



Vision Group for Sidmouth

Minutes of the AGM 6th June 2019 Leigh Brown Room, Dissenter

Present

Jenny Alexander
Miriam Brown
Rita Hedley
Cllr Kelvin Dent
Bob Miles
Mair Miles
Cllr Deirdre Hounsom
Peter Murphy
Brian Golding

Jeremy Woodward - Chair for the meeting
Mary Walden-Till - Communications Officer
(including the role of Secretary)
Roger Till - Treasurer

1) Welcome and opening remarks from the Chair.

Jeremy gave brief background remarks about the history of the VGS, how it started about 15 years ago as a joint SVA and Sidmouth Town Council initiative and its work was the precursor to the Neighbourhood Plan in many ways. It produced a report based on community surveys and created a plan for Port Royal; therefore the VGS contained (through the people in it) a great deal of local knowledge and expertise which was at the service of the town in general. This had been shown in projects like Sid-Energy; and the now separate Science Festival, and Farmers' Market: it continues in a small way by arranging meetings such as those to discuss the possibility of a Mutual Bank for Sidmouth. The VGS hopes to expand again soon with projects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan.

2) AGM Agenda

a) Apologies

Apologies were received from John and Jean Twibell, Dave and Liz Bramley, Robert Crick, Richard Eley, Dave Alexander, Councillors Ian Barlow, Louise Thompson, Chris Lockyear and Stuart Hughes.

b) Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of last year's AGM and the meeting of 3rd April 2019 were both passed as a true record. Proposed Peter Murphy, Seconded Bob Miles.

c) Treasurer's Report

Roger explained that he had finally managed to get onto online banking for the first time last night. He listed the outgoings as summarised in his [report shown on the website](#) and explained that the £1,000 donation to the Science Festival was as a result of an agreement made in 2017. As far as future spending was concerned we would need to keep up our insurance cover but he was confident he could reduce the cost from the current £300 per annum (approx) to £200 pa (approx) with greater coverage for our particular needs; as he has already been looking into the subject. There was also a commitment to spending on running the website which would be about £70 per annum. Incidental spending was mainly on room hire, most often the Leigh Brown Room at £10 a meeting. Our current reserves are £2100 (approx) so even if we don't manage to generate income we should be solvent for some time.

d) Communication Officer's Report

Mary gave a brief report on the fact that the Twitter account set up by Rita in 2015 is now working again and that our presence on FaceBook is growing all the time as the VGS joins other FaceBook groups. All posts created under [Recent News](#) are automatically reproduced on the Twitter and Facebook accounts.

She touched on why the VGS circular logo had developed as it did (to suit Twitter and Facebook) and asked for approval of the new letterhead, which was given.

On the subject of the website, Mary drew attention to the new section holding information on useful legislation and national guidance. This section can be found by opening the 'Contents' sidebar (from any of the web pages) and then clicking the + sign next to the title 'Subjects Library': the section [Some legislation of importance to Sidmouth](#) then becomes visible. It is hoped that these pages will be useful both to Councillors and to people attempting to talk to Councillors about particular subjects. Her final request was that people look at the 'short-term' business cards which had been produced in an attempt to advertise the VGS, and consider what writing they thought should be on any permanent cards in order to explain what the VGS is and what its interests are. She urged people to think deeply about what should be on them as this will be one of the really important aspects of publicity, and then let her know their ideas. These ideas will allow us to create a tag line or strap line to use in a variety of situations.

e) Election of Officers for 2019-20

We currently have two permanent Officers, and one 'rotating' one. The one which rotates is that of Chair and so is not an elected position. The only two candidates standing were Roger Till as Treasurer and Mary Walden-Till as Communication Officer.

Roger was proposed by Miriam Brown, seconded by Peter Murphy, and elected unanimously.

Mary was proposed by Peter, seconded by Jenny Alexander, and elected unanimously.

f) Confirmation of new Constitution.

The proposed new Constitution had previously been notified to everyone on the VGS newsletter list so all people at the meeting had had a chance to study it. Jeremy and Mary referred to the reasons that it had been necessary and the potential, if extremely rare, circumstances it guarded against. These have been previously documented in minutes, newsletters and on the website.

Adoption of the new Constitution was proposed by Peter and seconded by Cllr Deirdre Hounsom, it was agreed unanimously. The new Constitution will now replace the old one [on the website](#).

g) Any Other Business

This was a very lively section and the issues raised would have needed a whole meeting devoted to them in order to do them justice.

Peter Murphy raised the issues of who decides what can be said about the VGS given that an official position on something needs to be recorded on the website (see new Constitution), and if other Officers should have been suggested and elected at item e).

He was reassured by Jeremy and Mary that the Constitution allowed for Officers to be created at any time and then ratified at an AGM and also that the VGS position on things was always formed by consensus and later made public on the website.

Peter also spoke of the money which will become available for Community Actions arising out of the Neighbourhood Plan, £10,000 in total: of the legacy of the Neighbourhood Plan left by Councillors who had not been re-elected and the strengths and determination of those who were now Councillors: of relationships with Councillors and the Neighbourhood Plan's Community Actions which will be emerging in the autumn. He stated that we needed to reach out to other groups in order to deliver positive outcomes for the Community Actions and reach out even more widely perhaps, for example to young businessmen.

Deirdre pointed out that Peter had written the Economic Resilience Policy of the [Neighbourhood Plan](#). She went on to say that as Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan's Steering Group and now as a Councillor she welcomes the interest of, and help offered by, the Vision Group for Sidmouth.

Councillor Kelvin Dent spoke of the Sidmouth Town Council's intention to have a proactive Environment Committee. There is also the intention to set up a Working Group for community plans with the possible title of the Community Actions Coordination Group. This group will be composed of Cllrs and representatives from other groups within the town and will carry forward the work of the Neighbourhood Plan Group once the NP has been to referendum, the NP Group's job is done, and the NP Group has been disbanded.

Deirdre then gave us news of the possible timing of the NP Referendum. She explained that the NP had to be submitted to the East Devon District Council, again, now it has been passed by the Inspector. It has to be with the EDDC for 6 weeks before the Referendum occurs as they need that length of time to recheck it and to actually organise the Referendum. So likely timings are that it will go before the District Council Cabinet Meeting on 10th July with a view to the Referendum being held in the second week of September. Deirdre informed us that turnout for NP referendums is normally

quite low but she wants to maximise it so the Plan has as much weight as possible, they will be ramping up the publicity for a month before the vote in an attempt to reach a 22-23% turnout.

Miriam Brown raised the question of whether we should be looking at having leaflets available around town to raise the profile of the VGS. Peter responded that he thought leaflets were most useful when we had something special to advertise. Brian Golding made the point that leaflets create waste so with our group's aims perhaps they weren't the best way forward. Mary said that an agreed business card format would serve the purpose of leaflets.

Brian gave feedback on some difficulties he had found with the website when using it on small devices. Mary then had to be called to order as she plunged excitedly into teaching the way the website worked and held up the meeting! Once that was under control Brian gave very useful information about the start of the VGS in 2005. He said it had originally been based on what might be described as a business model in an attempt to revive the economy of Sidmouth through greater appeal to tourists. He felt that the slow emergence of the identity of Sidmouth as a Festival Town was a result of the early VGS work, amongst other useful developments. He pointed out that there were far more festivals occurring in the town than we had links to on the website and kindly told us that the Parish Church had a list we could use. He reminded us that the VGS had done detailed work on the subject of Port Royal although that work had been rendered obsolete by Rockfish taking on the Drill Hall. He also briefly touched on the subjects of environment and sustainability which had been a core part of the early VGS and mentioned that the modern concern of 'well-being' had not been included in its concerns but perhaps should have been. He questioned whether the VGS should now get involved in it or if the field was too crowded?

This question from Brian led to a very informative section where Deirdre, wearing her hat as part of [Sid Valley Help](#) explained what they do and why they are needed. It became obvious that few of us realised just how much they did. Deirdre invited any of us who were interested to come along to their networking meetings. She also informed us that they have recently received substantial funding for their work from Devon County Council.

As time was getting on it was decided we should draw the meeting to a close to allow Pete Blyth, who had been sitting patiently all this time, to give his talk.

Peter Murphy raised the point that we hadn't set the date of the next meeting and Jeremy, backed by Rita (ex-Secretary), said it was not the VGS way to do so. The VGS is an unusual construct as the regular activity takes place in sub-groups. As a result of this it had been decided many years ago that the VGS worked best by calling meetings when something interesting happened or a sub-group wanted to report, rather than by having regular meetings when there might not be much to discuss. Date of next meeting to be decided later.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and for their informative and enthusiastic participation.

3) [Pete Blyth, East Devon Beach Safety Officer](#) then gave his talk which is reported in a separate document.