

Egm minutes 30th april 2018

Present: Helen Bennett, Simon Bennett, Chris Black, Tom Clark (Director), Paul Eavis (Director), Annelise Franck, Barbara Helm, Robin Howell, Michael Kellaway, Tim Knock (Director and Events Manager), Vivienne Fairbrother, Geri Laithwaite (New Director), Trish Long (Treasurer), Hazel Pegg, Kirsten Rushby, Diana Stewart, Rory Weightman (Chair), Solange Zamora, Geoff Hill, Rosemary Bradley, Jenny De Cox, Barbara Priestley, Paul Branson, George Marol, Michael Penn, Cheryl Penn, Barbara Robinson, Mick Walker, Liz Shields, Gareth Mills (Director). Rob Pozier (Facilities manager), Jacquie Lindgrow, Helen Da Silva (New Director), Kathy Contaris, Ramona Belcher, Dana Amma Day (New Director), Alison Belshaw (Project Manager), Mandy Reynolds (Bookeeper), Amy Watkins (Volunteer Coordinator)

Apologies: Sarah Sander Jackson (Director), Rachael Inman, Rosie Parks.

Rory paid tribute to Alan Gloak who has resigned from Chair of the Board of Directors due to ill health. Alan has been part of the project since the very beginning and so Rory proposed a note of thanks for all the support both material and emotional over the years. Seconded by Gareth.

Rory introduced Board Members.

Trish read through Treasurers Report and budget projections.

Question was asked about what the Power to Change was for.

Alison answered that it was approx. £260,000. Half was for revenue funding ie staff posts and half was for things like the Morland Room and the lift – capitol works.

Trish moved on to look at current year compared to last year and how we are moving forward. She commented that the Events have generated £3000 up on last year. These do not include latest costs but it gives a general idea.

Budget was a draft only but it showed the forecast for the next 3 years – the 1st year will be ok to cover costs but the following years will be further and further behind.

Some people didn’t follow this.

Paul said that there is an overspending of £60,000 but that is to include the repayment of a loan for £22,500 which will be finished after the first year.

There was a question about the management charge which Trish explained was the VAT element of the intercompany management charge between RBB Company and RBB Tenancy Services as one can claim the VAT back and the other can’t. Question was asked about what would happen if we didn’t pay this charge but could this come from donations instead. Trish said that we wouldn’t be able to claim the VAT back from the other company. (? Needs clarifying).

Qu – Please account for the differences in salaries between 2017 and 2018. There was an increase in wages for everyone and pension contributions brought is as well as NI contributions as the increase in wages put people over the threshold.

Alison said that the Somerset Community Foundation can take donations for us and that would also get Gift Aid.

Kirsten asked whether the lottery had been ruled out, and Alison replied that we are registered with Shape Mendip Lottery where we have so far received £600. Please can everyone push this?

Are we getting a feeding tariff from the solar panels? Trish said that the money from the panels is being kept back to pay back the investors who installed them. Repayment due 2020.

Rory asked for a move to approve the accounts: seconded by Geri. Almost unanimous with 2 abstentions.

Move to approve accountant – Maxwell accountant with a limit for his fee of £4000. Almost unanimous with no abstentions or against.

Questions from Shareholders

Chris Black asked for assurances that there would be no demolition of building C without a full explanation. Rory gave assurances and said that we took the building to stop demolition and we will consult shareholders. Demolition is not on the agenda only the internal stuff.

Chris Black apologised for his heated behaviour at the last meeting. “I reacted very strongly to the idea it would be demolished” – Apology accepted.

Mike Penn suggested renegotiating the contract with the Bocabar and it was agreed he would talk to Tim and Paul after the meeting.

Also asked why the AGM dates were moved – the team weren’t ready as we were waiting for developments for Building C and the account weren’t ready.

Anonymous Questions

What skills will the directors use to address these challenges?

* We will use the skills we have – we have some very talented directors and there are 5 new directors to be coopted. They will give the skills they have and they will do their best. Each director has a specific role and function depending on their skill set.

How can you communitcate issues to shareholders who are the lifeblood of the project?

* Everything depends on good communication. There is a shareholder meeting in July. There was a commitment that a discussion paper should be sent out before the next meeting in July.
* Some shareholders are not getting the newsletter. Alison asked all shareholders to sign up to it on the website or at the reception.
* It was agreed that shareholders can give feedback to Alison’s email enterprise@redbrickbuilding.co.uk
* Rory stated that we have had consultations on Building C but we do need to do more and make more effort on all sorts of things. Everyone should have a voice. Alison stated that everyone is welcome to come in and talk to us and find out what we do. We will also set up a suggestion box.

It was suggested that the newsletter is great to find out what goes on but not at a strategic level. There is more talent in the shareholders than directors and we need to harness these skills. There needs to be another way to engage shareholders. Could a director do a shareholder update after board meeting with action points so we could support or help? Rory and Alison could possibly do a bi monthly?

Tim is planning on holding 3 monthly meetings.

It was proposed we hold a shareholder dinner.

It was suggested that it is not always easy to get hold of the staff on duty. Alison said that we will be putting in a new phone system which should make things easier.

Hazel suggested that to increase shareholder involvement there could be a closed forum on the website and then as issues arise people can discuss on closed forum which would be password protected and the Board members could monitor it. We agreed to look into it for the website.

It was discussed that we could find out more about shareholders and that there could be different forums, social and business.

Annelise raised the issue about the space upstairs and the fact that the community health have moved on as sound is an issue – could we not soundproof the room? Gareth answered stating that it has been looked into and that it would be very very expensive. Alison informed us that there was an issue with the Morland Room and we had an Award 4 All grant but that it lowered the ceiling significantly. It is still not a perfect solution as it takes managing if we have noisy things downstairs and quiet upstairs. This is a community building and we can learn lessons from experiences.

It was requested that each shareholder be reminded of the committee meetings

We are struggling to get the publicity for events and we are not taking advantage of good opportunities. Can we find some money to help us publicise?

We do need to find a sustainable business model, but this building is an experiment and it is unique.

Paul said that there have been a number working on the business plan and It will be ready soon.

We need to get to a stage where our rents/room hire/events are more than expenditure. Up until now we have relied on grants but we need to get in to a position that our income covers expenditure. The margin is less than 20% about £4-5000/month. However we are paying back a loan which will be done at the end of the year.

We are constantly assessing how we can get more money in so we are asking shareholders to bring ideas.

Trish reminded the group that we have only been operating for 4 years so we are doing really well. She also answered how much is regular bookings and how much is one offs.

Space hire really needs pushing so we can hire it out during the day. We really need to reach out to local businesses to promote space. If we can get the rooms hired out 50% of the time it would make a big difference.

Suggestions were made about local councils and to go further like Bristol and Exeter but all the staff are limited by time.

There was then a discussion about Bocabar and that people might be put off booking space if they have to get their catering through them as it is more expensive. There was a debate about this and some shareholders felt that a lot of business is lost because they don’t want to use the Bocabar but then Rory pointed out that some people book events because of the Bocabar. Gareth pointed out the need to acknowledge the substantial financial contributions the Bocabar have made over the years and supported the need of the community. It was agreed that further discussions should be had about whether people can bring in their own catering/food and whether for certain events they can bring in their own drinks.

One shareholder said that they find the website very difficult to use and that it is too image heavy. They can’t get the information they are looking for. The website is overdesigned and takes too long, the menu is horrific. Someone said that she doesn’t list the events for the RBB in her paper as the website is too hard to use. Alison said that we can start sending her the listings and that we have introduced a search bar.

It was also mentioned that the advert in the oracle is not easy to read. The Basis magazine is the only comprehensive list of RB events but it comes out half way through the month so some of the events have passed.

It was suggested for letting regular empty slots we could push special rates? Alison said that we talked about it but that could encourage people to hold off bookings.

Solange raised a question about the progress with Strode and Building C.

At this point Rory suggested we close the formal agenda and move to Building C.

Alison said that Jemma Coles left in March and that the steering group for Building C is Paul Eavis, Tom Clark, Tim Knock, Alison Belshaw and Sarah Sander-Jackson.

In December 2017 the Board considered options and focussed on Building C.

We want it to be used for training for young people and involve communities.

Strode College have conducted a feasibility study and the project coordinator has a meeting with the architect and the steering group next week. Stroud board will look at that study at the end of June then put plan. We will then consult with Shareholders.

We discussed about parking situation and that there is a bus route so would not put off the college. Someone suggested a green travel plan and that the college could put on a shuttle bus.

Strode College would be in charge of the finances for part of the building and we would be in charge of the funds for our bit.

Concerns were raised about moving the garden but that has always been in the plans. If it does have to be moved we will find space for it.

Gareth reminded everyone that the costs turned out to twice what was predicted which was why we looked elsewhere and we had to put the original plans on the backburner. Until we have the commitment for substantial chunk of financial assistance there is not point looking at alternatives. We have a wish list but we will have to wait and see.

Geri suggested 3 monthly meetings with shareholders.

Rory introduced new board members – Helen Da Silva, Geri Laithwaite, Dana Amma Day and 2 others who were not here Rachael Inman and Rosie Parks.

Date set for next shareholders meeting – 2nd July at 7 p.m. and it was suggested that we should bring food to share.

Next AGM is on the 19th of November at 7p.m.

Please can everyone send comments on minutes to Alison.