

GENERAL MEETING

Old Church Rooms on Monday 19th November 2018 at 7.30pm

Present: David Silver [Chairman], Tom Evans [Vice Chairman], Nick Hawkins (Secretary), Ellis Jenkins (Treasurer), Eric Blackwell, Bob Roberts, Cllrs Helen Lloyd Jones, Huw Jones & Rod Mckerlich, and 30 members.

Apologies: David Cargill, Allan Cook, Raymond Rivron, Ian Thomas, Julie Davies, Jean Monk, Jamie Grundy, Colin Johnson.

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Kevin Brennan MP: “Restoration of the Palace of Westminster”

The Chairman introduced Kevin. He was born in Cwmbran in 1959 and was educated at St Alban's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School in Pontypool before going up to Pembroke College, Oxford where he took a BA in PPE. Before becoming the late Rhodri Morgan's full time aide in 1995, he was Head of Economics at Radyr Comprehensive School. Between 1991 and 2001 he was a member of Cardiff Council. In 2001 he was elected to Parliament and has held many roles in both government and opposition.

Kevin started his talk by commenting on the honour and privilege he felt working in the Palace of Westminster. The site, and some of the buildings, have an incredible sense of history - dating back over 1000 years. However, the origin of the present building actually dates back to 16th October 1834 when a fire, started by the burning of 'tally sticks' destroyed the then ramshackled set of parliamentary buildings. Parliament was deeply unpopular at the time so the local populace was not too dismayed at the destruction - and the fire risk to the old buildings had been noted in a report back in 1789. Only Westminster Hall was saved, mainly because the fire services prioritised it over the parliamentary buildings.

A competition for the design of a new set of buildings was organised in 1836 and received 97 entries, all entered under a pseudonym. The winner was Charles Barry who used the emblem of a portcullis as his pseudonym - an emblem which has been used ever since for the Palace of Westminster. Construction of the new building, in the then fashionable Gothic style, started in 1840 with a build time estimate of six years and a cost of £724,986. It actually took over 30 years at a cost of over £2 million. Although Barry was the architect, the underlying genius of the continuity of the overall design was Augustus Pugin, who designed everything down to the door knobs. The House of Lords first sat in their new chamber in 1847 and the House of Commons in 1852 (at which point Barry was knighted). Pugin ultimately went mad.

The building was damaged in 1941 during WWII when the Commons Chamber was hit by bombs and the roof of Westminster Hall set on fire. Again, the fire services prioritised Westminster Hall and the Chamber was totally destroyed. Interestingly, from June 1941 to October 1950, the Commons met in the Lord's Chamber whilst the Lords met in the Robing Room. To reach the temporary Chamber in the Lords, the Speaker's Procession had to pass through the Central Lobby. This proved so popular that this continues to the present day.

Essentially, the building has remained untouched over the last 170+ years - being maintained purely on a 'patch and mend' basis. Many features have never undergone major renovation and most of the essential infrastructure is extremely antiquated. Asbestos is present throughout and the cumulative effects of pollution and lack of maintenance has resulted in decayed stonework and corroded gutters and downpipes. The introduction of new technology since the 19C has resulted in all the vertical and horizontal ducts being totally congested making it virtually impossible to repair anything, or even to remove redundant kit. It is estimated that the ducts carry 240 miles of cables. The fire risk is huge and fire safety officers patrol the Palace 24 hours a day. The building is also inconvenient in many aspects - disabled access is notably difficult.

So, what to do with the building - which is now a UNESCO World Heritage site? It cannot be demolished, but should Parliament stay there? After much debate, it was agreed that the huge historical significance of the building meant that the Palace of Westminster should remain as the

centre of Parliament and the most cost effective way of doing it would be for Parliament to move to a temporary location and to complete the work in a single phase. The likely cost will be £3.6bn and will take place in 2025 at the earliest and the work will take six years. (A rejected proposal, allowing both Houses to remain on site, would have taken 35 years to complete and cost £5.7bn.)

The major elements of the restoration include installation of new and more advanced fire safety systems, the removal of the asbestos, significantly improving disabled access, replacing the sewage ejector system (which was installed in 1888 and is still in use) and installing information and communications technology necessary for a 21C Parliament. As is obvious, there is a lot of planning and investigation to do before work starts.

Kevin answered a lot of questions following his talk. These included:

What is the current atmosphere in Parliament? He recalled the Iraq debate in 2003. That was Parliament at its best - MPs taking their responsibilities seriously. The current feeling, at least in opposition, is one of 'watching the other side' and reacting as appropriate. He had no idea how Brexit would play out in the long run, although he thought it most unlikely that the current Brexit proposals would get a majority vote.

Do people understand the importance of Parliamentary Committees? In fact, most parliamentary work is done in committees, not on the floor of the Houses of Parliament. That is one reason why the debating chamber often looks very empty! The continuation of committees and the provision of suitable accommodation is an essential element of the temporary accommodation plans.

Did he support adversarial politics; would a different type of debating chamber make for better debate? Kevin said he actually liked the present arrangement, which requires Ministers to be held to account. He noted that the current arrangement dates back to the original Parliament building where debates were held in St Stephen's Chapel (destroyed in 1834) and MPs sat in the choir stalls.

Who decides who speaks in debates? This is at the gift of the Speaker, although there is an understood 'pecking order'.

Is the House of Lords an effective second house? He thought it would be better if it was a totally elected assembly, and it should be a revising body rather than a pre-eminent one. However, overall it does a good job as a revising chamber with its power lying mainly in the ability to delay rather than thwart legislation.

Is not the Palace of Westminster currently in default of Health & Safety regulations? Technically, as a Royal Palace, the PoW is not subject to H&S legislation! But, yes, the rebuild will bring it into line.

At the close of the talk, the Chairman thanked Kevin for giving his time and giving such a good insight into the workings of Parliament and the problems with the current building. He noted that some of the slides he had shown of the cable ducts reminded him of what he had seen in the streets of Delhi! He gave him a token of the Association's appreciation.

Minutes of the previous General Meeting on 24th September 2018

The minutes were approved. There were no matters arising.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported that the Association's unrestricted funds currently stood at £7936, represented by £3803 in COIF and £4133 in Current A/C. This represented a current deficit over the year of just £68, a very satisfactory position. He highlighted the May Festival finances and again thanked the R&M Community Council for their generous grant of £1150

The Chairman noted that he had recently presented both Primary Schools with a cheque for £1500, being the amount the Association had been holding in a reserved account on behalf of the now disbanded R&M Choral Society. The money would be used to form choirs and orchestras at both schools; something that would create a musical tradition that would carry on into secondary schools.

Entertainment

The Chairman reminded the meeting that on Thursday, 22nd November the Association's Film Club would be showing "The Leisure Seeker" an excellent film starring Donald Sutherland and Helen Mirren.

Christmas Tree lighting on Friday, 7th December

The Secretary gave details of this popular event. Details were being delivered to all properties in R&M.

May Festival 2019

The Chairman informed the meeting that the Programme for the Festival was virtually complete. It was still planned to put on a cookery event - but it appeared that cooks were reluctant to speak! There would be the normal range of Arts events, including a film of an Australian version of G&S' Pirates of Penzance.

Improving Road Safety in Radyr & Morganstown

Cllr Rod Mckerlich took the floor for this topic. He reminded the meeting that he has lived on Heol Isaf for many years and has personally witnessed the growth in traffic. He noted that R&M was built on the 'valleys principle' with one main road linked to many side roads. It was never designed to take the current traffic flow - around 6.5K vehicles in each direction every day. Earlier suggestions to Cardiff Council to construct strategic arterial roads in and out of the City had been ignored so all housing development - to the east and west of the City - had to rely on the old infrastructure. In addition to the volume of traffic on Heol Isaf, speed is excessive, with >50% exceeding 37mph with an average of 34-36mph, notably around the junction with Min-y-Coed.

The Cardiff LDP had recognised there was no spare road capacity in R&M, nor in Llantrisant or St Fagans. However, Cardiff has little money to resolve the problems, with 'planning gain' being the only source of revenue. The money available for work in R&M currently stood at £300K - and that is only because Redrow, the principle builder in Plasdŵr, had brought forward their contribution in advance of the stated trigger point (number of building completed). This money needed to be spent wisely.

Cardiff Council had drawn up a plan of road safety works in R&M, which Cllr Mckerlich used to highlight the issues and opportunities. (*Secretary's note: the plan can be accessed on the [R&M Website](#).)* The total cost of all the work was around £1m so, with just £300K to spend, there was a need to prioritise. In making decisions the objectives were to:

- Try to slow the traffic
- Make Heol Isaf less attractive to through traffic
- Avoid creating 'rat runs'
- Avoid having unintended consequences

He listed the various sections intended for upgrade. The intention was to implement 20mph throughout R&M in due course - but noted that putting in 20mph signs when the average speed is 34-36mph is known not to work; it is essential to introduce traffic calming first. This would be done in the first instance by introducing new tabled crossings in Morganstown, Min y Coed and by Christ Church. Pavements would also be created in known danger spots (e.g. the bend on Windsor Road). He also thought it would be sensible to close Golf Club lane.

Other factors would improve the situation - encouraging people to use bicycles (he noted the facility of the Taff Trail, although it needed to be properly maintained), changing the fare tariff to make it less attractive for people to come into Radyr to catch the train, and introducing better and longer trains. More speed cameras would also be a good idea.

The meeting the following day in the Comprehensive School, organised by 'Love Our 20mph Villages', was highlighted. This meeting would be looking at all these road safety issues and would be addressed by Rod King MBE (20's plenty for us) and Dr Sarah Jones (Public Health Wales).

General R&M Matters

No matters raised.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Monday, 11th February 2019 at 7.30pm in the OCR when the speaker will be local resident Colin Johnson. He will be talking about 'Science and the Public'.