

ESJCT Ltd Directors' Annual Report September 2017

The Trust Board has met on six occasions since the last AGM, with full attendance at all but one meeting for which a single director was forced to tender apologies. Approved Minutes are published on the website.

Following the Chair's request at the last AGM, Directors were greatly encouraged when Member Rebecca Bower came forward offering her expertise in financial accounting, and were subsequently delighted that she accepted an invitation to join the Board as an Appointed Director in January. She has provided invaluable help in preparing accounts for FCA in requisite format, as well as the online Company Tax Return required for the first time this year.

The Trust now has 238 Shareholding Members and has raised £3,770 of shareholder capital.

The Board has coordinated the production and delivery of two further issues of About St James, as a joint enterprise with Exeter St James Forum and with Gaynor Carr as the current Editor. This attractive 4 page newsletter that is delivered to every property in St James, is also available to download from the website.

A brand new website is in preparation and expected to be launched soon. The current, original website presents the Trust very much as a subordinate to Exeter St James Forum, reflecting the Forum's parenthood. However the new website, which will still be shared, will present an evenly balanced view of the two organisations, as is now appropriate. Many thanks are due to Aylwyn Bowen for lending his professional graphic design expertise and the enormous amount of time he has freely given to the design of the new website and About St James.

As Members are aware, the Trust was set up by Exeter St James Forum as a not-for-profit, incorporated body able to take legal responsibility for those Neighbourhood Plan projects that involve entering into leaseholding or ownership arrangements. To date the Forum has requested the Board consider accepting legal responsibility for three NP projects: Queen's Crescent Garden (QCG), St James Vegetable Gardens (SJVG) and 3 Well Street. The latter, mentioned at the last AGM, was aborted for the timebeing when another tenant signed the lease and Rabbit cafe opened.

At each Board meeting, the remaining two projects have been agenda items.

The Directors are acutely conscious that Members must feel progress made with regard the QCG project has been painfully slow, but would like to assure you all that behind the scenes much work is being undertaken virtually continuously, requiring considerable persistence and tenacity. The frustration of Members must certainly have been mirrored by that of the Board, but we are delighted to confirm that the persistence is now paying off. We expect to be able to announce significant progress regarding the CPO and lease at the AGM, as well as news of grants already awarded contingent upon the Lease being signed, that should see a new phase of the regeneration work commence at the earliest opportunity.

St James Vegetable Gardens project is also requiring a great deal of patience. After progress appeared to be being made in negotiations between SJVG and Network Rail last November, the Board expected to be in a position to instruct a legal appraisal of the final documentation early this year, and if deemed appropriate, to sign the lease. However, progress appeared to stall as the final documents were not received. Letters were sent on behalf of the Board to the Chair of SJVG in March, expressing the continued willingness of the Board to take on the lease subject to satisfactory negotiations with NR and legal review, and to Network Rail's negotiator in May, in an attempt to set up direct dialogue and emphasise the Trust's eagerness to receive the final version of documents for signing subject to successful legal review. No reply has yet been received from either.

The rules of the Trust require that a third of elected Directors stand down at each AGM. This year it is the turn of Robyn Connett and Aylwyn Bowen. As an Appointed Director, Rebecca Bower is also required to stand down. All three may stand again and their fellow Directors are pleased that each has accepted nomination. However, the Board recognises the importance of new blood for the long term vitality of the Trust, so is keen to receive further nominations. It is a privilege to serve the community of St James in this way.

Robyn Connett (Chair) Paul Layton (Secretary) Harry Temple (Vice Chair) Aylwyn Bowen Beth Osment and Rebecca Bower