

Minutes of BARLOW AGM  
Wednesday 29th May 2024 – 7.00pm

Attendees:

Current/Prospective Trustees:

M. Fay (MF) – Chair of Board of Trustees  
P. Grundy (PG)  
P. McDermott (PM)  
G. Haynes (GH)  
P. Allen (PA)  
K. Holt (KH)  
J. Marriott (JM)  
N. Kernick (NK)  
L. Jeffries (LJ) (Acting Treasurer)  
C. Jady (CJ) (Hulljady Accountants)  
+ 23 members of the public.  
Apologies – R. Driver (RD) (Trustee) J. Coleman (JC)

1. Welcome & safety arrangements.

MF welcomed members of the public and PG outlined safety arrangements.

2. Introduce current Trustees & inform of those wishing to continue as Trustees.

MF introduced current Trustees and all indicated a wish to carry on as Trustees. Apology for absence from RD given.

MF indicated that he would be standing down as Chair of the Board of Trustees but wished to continue as a Trustee.

3. Present the Trustees' report.

MF gave a summary of the Trustees Report as set out in the Annual Report outlining the issues and achievements for 2023 as follows:

The Barlow is open daily, for community groups and private users.

The Reading Room provides valuable paid employment for some of the younger adults in the community, and provides a pleasant hub where people can meet socially.

During 2023, The Barlow has moved into a more “business as usual” path with projects generally in the planning phase and with day to day maintenance being carried out. It is true to say that the world wide cost of living crisis did catch up with us, and in some ways overtook us, leading to us operating by mid-year on a loss making basis in both the Reading Room and within the Charity as a whole. During the Summer months we also lost a long-standing and valued employee and so a root and branch reform was undertaken to establish our exact financial position and to set a plan forward to take us back into surplus before deducting depreciation, a non cash expense. Many changes have been made with staff, and the overall wage cost being trimmed to more suit our budget and to bring us back to a position of a small but consistent monthly surplus before depreciation. New Wedding packages have been launched, and many plans made to both reduce cost, and increase revenue.

The Trustees have embarked on a long term plan to guarantee as much income towards our annual needs as possible and we are in the process of re-negotiating the lease (or other) with the Cricket Club, long term rental contracts for certain rooms within the building, and a new ‘Corporate Friends of the Barlow’ fund canvassing local business for sponsorship which will be used for day to day running costs rather than capital projects which the standard Friends of the Barlow caters for. Details of these

exciting new projects will evolve as the negotiations evolve. The Reading Room team in response to many requests from the Community, have also expanded The Barlow's live music offering and we expect to put on 12 bands between now and the Year end. The Barlow is also reinstating the 'New Year's Eve Party' for this year.

Concerns expressed and questions asked about lease arrangements with the Cricket Club and what payments are made. Questions also asked about the Cricket Club's development proposals.

MF explained current lease arrangement and payments made in relation to the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). MF went on to explain that the current 25 year lease on the Cricket Club applies to the building only and work with the Cricket Club is underway to put in place new arrangements that better reflect the relationship between the Barlow and the Cricket Club.

In relation to development proposals MF explained that plans had been displayed and the public invited to comment. Expansion of the pavilion had subsequently received planning approval and the Barlow had not objected to the planning application. Further elements concerning the scoreboard area had not been submitted for planning permission at present and the Barlow had not taken a view on these elements at this stage.

#### 4. Present the 2023 financial report & vote on acceptance.

CJ outlined the key elements from the Barlow Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2023.

CJ explained that there were issues with increasing costs, e.g. energy costs, and matters associated with the Reading Room Café/Bar. It was further explained that the issues associated with maintaining the financial viability of the Barlow had been recognised by the Trustees during the year and steps had been taken, and continue to be taken, to put the Barlow on a viable and sustainable financial footing going forward. Measures had included cutting costs associated with Reading Room Café/Bar, increasing hire charges, new wedding packages and expanding events and activities programmes.

With the above measures in place, CJ indicated that she was content with the accounts and financial management systems in place at the Barlow and thanked the Treasurer and other Barlow volunteers for their work and support.

A number of questions were asked seeking explanation and clarification of some figures in the accounts and CJ gave responses which answered the queries raised.

The accounts and financial statement were then proposed for acceptance by those present.

However, some concerns were raised by members of the public that they had been unable to view the on-line versions of the accounts that had been published and were disappointed that paper copies were not available at the AGM.

On the back of this discussion some concerns were raised about the publicity of the AGM in general. MF explained the measures taken including emails, Facebook, website and notices at the Barlow and elsewhere in the area.

CJ explained that Hulljady had experienced some technical problems when picking up some last minute typographical errors and in seeking to clarify some information. As a result, final paper copies had not been printed.

Following continued discussion and concerns it was proposed and accepted by all present that a decision on the accounts and financial statement be deferred until paper copies could be made available. MF undertook to make paper copies available from the Barlow as soon as possible and for the matter to be re-considered at the next available meeting of the Trustees, scheduled for July, and for all members of the public wishing to attend to be given the opportunity to vote on the accounts at that meeting.

#### 5. Brief update on improvement works completed & future plans.

MF outlined the continuing programme of improvements being made to the Barlow building and, in particular, thanked the volunteers and generous donors that had made possible the recent works carried out to the Snooker Room and Main Hall.

MF went on to explain that investigations were underway to look at making more efficient use of floorspace within the Barlow and, jointly with volunteers from the Cricket Club, to explore possible future income generating opportunities.

In response to some concerns about the possible impact of works on current users and groups, and the character of the Barlow building - MF re-assured that any proposals would be consulted on before any decisions taken.

PA also drew attention to the works to the Barlow which had been undertaken over recent years and sought to demonstrate that Trustees had always put the need to protect the character and historical importance of the Barlow building first and all works had been carried out in a sensitive and respectful manner, and this will continue to be the case.

PA went on to outline the background to the works that continue to be made to Barlow Woods. The works have now been underway for some 5 years and, with the help of major funding from the Postcode Lottery and the dedication of the volunteers, many of the initial proposals to bring the area back to its former glory have now been achieved.

However, the recent winter storms did see some setbacks with 12 mature trees blown over. Fallen trees caused damage to walls, fences and a climbing frame within the Play Area and the devastation is still being dealt with.

Future works will be increasingly focussed on maintaining the improvements that have been made but there are also plans to provide new information boards, develop a walk trail leaflet, provide a mud kitchen and, longer term, develop forest school activities. A further pack of 420 trees from the Woodland Trust will be planted in the autumn.

A query was raised about whether it would be possible to provide a handrail on the steps up from Quarlton Brook – PA indicated that funding would be an issue but undertook to investigate.

6. Invite nominations for the 2 electable trustee positions. (Vote to select if more than 2 nominations). MF explained the make up of the Board of Trustees – 4 Trustees nominated by the User Groups, 4 Trustees nominated by North Turton Parish Council and 2 Trustees elected by those present at the AGM. Trustees also have an opportunity to co-opt 2 further Trustees.

MF then explained that GH, PG, PA and KH had been nominated to represent the User Groups and that the Parish Council had indicated that it did not wish to nominate any Trustees which means, in line with the Barlow constitution, vacant positions can be filled by further co-opted Trustees – this will be addressed at the next Trustee meeting.

In relation to the elected Trustees – MF and PM put themselves forward for re-election and a further proposal was put forward for S. Lobley (SL) to be elected. With 3 candidates a vote was carried out for the 2 places available – MF and PM were elected (MF 25 votes, PM 21 votes and SL 0 votes)

7. Inform date of the next AGM.

Next AGM scheduled for 7th May 2025.

8. Thanks to all & close the meeting.

MF thanked all parties for their attendance. Meeting closed at 8.45pm.