



Whitgiftian Association Chairman's Report for 2020 AGM

On behalf of myself and the other members of your Committee, may I begin my Report by offering you and your families our very best wishes. 2020 has been in equal parts surreal and unsettling, indeed in many cases heart-wrenching; we must all hope for better days ahead.

Despite the backdrop, the year has been a busy one.

School alumni office

As you will all know, the School, under the stewardship of Chris Ramsey, is assuming direct responsibility for the management of its relationship to and with its alumni, with a view to entirely reframing that relationship.

Creating an engaged, supportive alumni network is crucial to the realisation of the School's medium to long term ambitions. An informed and engaged alumni are, it is thought, likely to be loyal supporters of the School and its best ambassadors. As well as offering marketing and promotional support across their personal and professional networks, they are considerably more likely to "give back" to the School in some way, whether that involves the sharing of experience and insight with prospective and current School boys or the provision of financial support to assist the School in offering the benefits of a Whitgift education to many boys who would otherwise be denied one.

The School will be ramping up its efforts in this regard over the course of the next year.

All of us, I'm sure, understand how transformational a first-class education can be, both in individual and societal terms. The Headmaster and his alumni team deserve our respect and support in this endeavour.

We have long known that all this would involve the School's alumni office occupying much of WA's space, both in terms of its functions and its broader purposes and that the natural consequence of this would be that WA leaves the stage at some point in the relatively near future. The School has its own alumni database and has, until recently, put this to use in organising reunions of year groups and the like. Further, over the course of 2021 the alumni office will assume responsibility for newsletter and magazine production (albeit assisted by a cast of regular (WA) contributors). In short, then, WA's scope of responsibility is shrinking. The School certainly sees value in the creation of an advisory committee of old boys to provide insight and support to the alumni office on an ongoing basis, but as currently constituted the WA has no role in such arrangements.

All this said, while the future of the Croham Road Clubhouse and grounds remain uncertain there is no case for the winding-up of WA.

Croham Road

The overriding objective of the WA is to secure the long-term future of the Croham Road site, for the ultimate benefit of:

- 1) current and future (sporting and/or social) members of Whitgift Sports Club Limited ('WSC')¹;
- 2) the School; and
- 3) the broader community.

Our vision for the site is one which provides sporting and social opportunities for all, regardless of sex, age, ethnic or religious background or disability.

The survey of the Clubhouse commissioned by WA in the early part of the year makes absolutely clear that this vision cannot be achieved unless the facilities on site are redeveloped or, at the very least, significantly upgraded.

As well as the very obvious financial challenges this entails, there are additional legal challenges. The conveyance by which OWTL acquired the site from the John Whitgift Foundation (the 'Foundation') back in 1950 mandates *inter alia* that the consent of the Foundation be obtained in advance of any scheme of redevelopment or upgrade.

Given this and our hope that the Foundation might be prepared to make an investment in the site it is clearly of primary importance that we engage with them (in the first instance through the School) as a matter of priority. To this end, we are currently engaged in a dialogue with the Headmaster and the Chairman of the School's Governors.

Clearly we cannot expect the Foundation to make any material investment in the site if it is not squarely in its interests (and the interests of the School) that it do so. Nevertheless, early discussions suggest there to be broad commonality of interest and therefore grounds for cautious optimism that a mutually agreeable settlement might be reached in respect of Croham Road.

Croham Road is an emotive subject for many, in particular past and present WSC members and the sports clubs who call Croham Road home. By way of reassurance, there is no intention on our part to

¹ WSC is the umbrella corporate entity through which the sports clubs (OWRFC, OWCC, COWHC, OWFC & OWSC) are incorporated. Membership of WSC is open to the general public (not just Whitgift School alumni).

simply hand over the site to the School – if we are able to agree terms that we think to be compatible with our vision for the site we will put them to you for your agreement. In the interim, WSC will remain fully represented in all such discussions.

Further, we must, indeed will, keep our options open, so any serious contribution to this issue is greatly to be welcomed. To this end, I want to acknowledge the OWRFC's recent development proposals, which many of you will have seen. They are credible and contain much that is useful. Before any work is done off the back of them, however, I would merely ask that for the moment WA be given room to continue its dialogue with the School/Foundation without the heat that such work might generate. Should it need reiterating, one way or another all routes to the redevelopment of the site lead back to WA and ultimately the Foundation.

WSC

As I reported in our most recent newsletter, WA has now acquired ownership of WSC. Its objectives in doing so are twofold:

- 1) to stand behind it financially;
- 2) to improve its corporate governance, so its constituent sports clubs come to be fully invested in it and participate fully in its proceedings in the interests of themselves and the wider club.

Each of the constituent sports clubs have been invited to appoint a member to the board of WSC and it is on that forum that the interests of the sports clubs will be projected and represented. Indeed, by the night of the AGM the newly-populated WSC board will have met for the first time.

While that board contains a number of WA appointees, there is no intention that it rubber-stamp decisions taken at WA level. Rather we hope for, indeed require, robust participation from all its members. Our expectation is that WSC will long outlive WA. It is therefore essential that all the sports clubs have a voice in shaping its future.

Conclusion

While WA will continue for the foreseeable future, at some point it will cease to function as an alumni organisation in the conventional sense. At that point, there is a strong case for it ceasing to require the payment of membership subscriptions.

For the moment, however, we ask for your continued support in 2021.

Whitgift Benevolent Society ('WBS' or 'Society')

Finally, given the time of year I wanted to say a few words about the WBS.

The Society was formed over a hundred years ago to help OWs encountering difficulties and problems in their lives. More recently, the Society's remit has been expanded to embrace not just OWs but anybody that has an association with the School; it now helps current OWs, members of staff, indeed anybody who might form part of the "Whitgift Family".

The Society's committee, made up entirely of OWs and on which I am privileged to serve, deals with a great variety of cases and situations, ranging (by way of quick illustration) to a current schoolboy on a bursary whose parents are struggling to cover the extra cost of a cricket tour to an OW who has run

into serious difficulties in his life and needs assistance. Each case is considered by the committee and a decision then taken as to the type and level of support the Society can offer. Although financial assistance is often at the top of the priority list, the support, advice, sympathy and friendship the Society and its members can provide are sometimes of equal importance.

By way of clarification, the Society is not itself a provider of bursaries.

The Society currently has over 70 subscribing members, almost all of whom are OWs. WBS members are encouraged to keep their eyes open for anybody within the Whitgift Family who may be in need of the Society's help. Anybody who would like to know more about the work of the Society, perhaps knows someone the Society might be able to help, or would like to become a subscribing member of the Society should contact one of the officers:

Richard Martin, Chairman (housemartinrp@btinternet.com)

Peter Dunn, Secretary and Membership Secretary (peterdunn75@gmail.com)

It really is a most worthy cause and I recommend it to you wholeheartedly.

John Etheridge
2 December 2020