

The Honourable Company of Gloucestershire: Strategy for 2020 / 21

Background

The objectives of the Company are to serve the County of Gloucestershire (“For Gloucestershire”) and to provide fellowship for the membership, the latter serving as a catalyst for the former. While these remain unchanged, the impact of Covid 19 requires a re-assessment of how they are to be achieved both in the short term and the medium to long term. While largely outside the control of the Company, it seems probable that restrictions on some activities may last for a while. The requirements and priorities for the County will of necessity change, with real pressure being felt across all sectors.

There is an understandable desire to do something promptly, perhaps especially by those of us and some of our membership who are restricted by dint of age and other conditions. On the other hand, many members will be making significant contributions individually and through their own charitable associations. However provided, it is highly probable that the needs arising from the present crisis will be long term and there will be a need for sustained support within the County, perhaps when the attention of some has moved on to other things. Even when restrictions on activity are modified or lifted there may be a reluctance by some to go back to previous ways of doing things.

Court had a preliminary discussion on these issues and their impact on the contribution and work of the Company at its meeting in April. While some changes in circumstances will necessarily be restrictive, others can be catalytic and will focus our minds on new and potentially better ways of doing things. Court might initially consider the issues under three headings: For Gloucestershire, Fellowship, and the administration of the Company.

For Gloucestershire

The impact of the pandemic on the County, as elsewhere, will be both short and long term and will affect all sectors. The Company will need to decide where it can best make a contribution. In its response the Company will consider the following:

- **Partnerships:** the HCG to work more than ever in partnership with others. Existing partnerships and connections will be maintained and developed. While some will be at Company level, others will best be developed and implemented at Interest Group level, with the knowledge and, where appropriate, the agreement of Court. The Company and interest groups will appraise themselves of the priorities for partners, such as the LEP, in managing the crisis and post-crisis periods.
- **Charitable giving:** many members of the HCG will be supporting individual charities and organisations in the County in a private capacity. The initial response of the HCG Charitable Trust, like a number of major funders in the County, to place funds with the Gloucestershire Community Foundation (GCF) is a very positive move. A specific donation was also given to the Long Table Project following an approach from + Rachael, Bishop of Gloucester. The Company has also, on request, made members aware of some other requests for support. The financial implications of the pandemic on the charitable and other sectors is beyond the scope of the HCG to make a meaningful monetary contribution on its own, but the Company

can have an input into the wider discussions on supporting the many Gloucestershire charities through, for example, the Community Support Group.

- **Contributions in kind:** it is likely that the most effective contribution of the Company is through time, expertise and encouragement. The partnership with the Cranfield Trust is an excellent example of how this might work. We might also, for example, initially focus on those organisations we have helped in the past.
- **The Gloucestershire Lecture:** the 2020 Gloucestershire lecture, which was originally scheduled for March, will now be given at 5pm on Wednesday the 17th of June on line and will be available subsequently on U Tube. In future we will plan to record such events anyway for subsequent availability to members, or in the case of the Gloucestershire Lecture, more widely.
- **Annual Schools' Science Lectures:** it is hoped that the 2020 lectures will be able to go ahead in some format. Previous discussions about recording and making the lectures more widely available have come to nought, but should be brought to fruition now both for 2020 and in discussions about the future relationship with Cheltenham Festivals.
- **Stimulating Discussion:** in both the short and longer term the HCG is not afraid of being proactive in organising more public contributions such as meetings and discussion forums, again in partnership with others where appropriate. The concept of a 'think-tank' for the County is something that the Company would wish contribute to.
- **Interest Groups:** the Company's Interest Groups are best placed to advise on how contributions may best be made in their areas.
 - Armed Forces Group:
 - Arts and Heritage Group:
 - Business Group (including rural affairs and education):
 - Community Support Group (including sport):

Fellowship

Fellowship provides a means of developing the Company's contributions to the County, and is the most tangible benefit of membership for many. The 'fellowship programme' is the most obvious and immediate casualty of the current crisis and restrictions. It has led to the cancellation or postponement of events such as the Installation Dinner (May the 14th), and a number of events such as the Voyager trip (May the 1st), those organised by the Arts and Heritage Group, and the visit to the House of Lords. A timetable for the rescheduling of some of these is not entirely in the Company's hands but dependent on the relaxation of current restrictions by Government on a national or regional basis. The Company should also recognise that given the age profile of its membership Covid 19 may affect us for longer than some other organisations, both due to continuing lockdown requirements for some groups and the vulnerability of some of our members.

Concerns may well persist following relaxation of the current restrictions, influencing individual members desire to attend meetings and events. We will need to be very clear of the arrangements for any event so that members can make their own risk-benefit assessment. Virtual attendance will need to be made available wherever feasible.

Honourable Company Annual General Meeting, planned for the 10th of November, 2020: we will need to hold the AGM in one form or another whatever the restrictions and concerns still in place. We should plan both in terms of a speaker and a venue, recognising that the format may need to be changed nearer the time. Jamie Tabor has agreed to speak in his role as chair of the GCF (Gloucestershire Community Foundation) and will be accompanied by the GCF CEO Talitha Nelson; he will speak about their response to Covid19 and the lessons learned. The Company was scheduled to hold the installation dinner in May at the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) and, subject to availability, could use the RAU for the AGM. A precise room or lecture theatre can be agreed nearer the time. Arrangements should be made to make the event available virtually, both live and subsequently.

Annual Dinner: The addition to the calendar of a dinner to replace the cancelled installation dinner would probably be welcomed by members, and could be scheduled now for the spring of 2021, though the format might be problematic. In terms of location it will be interesting to see what options different venues develop as their response to a new environment. We need to remember that we had in mind to use Tewksbury Abbey in 2021 for a function as part of the Abbey's celebrations.

Interest Group (IG) Events: in the short term it will be helpful for IG's to organise virtual events that members can log in to, either live or through recordings.

Specifically the **Arts and Heritage Group** might consider recorded pieces, made available to members on line, that relate to visits arranged but now postponed, such as that to Anne Chambers' Kiftsgate Gardens, which could serve as a precursor to subsequent visits. Some locations may already have videos available for such use. Virtual visits to some venues may replace visits for some members in the future.

The Armed Forces Group might consider a recorded conversation with our host for the postponed tour of the House of Lords, and the Business Group for the potential visit to Javelin Park.

Many organisations arrange stand-alone webinars, individually or in series, where individuals are interviewed or topics explored. It would be good to uncover expertise in the production of recordings within the Company's membership.

In the absence of other gatherings of the membership it is important that regular and perhaps more frequent contact with members is maintained (updates, further newsletters) and other virtual events created (as above, this year's Gloucestershire Lecture delivered online; virtual meetings such as talks or 'evenings with', precursors for future events and visits). As restrictions ease we need to think creatively about physical events that meet the prevailing needs, such as smaller events in more open environments. We will continue to remind the membership of the availability of the Company Almoner.

Administration of the Company

It seems probable that restrictions on movement and gatherings will be maintained for a while and that Company meetings, such as Court (next meeting 16th of June), IG Chairs (19th of May) and Interest Groups (various) will need, at least in the short term, to be carried out virtually or by (electronic) correspondence. The capacity to use Zoom or Microsoft Teams is valuable and we need to continue to assist group members, and the general membership, to use them, and to help IGs organise meetings where necessary. The same considerations will pertain for the Charitable Trust.