay it during the course of this year. Looking forward, just from a financial point of view there are many positives but also some threats.

Nick outlined the positives, including

- the strong demand to come to the school, which Annabel mentioned. This is good for education and for the KAS community and also for school finances!
- the KAS educational initiatives which are taking shape;
- The school's strategic master plan exercise for the site - which Fiona spoke about - this shows what the school could do in the coming years to meet our educational objectives. But Nick noted these would need investment.

Nick went on to note that the threats are also out there. These are not unique to KAS but impact the whole independent sector, although those schools with endowments have a financial cushion that KAS does not have.

In addition to current inflationary pressures, Nick noted that the school was likely to see fiscal changes including some or all of:

- loss of charitable status, which would mean paying tax on any surplus;
- Loss of business rates relief, currently worth some £120k;
- VAT on school fees.

The impact and response to some is easier than others. Nick reflected that he was sure that VAT would be on many of parents' minds - mitigating the impact of that will be difficult and Council does not have the answer today. There are some offsets for example, the VAT the school currently suffers would be able to be recoverable and so reduce costs and there are various upfront fee payment possibilities being mooted, which may delay or defer the impact of VAT for some people. Council is currently doing an exercise to evaluate the potential impact and develop a response to these various challenges, and a financial plan for the next few years.

Nick explained that, as part of this planning, and to give some additional room for maneuver should it be needed, members would be asked to vote on a resolution later in the meeting to increase Council's authority to borrow from current £2m to £3m. Council do not need to borrow money as of today, but this is intended to give us the flexibility should the need arise - ahead of next year's AGM - to increase borrowings.

Finally, Nick thanked Victoria and the bursary team for all their work. He noted that every year is challenging and as always, their dedication stands the school in good stead.

He went on to note that Victoria is, unfortunately for the school, leaving at the end of the summer term. He explained that she has had an unexpected opportunity come to her,

which she should not turn down. The school wish her well and thank her for her contribution. Council has started the search process for Victoria's successor.

Nick reflected that it would have been lovely to stand in front of members tonight and lay out a full financial plan for the school, reflecting how it would respond to these threats, whilst still maintaining progress with its educational vision. However, Nick emphasized that there is a lot of thought and planning going into it and the school is not alone - the independent sector as a whole, supported by its various member bodies, is very focused on these issues and the response.

Nick reflected that what was also important to remember was that KAS was 125 years old and has lived through far more challenging times than these. The school faces the potential choppiness that lies ahead in as strong a position as Nick could remember since he first got to know the school, back in 2006.

Nick then handed the meeting over to Victoria to run through the formal business.

Adoption of the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st July 2022.

Nick proposed the adoption of the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31st July 2022. 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 Sophie Silocchi and reported the nominations for Members of Council as follows: retiring by rotation; Christian Schmitd; new candidates; Nick Harper, Lara McCann, Ilana Sarner, Sophia Senroy, Galia Shilo Sum and Jo Tang. She reiterated that the ballot would close at the end of the AGM.

Appointment of Auditors

Nick Friedlos proposed that Haysmacintyre LLP be appointed as the school's auditors for the year 2023-24 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 increase the borrowing authorisation limit delegated to Council to £3m was proposed by Philip Whale and seconded by Nick Friedlos and was carried unanimously.

Any Other Business

There being no other business, Annabel closed the meeting.

Victoria Healey, Secretary

Following the AGM Robert Lobatto gave his report.