

Administrative Headquarters

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Dear fellow members,

I am delighted we will be able to meet on 12 September for our Society's Annual General Meeting, albeit virtually.

This year's AGM is especially important. It comes at a critical time for the Society as it works hard to survive the impact of the Covid crisis. At our EGM in January, even before the pandemic hit, the Society had to address the need for a substantial recovery programme. Our Trustees' Report and Financial Statements 2019, showing draft operating losses of £250k, reinforce how vital such a programme is. Substantial losses of this scale are simply unsustainable.

Transformation of this nature starts at leadership level, and one of the first tasks I undertook, as your new Chair of Trustees, was an audit of the skills currently represented on Council. We have a depth of knowledge and experience in archaeology and research, financial acumen and legal services. A skills gap was however obvious in fundraising, marketing, communications, tourism and digital media. In order to lead our Society's recovery, Council firmly believes it needs to add individuals with significant, professional skills in these areas.

In a society where equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are at the top of the world's agenda we also need to make a vast improvement in the diversity of our Trustee group.

To these ends (and following Charity Commission best practice) Council embarked on an open and inclusive recruitment process. I am delighted to say the process had an overwhelming response, securing 22 applications. A thorough short-listing and interview procedure was conducted by a Council nominated panel, and the Council ratified 4 candidates from this process.

We believe these individuals would bring professional skills and experience in abundance, alongside senior influence and a network of contacts not just locally and regionally but also at national level. Additionally, they would improve the diversity profile of our Trustee group in terms of age, gender and sexual orientation.

I hope you feel this robust and thorough process has resulted in candidates of a suitable calibre for your consideration as Trustees of the Society.

Our wider recovery work is already starting to bear fruit. In recent weeks we have:

- welcomed visits from both Nigel Huddleston, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Sport, Heritage and Tourism and from Nus Ghani, MP for Wealdon;
- we have successfully secured £250,000 in emergency funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This is a true testament to the Fund's belief in our refreshed direction of travel, given they have granted us the maximum award available;
- and our Celebrating 175 campaign is also gathering momentum. I am delighted that its Patron, Tom Holland will be popping into our AGM to say a few words.

Our wonderful President Martin Bell's current term of office is also shortly coming to an end, but I am delighted Martin has agreed to stand again and a proposal for his re-election is included in your proxy voting form.

I firmly believe we now have a short window of opportunity to transform the fortunes of our Society; we must use this window to equip it with the tools to meet the unprecedented challenges ahead and secure the bright future it so richly deserves.

There is also still much work to do on embedding EDI principles throughout our activities, particularly for those of colour and with a lived experience of disability. Inaction is not defensible.

In conclusion, I emphasise that YOUR vote counts now more than ever, so I encourage you to complete the proxy voting form and return it to us as soon as possible either by post or email to vote@sussexpast.co.uk.

You may cast your vote on each individual resolution (Part B) or opt for your vote to be cast by the Chair of the AGM, our President Martin Bell (Part A).

I look forward to welcoming you to our 2020 AGM and to meeting many of you in person in the not too distant future. Thank you for your ongoing support and understanding, as our Society charts its way through the many challenges of the current environment.

With kind wishes,



Mrs Amanda L Jones FCA

31 August 2020