



READING CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 14 February 2026 at Watlington House, at 2.00 p.m.

Committee members present: Richard Bennett – Chairman
Penny Kemp – Honorary Treasurer
Alison Bennett – Membership Secretary
Amanda Martin
Terry Dixon
Clare Platts
Richard Stainthorp

1. Apologies for Absence: In total 43 members and guests attended the meeting, with apologies received from Lynette Edwell (committee), Jo Alexander-Jones (committee), Stephen Snook (committee), Chris Widdows, Phil Lewis, Tony Page, Brian and Tomiko Morley, Ken and Trish Brown, John Nixon, John Dearing, Anne and Richard Jessel, Virginia Day.

2. Minutes of 2025 AGM

The Minutes had been distributed to members prior to the meeting and posted on the website. The Minutes were accepted unanimously as a true record of the meeting with no matters arising.

3. Chairman's Report to December 2025

The Chairman gave a review of the year's events and activities with a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the main topics:

a. Events

15 events were either run for members or attended by Committee members. The main events included the new Jane Austen plaque unveiling in June (members contributed £1,350 towards the cost of £7,500) and in December attendance at the Jane Austen 250th Birthday celebration at the Abbey School; Northcourt Avenue Walk with Penny Kemp; HODS – talk by the Royal Meteorological Society at 175 years, talk on Planning in Reading by Tony Page; South Oxfordshire Churches Tour; talk on Workhouses, Inns and Vestries by Margaret Ounsley;

b. Planning

John Lewis Warehouse Site – RB attended the planning meeting on behalf of RCS and CAAC and spoke in support of the development (250 flats). Consent was given in October '25.

NHS Capacity – There has been a large increase in population in the town centre with challenges faced by practices in old buildings which are not suitable for extension. In the summer RB arranged for a discussion with the RBC Head of Planning at the Eldon Square Medical Practice and the Care Commission Board (West Berkshire and South Oxfordshire) to highlight the need for potential sites for modern medical practice building in the centre of Reading to be included in the Local Plan. CCB has finally objected to large new builds based on the lack of capacities of practices.

Station Hill – Members were encouraged to attend the public exhibition in November about Phase 3 of Station Hill (600 flats). Some Committee attended the private view.

Queen Victoria Place development – RB chased up Thackeray about progress in Jan.

Thames Lido – in February RB will meet the Lido team with Tony Page and Opus Works to explore how they can guide the Lido team about their planning application to expand their car parking which has been “bounced” at Pre. App. stage.

CAAC – RCS mainly works with the CAAC on their planning comments.

c. Participation and Engagement

First Friday Club – networking events for local groups.

Arts and Heritage Forum – 3-monthly meetings.

CAAC – 6 RCS members are members of the Conservation Area Advisory Committee.

Civic Voice – In the autumn RB attended talks in Birmingham about the future of Civic Voice.

Friday Friends, Tilehurst – In June RB gave a presentation – Work of the Society.

In January RB met Cllr Micky Leng to discuss a variety of issues including planning and also took part in discussions about RBC’s proposal to submit an Expression of Interest to be City of Culture 2029.

Terry Dixon’s walk of the Kendrick CA goes into the London Road University site. This led to questions why the Memorial clock bell did not ring the hour. A follow up with the University Community Engagement Manager led to it being restarted.

On 8 January RB gave a talk to the Rotary Club of Reading Abbey about the Look Draw Build Project.

d. Publicity

The new website has been further developed with additions to the Heritage Plaque section and a further 20 to add.

The revised information and recruitment leaflet has been placed in the Library, the Town Hall and at the Welcome Desk at the station.

An article which appeared in the Reading Chronicle on 16 October highlighted the RCS support for the John Lewis site.

e. Heritage Plaque Project

The committee of four, whose initial members have now been identified, have a long list of proposals to assess. The assessment model is being worked on. Funds raised by talks and walks stand at £2,985 with further sources of funding to be identified. Each plaque costs around £800 and information panels would be around £5,000.

f. Look Draw Build

During 2025 the Look Draw Build programme was delivered to schools in Bristol as well as in Reading at the suggestion of GWR. The £15,000 funding came from the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAE), the Earley Charity, Network Rail and Reading Rotary Club. Ten schools in Reading participated along with nine in Bristol, 30 workshops were delivered, 900 students engaged and 300 models were built. In Reading the Project Reception was held in Haslams offices. Around 35 people (including teachers from participating schools) attended and an Exhibition was also held in the Oracle Shopping Centre. In Bristol the Awards Night Reception was held in The Engine Shed and Brunel’s Boardroom. Over 60 people (40 children and teachers from the schools) attended.

Looking to 2026, funding will come from a £16K grant from the GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund. JELLY will be leading the project with RCS as the supporting Partner, with members participating in school workshops.

g. Terry’s Reading Walkabouts

Committee member Terry Dixon has raised £32,480 via the walks since they began in 2016. This total has been donated to local charities. The 2025/26 total is £6,504 which has been allocated to Camp Mohawk, Ways and Means Trust, Models for Heroes and the RCS Blue Plaque scheme.

9 Conservation Areas are now covered by the Walkabouts with Christchurch CA to be added in 2027. The charities to benefit in the year 2026/27 are Dingley’s Promise, Green Health Thames Valley and the military charity SAAFA.

4. Membership Report

The Membership Secretary reported that at the end of the membership year 2025 the number of individual members stood at 150 and that there were two group memberships; CADRA and the Abbey School. Fees received up to the end of December 2025 amounted to £1,240 (£1,410 in 2024). 8 new members joined since the last AGM in 2025 compared to 19 new members between the 2024 AGM and 2025.

Membership renewals from January 2026 to 12 February 2026 are slow with only 97 individual members and the two groups having rejoined so far, with £845 in fees paid to date. Reminders will be sent out in the next couple of weeks.

5. Hon. Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts to 31 December 2025

The Hon. Treasurer, Penny Kemp, reported that copies of the accounts had previously been distributed to members and were available at the meeting. The accounts had been examined by Paul Welch FCA.

The closing bank balance at 31 December 2025 was £17,563. This amount was made up of unrestricted funds of £8,908 and restricted funds of £8,654. The restricted funds are allocated as follows: LDB £4,427; Blue Plaque project £2,985; RBC-funded website work £850; held on behalf of the CAAC £392.

The Chairman's Report was accepted by the meeting. The Accounts were acceptable to the meeting – proposed by Katrina Parker and seconded by Vickie Abel and agreed *nem con*.

6. Election of Officers and Committee Members

Richard Stainthorp took the chair for the election of the Chairman. Richard Bennett agreed to continue in the role. There were no other candidates and he was elected unopposed, proposed by Nick Haskins and seconded by Penny Kemp.

All the Committee members agreed to continue to serve in their current roles and all were duly elected *en bloc*: proposed by Bill Gornall King and seconded by Vickie Abel.

7. Election of the Examiner of the Accounts

Paul Welch was willing to continue as Examiner of the Accounts. He was elected unopposed, proposed by Penny Kemp and seconded by Richard Stainthorp.

8. Looking Forward

a) The Annual Luncheon will be held on 14 March 2026 at The Rising Sun in Castle Street. So far there are 30 bookings with a possible capacity of 40.

b) There will potentially be a Churches Tour.

9. AOB

There was no other business.

The formal business of the meeting concluded at 2.35 p.m.

The meeting was followed by a talk on **The Story of Jacksons Department Store by Thomas Macey**.