



ALSTON MOOR BUSINESS ASSOCIATION MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date/Venue: Wednesday 15 April 2020, 6pm, online via Zoom

Present: Ian Grey (Chair), Janis Goodfellow, Gina Perryman, Elaine Edgar, Lesley Mearns, Guy Harmer, Andy Holt, Gary Wright

This meeting was the first to be held during the Coronavirus lockdown, announced by the Government on 23 March 2020.

Minutes of committee meeting held on 13 February 2020

Agreed previously via 'virtual voting', with no matters arising. They have been published on the website.

Review of AGM content and Minutes

There was good feedback on the format and content of the AGM. Gina had sent the draft minutes to the Committee, and it was agreed that these could be circulated to members now, flagging them as 'Draft' as they don't formally get adopted until the next AGM. **Action for Gina.**

Finance and Membership

Janis presented the latest finance figures. Over 40 members have paid renewals subscriptions, but Janis has not done her usual chasing up due to the current situation. Gina had suggested that in light of the Coronavirus crisis, we could offer free membership to any business that meets our membership criteria for 2020. Any businesses that had already paid their subscription could have that carried over to cover 2021. This was unanimously supported. **Action for Gina, Ian and Janis** to organise this.

Janis advised that all outstanding payments for Christmas trees had now been received.

Front Street Steering Group

Gina reported that there had been no communication on this from the Steering Group leads, and the March meeting had been cancelled due to the Coronavirus lockdown. 2020 could be perfect for the town to have the initial work done as planned, in light of the fact that no visitors can come at present, particularly if the lockdown continues through the main tourism season. **Action for Gina** to get an update on plans.

Marketing Group sub-committee

The AGM validated the priorities identified for 2020. However, Coronavirus restrictions followed immediately after. The focus initially was to share on the website what individual businesses were doing to keep customers and staff safe, but that was quickly overtaken by the lockdown measures. Although we can't actively market Alston Moor at the moment, there is preparatory work that can be done by the group. Gina will get the sub-committee together for a Zoom meeting to see what we can do in the short-term. **Action for Gina.**

Heritage Open Days Group sub-committee

Guy, as Chair of this group, explained that in light of the current situation planning has been suspended for this year's HODs programme, which is scheduled to run from 11-20 September. Guy will consult with the rest of the group (Ian, Gary and Alistair Robertson) to see if they can plan just a skeleton set of events for now, including STR and High Mill. **Action for Guy.**



VE Day

Ian reported that the national plan is to roll the postponed VE Day plans into an event in August alongside VJ Day. Andy mentioned that he may be looking to another constituted body to take on the finances for the Alston Moor events; it was noted again by the committee that this would not be AMBA, as previously decided.

United Utilities sub-committee

The sub-committee has considered 3 grant applications since the last meeting. One was signed off by the full committee a couple of weeks ago, one has been returned to the applicant for further information, and one was discussed at the meeting with options to be considered by the group/applicant.

Actions for Ian to go back with options for the third applicant. Also, as minuted last time, to approach UU to see if they will allocate more funding (once the time is appropriate to do so).

Facebook

Two aspects to discuss; should AMBA join local groups, and requests from some members to intervene in respect of some very negative and sustained personal attacks on their businesses by those behind the operation of the Alston Moor Matters Facebook Group.

Joining groups – various pros and cons. Pros - we can share our AMBA page posts to get wider organic reach, e.g. Absolutely Alston has 1,400 members we could reach, rather than just the 450 who follow the AMBA page. Committee members could share posts themselves, but it allows individuals to keep their private accounts for personal posts by having AMBA post direct as AMBA. Cons – a feeling from some that we couldn't be seen to favour one community page over another, and also that we shouldn't be looking for wider reach. We didn't really reach a conclusion in the Zoom environment, as no vote was taken, so one to take offline; **action for Gina** to progress to a decision.

Concern was raised that one Facebook Group had been recently been overtly and unfairly critical of two local businesses who were AMBA members. The negativity is damaging to our businesses, and reflects badly on Alston Moor generally, as it does not represent the business or community values that we aspire to. It would also be helpful if prior to judging others, the facts could be established first. After some discussion it was agreed that Ian would communicate with those behind the Group to ask that they deal with any grievances or negativity that they may have with some of our members directly in the first instance before posting comments. It was stated that individual businesses could also help themselves by reporting posts to Facebook, and having settings on their own site to moderate/block comments prior to posting, blocking certain individuals and ultimately to resort to reporting malicious activity to the police or taking civil action. **Action for Ian**, with input from members concerned.

Coronavirus Recovery Plan

We have shared a lot of information with our members recently, and feedback was that what had gone out was appropriate, helpful and sufficient.

Thinking ahead to when things start to return to normal, it was felt that encouraging those people who have used Alston Essentials to continue to shop locally was one aspect to work on, and this can be part of the 'Shop Local' strand of the marketing priorities that we have already set out for 2020. The question was asked as to whether we could quantify the community benefits of Alston Essentials and share that. In the short term we could make more use of things like Shop Local memes, and strap lines like 'We'll still be here when Coronavirus has gone'. We could also capitalise



on the remoteness of Alston Moor as a visitor destination, which was a feature of the last Visit Alston Moor Facebook post. **Action for Marketing Group**.

AOB

Next meeting in about 3 weeks time; **action for lan** to agree suitable date.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.