



Proposed new constitution for the Haslemere Society

At the forthcoming AGM, the society will be asking its members to approve a new constitution. This article provides background to this proposal to aid members in their decision.

The current constitution of the society dates in 2003. However, it appears that, probably through oversight, the Charity commission were never notified when the constitution was amended at that time. In fact, the Charity commission records state that our governing document is “constitution and rules adopted 28 February 1936 and amended 26 October 1979 as amended 5 November 1993 as amended 23rd of April 1999”. This makes clear the need for us to update things! In fact, when we recently applied for online banking with the society’s bankers, they asked for a copy of the constitution and would no doubt have checked against the records of the Charities Commission.

In drawing up a new constitution, we have had regard to the charity commissions model constitution for member societies with modifications made to reflect the circumstances of the society. The proposed constitution differs from the 2003 constitution in the following particulars

- the objects of the society have been changed as previously, they did not make reference to our interest in the “built environment”, only to “rural scenery”. However, the section on ‘carrying out the objects’ has been more broadly drawn to allow for more flexibility in the Society’s activities
- the earlier constitution did not make it clear that a list of members needed to be maintained and made no provision for the removal of a person’s membership. Both these elements form part of the charity commission’s model constitution and have therefore been included
- The minimum number of members present for the AGM to be quorate has been increased from 15 to 20 as has the number of members required to call a general meeting.
- Officers. The earlier constitution made allowance for the appointment of specific officers at the AGM but was unclear as to who the trustees of the society would be, and then set out certain obligations relating to both the general committee and an executive committee. As has previously been explained, it is the intention of the society in future to carry out much of its business through a number of committees: heritage, planning, environment and events. We do not think that there is any need for the activities of these subcommittees to be governed by the constitution. The new constitution therefore focuses on the meeting of the trustees (rather than a general and executive committee) and allows for these to be between 3 and 10 individuals. Each of these individuals should be elected annually at the AGM, and any member will be entitled to stand for election.
- In normal circumstances, we expect the trustees to be the chairman, treasurer and secretary, and to also include the chairpersons of each of the committees. This is not however restricted by the constitution. The previous constitution restricted the tenure of the Chairman to a period of 6 years’ service on the general committee, whether as chairman or in any other capacity. This provision has not always been complied with. We have amended this to restrict the tenure of individuals as chair, treasurer or secretary (but not as committee members) to 6 years, unless the trustees conclude by unanimous decision that it is in the interests of the society for them to serve for a longer period.
- Specific provisions, in accordance with the Charity commission model constitution and relating to money and property had been inserted. The earlier constitution was silent on these matters