

The Geological Society of London

COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting held on 19 August 2020 – Burlington House closed during the coronavirus pandemic shutdown

PRESENT: Mike Daly (*Chair*), Jo Alexander, Andrew Bloodworth, John Booth (*Vice President*), Jennie Gilbert, Joel Gill (*Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs*), Kathryn Goodenough, Jim Griffiths (*Secretary, Professional & Chartership Matters*), Michael Kehinde, Chris King, Andrew Moore, Keith Myers (*Co-opted – Treasurer designate*), Bryne Ngwenya, John Perry, Nik Reynolds (*Vice President*), Sarah Scott, Gemma Sherwood, Jessica Smith (*Vice President, Regional Groups*), Helen Smyth, Rob Strachan (*Secretary, Publications*), Alex Whittaker (*Secretary, Science*) and Lucy Williams

APOLOGIES: Graham Goffey (*Treasurer*)
Tom Backhouse

In attendance: Richard Hughes (*Executive Secretary*), Alex McPherson (*Director of Finance & Operations*), Alicia Newton (*Director of Science & Communications*), Maggie Simmons (*Director of Publishing*), and Stephanie Jones (*Administrative Secretary*)

Hazel Rymer and Neal Marriott – item 7
Megan O'Donnell – item 8

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies from Graham Goffey were NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 17 JUNE 2020

The minutes were APPROVED. A version of the minutes will be published on the website, with an explanation if items have been removed or reduced.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

5. LEASE UPDATE (*confidential to Council*) (CM/52/20)

6. DIVERSITY AUDIT OF SOCIETY'S COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES (CM/53/20)

MD asked Alicia Newton (AN) to present the paper. In doing so he commended Caroline Lam's report and in particular drew attention to her comment that her report reflects current views which may change in the future.

AN said the Society's collections and displays have been under consideration for some time, but discussions around diversity in the geosciences and the Black Lives Matter movement have brought more urgent attention to the links between early geologists, the slave trade, colonialism and theories of racial superiority. This audit focuses on the slave trade and racial superiority and a report on links to eugenics and colonisation may follow.

Henry de la Beche, who was actively engaged in the management of his slaves, has been a particular focus, with BGS and Imperial College removing his name from an

auditorium and student society respectively. A number of other early members and officers of the Society had links to the slave trade and promotion of racial superiority and are represented in the Society's collections and displays.

Council discussed the issues at length. Although the practices and views of some of those represented around Burlington House are abhorrent to present sensibilities, nevertheless many of these figures made major contributions to geology. They cannot be forgotten but more transparency is needed. Representation of more recent achievements in the science is also needed, and John Booth suggested that the Fellowship could be asked for their recommendations.

The following actions and decisions were AGREED:-

- Council noted the serious issues with regard to Henry de la Beche and Louis Agassiz. Ask the History of Geology Group to peer review Caroline Lam's report.
- Consider publishing Caroline Lam's report in *Geoscientist* to inform what action is being taken and as an interesting document.
- Develop a policy and process to review people who may be suggested to be depicted at Burlington House as representative of excellence in the profession. This policy will be applied to the historical figures currently displayed.
- There is no pressing requirement to do anything about the Society's medals which will be reviewed as part of the policy work described above.
- The portrait of Murchison on the staircase is considered poor quality and can be removed.

7. LIBRARY REVIEW UPDATE AND DISCUSSION (CM/54/20)

Hazel Rymer (HR), chair of the Library Review Working Group, and Neal Marriott (NM), Project Leader, joined the meeting.

HR thanked the members of the Library Review Working Group and the long list of expert witnesses. Key elements of the review process to date have been:

- Gathering and analysis of data (financial, collections usage, service usage, space usage etc.)
- Interviews and discussions with "expert witness" both from within and without the library community
- Regular meetings of the Library Review Working Group and Library Review Steering Group

Further data will be analysed over the summer and early autumn, a survey of Fellows is planned for August/September and discussions will be held with the Publications and Information committee in October. Final recommendations will come to Council in November.

NM presented the key points of the review around costs and usage.

Council agreed that there is undoubtedly value to users in the collection of hard copy books and also the maps but there is little point in providing journals that are available on line, although one point that emerged was that there are some journals available on line which have to be paid for and it may be worth investing in these. It is also important to maintain the Society's ATHENS designation. RH said he is leading the membership categories review for which comparisons are being made with other societies, some of whom only make available their own publications at no

cost.

HR presented the emerging 'direction of travel'. One of the questions posed to Council was whether the Society should cease acquiring all but the most highly used serials – say the top 30-50 out of 600. HR said one of the most important recommendations will be around IT where investment in the Library and beyond is needed and with it a unified approach to online resources and staff development and re-skilling for modern service provision.

RH said the Library Review was very long overdue and he thanked HR and NM, and their colleagues, for their work.

8. STRATEGIC OPTIONS PROJECT (CM/55/20)

Megan O'Donnell (MO'D), Policy Officer and Project Leader, joined the meeting. She said the propositions in the paper were draft and she was looking forward to Council's input.

RH said further strong progress has been made since the update to Council in June, with focus on the proposed new science themes, a deep dive into the Society's digital identity, and on refining details of the strategic options to be discussed by Council in September.

The first phase of the project identified five, high-level science themes with which there are clear opportunities for the Society to engage more strongly:

- Energy and Materials Transition,
- Earth Hazards,
- Climate Change,
- Planetary Geology and
- Advanced Computing

Development of the Energy and Transition Materials Theme is furthest advanced and a call for a leader(s) will be made in the near future. Council was presented with the draft advertisement and job description. Terms of Reference will be drafted for each of the themes and an early draft of those for the Earth Hazards Theme was presented to Council.

Council thanked MO'D and the team. There were some concerns about the timing of the request to support the recruitment of a leader(s) for the Energy and Transition Materials Theme (which Andrew Bloodworth said would be more appropriately described as Technology or Critical Metals) with some wishing to defer this decision until the final report is discussed in September at which time direction and outcomes from the project it will be clearer. It was suggested that the role should report to the External Relations Committee as well as the Science Committee. There were also concerns about the size and scope of the role and the expectations on a volunteer particularly in terms of time commitment and the timeframe for the project and absolute transparency is needed. It may be more appropriate to recruit a team leader who leads a small group. There must be clarity about support from the Society's staff. A communications strategy should be central to the project.

The actions agreed were that the job description and advertisement will be re-written in a more modern format and will be clearer about the number of people, time commitment and experience required. The aspiration for the Society and its themes will be set out. Lucy Williams and Alex Whittaker offered to review the re-draft. It will be tabled at September Council but if RH is content with the advertisement it will go ahead and be placed on the website and social media.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 and 9 September 2020 – virtual

There will be a business meeting during the afternoon of the 8th, with an Ordinary General Meeting following. The Strategic Options Project will be discussed on the morning of the 9th and there may be a short session during the early afternoon.