



Honorary President HE The British Ambassador to Belgium

**Minutes to the Brussels British Community Association's
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

held on Wednesday 15 July 2020

**as a Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams)
from 18:30 – 20:00**

Attendees:

H.E. Martin Shearman, British Ambassador to Belgium
Glenn Vaughan, Chairman BBKA
Glynis Whiting
Steve Robinson
Nigel Cameron
Anna Cameron
Lilian Eilers, Chair of British & Commonwealth Women's Club
Tim Reynolds
Amanda Newell
Chris Dalton
Christopher Thubron
Malcolm Johnson
Simon Pascoe
Tracie Ryan
Charles White
Nick Compton

Apologies for Absence:

Clive Hinchcliffe
Bernard Mills Chairman/President Brussels Madrigal Singers
Muriel Lowe
Eileen Chiles
Alan Davis
Léon RUBIN
Liz Taylor
Susannah Haan
Nikki Hayes

1. Approval of Minutes of AGM of 16 May 2019
Tim Reynolds proposed the approval of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 16th May 2019. Lilian Eilers seconded the motion and they were approved. There were no matters arising.
2. Address by HE Ambassador Martin Shearman
HE Martin Shearman, the British Ambassador looked back over the year. He explained that the Embassy had been very busy preparing for BREXIT at the end of January and maintaining the long relationship between Belgium and UK. He cited the event for the British Community in the Grand Place hosted by the Mayor of Brussels at the end of January as one illustration of the warmth of bilateral ties. The relations between UK and Belgium go back through history as the commemorations last autumn of 75 years since the liberation of Belgium had



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demonstrated. He thanked the BBCA for their work to inform British residents of their rights under the Withdrawal Agreement.

Looking ahead, the future relationship between UK and Belgium, preparing for the end of the transition period and supporting British business and residents occupy much time for the Embassy. He noted as encouraging signs as some big investments in UK by Belgian companies took place this year. Bilateral cooperation on foreign and security policy also remains important, with both countries on the UN Security Council and re-establishment of a resident Defence Attaché in the Embassy.

Regarding the UK's departure from the EU, the Ambassador made clear that the transition period will happen at the end of the year. The UK Govt set out its approach in February to negotiations with the EU on the future relationship. It published proposals in May for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and other agreements on fisheries, law enforcement cooperation etc. These draw heavily on existing precedent. UK will no longer operate under the rules of the Court of Justice after the end of the transition period. Negotiations were currently ongoing, and it remained the UK Government's objective to secure agreement on an FTA, though there were still significant issues to resolve.

The Embassy is preparing for 1st of January. There are many points to make clear including border issues with the ports to ensure mutual understanding of procedures as well as helping British residents in Belgium transition to their new status and obtaining new ID cards. The Belgian authorities have said that all registered British residents will receive a letter before the end of the year on obtaining their new residency card under the Withdrawal Agreement. The Embassy is pressing for early clarity on the exact procedure.

The Ambassador noted the ongoing challenge of Covid-19 to public health and the economic impact.

The Ambassador concluded by welcoming the good cooperation between the BBCA and the Embassy and thanking the BBCA for its work to support UK residents in Belgium. He looked forward to further cooperation.

Glenn Vaughan asked the Ambassador if there are still issues for UK residents in Belgium after BREXIT which are still not settled. The Ambassador informed that the Withdrawal Agreement protects the rights of existing residents so long as they are registered in Belgium for living /working / social security and healthcare etc. Frontier workers will also be able to continue commuting as normal.

Simon Pascoe asked when the UK lift the Covid restraints which are affecting frontier workers. The Ambassador explained that the UK had lifted the quarantine requirement for arrivals from Belgium. Belgium had introduced a traffic light system for arrivals from the UK, EU and Schengen with quarantine required for arrivals from red zones and recommended for those from amber zones. Leicester was currently listed as a red zone. Members are advised to regularly check the Belgian Foreign Affairs website where the traffic light system is updated every day at 4pm as well as UK Government travel advice.

Simon explained that the British Chamber has a close relationship with Belgian Ports Zeebrugge and Ostend which are concerned about impacts to fishing after Brexit. The Ambassador explained that the UK is seeking a Norway style agreement where quotas are subject to annual agreements.

Chris Dalton asked what impact for British nationals following Michael Gove's announcement on passports, pet passports, driving licence requirements.

The Ambassador explained that there was not yet an agreement on pet passports after the end of transition period. Otherwise British residents travelling to UK would travel as they now did, though they should travel with their passport and Belgian residency card. At some point in 2021 the UK would request Belgian visitors to travel with a passport rather than ID card. The Embassy has a monthly forum on Facebook to discuss ongoing issues for British residents and recommended concerned members to join.

Tim Reynolds expressed concern that there appear some Brexiteer members of Parliament intent on tearing up the Withdrawal Agreement. The Ambassador replied that this is not Government Policy.

3. Chairman's Report

Glenn Vaughan explained that the BBCA had had a very busy year in 2019. There were 3 BREXIT briefings hosted during the year which over 1200 people registered and of which around 50% attended, many joining this type of event for the first time.

The Summer Garden Party held at the Royal Brussels Cricket Club was a great success and he thanked the club, the charities and volunteers who ensured the day was a great success.

The BBCA Christmas Party was last year held at the Chatelain Hotel. Glenn thanked Tony and Angela Lowe who performed on the night as well as the British School Parents Choir for their lively Christmas songs. Glenn thanked the hotel and the BBCA social events team – Amanda Newell, Nikki Hayes and Tracie Ryan for their great organization.

Through these events the BBCA succeeded to raise 4,540 euros which was given to the charities close to the BBCA, namely the British Charitable Fund, the Royal British Legion, the Wednesday Club and the Community Help Service.

Glenn concluded by expressing his thanks to Alison Rose, ex British Ambassador to Belgium who returned to the UK last year, for her great support for the organization and many associations linked to it on behalf of the British Community.

This year the BBCA successfully hosted one BREXIT briefing which was attended by 150 people before COVID put everyone under lock down. Sadly, the Summer Party was cancelled, and these cancellations will have a negative impact on the BBCA's ability to raise funds for the deserving charities in this hour of need.

Glenn concluded by emphasizing the BBCA's gratitude to the Ambassador, our Patrons especially the Fry Group, ING, the British School of Brussels and Eurocity for all their support and to all the sponsors and volunteers who do great work giving their time, energy and care for the organization and the community.

Lilian Eilers introduced herself as the incoming Chair of the British and Commonwealth Women's Club. The Club is currently struggling with COVID and considering how to open its clubhouse for members in a safe environment. In the meantime, there are Zoom chats to maintain the community and the Club has organized 7 walks around Brussels this year raising money for charity.

Chris Dalton explained that the Wednesday Club is also having difficulty providing community for its elderly members. He is able to provide support on an individual basis but there is no view to bringing back together this high-risk group.



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4. Treasurer's Report and approval of Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2019

Christopher Thubron presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2019, a copy of the report having been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

The Net Worth of the BBCA was €16,069 compared with €15,134 at the end of 2018 increased by the surplus for the year of €935. The main component was the bank balances of €17,047 and after deducting the debts of c.€1,000 explains the net worth.

Income from subscriptions was stable at €4,950 and from events increased to €1,604 compared with €486. Expenses increased by a little over €500 to €1,079, due mainly to increased expenditure on development of the website leaving a excess of Income over Expenditure of €5,475 of which €4,540 was donated equally to the four charities leaving a surplus to carry forward of €935.

Christopher thanked Neil Anderson who sadly passed away last Christmas for his sterling job auditing the accounts for the last 6 years. He also expressed thanks to Steve Robinson for stepping in at short notice to review the 2019 accounts and looks forward to work with him in the future.

Malcolm Johnson proposed the approval of the Accounts. Amanda Newell seconded the motion and they were approved.

5. Approval of the Budget for 2020

Christopher Thubron presented the budget which had been circulated to members with the notice of the AGM. Income from subscriptions of €4,900 is forecast to be similar to the previous year but income from events was forecast as nil depending on the Covid-19 developments. Expenses were expected to increase to €1,500 due to costs of developing the website. An Excess of Income over Expenditure was forecast to reduce by €2,076 leaving an budget surplus of €3,400 available for donations to the charities, There were no matters arising.

Malcolm Johnson proposed the approval of the Budget for 2020. Lilian Eilers seconded the motion and they were approved.

6. Resignations and nominations and changes to the Conseil d'Administration

Glenn Vaughan informed that Helen James and Miguel Toledano had announced their intention to step down from the Conseil d'Administration and thanked them for their great service over some years. He also thanked Alan Davis for taking over Miguel's role as Social Secretary in our time of need.

There were no new nominations and it is hoped that positions now open could be filled later this year.

7. Election of the Conseil d'Administration

Chris Dalton proposed the approval of the Election of the Conseil d'Administration. Charles White seconded the motion and it was approved.

8. Election of the Independent Reviewer of the Accounts

Tracie Ryan proposed the approval of Steve Robinson as the Independent Reviewer of the Accounts. Lilian Eilers seconded the motion and it was approved.



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9. Any Other Business

There was no other business

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