Stratford Society AGM and talk by Aaron Corsi of BID
Monday 16 March 2026

Aaron Corsi updated us on the BID's Arts and Culture Strategy and the Town website. There has been a public survey about the existing assets and hopes for the town, and the results included some very positive feedback.

There are six themes for the development of the Arts and Culture Strategy:

- Inclusivity and welcoming
- Diversity of art and culture
- Pride in Shakespeare
- Going beyond existing assets
- Connecting with people
- The future

All of the organisations involved have endorsed it and the BID has 10 years to shape it and make it a reality. There is a Steering Group of 10-12 organisations which met recently, with a wider group of 50-100 organisations which will be involved intermittently.

The 'Town of Culture' application is now active and Stratford will be applying for it immediately. Stratford has an image problem in that it may be considered 'too cultured' already to need this award. There are lots of ideas and Aaron will keep us informed of the action plan. The main difficulty at present is funding. All of the work is voluntary at present.

The new town website has been launched in the last month so that information can be available all in one place. This is separate from the BID website. Many organisations are involved in putting events on the website. One has to 'claim' one's listing and put on opening times to start it off. The site also needs an app for tourists. Aaron noted that footfall is increasing, however, it is not just numbers that count, it's also spending! And residents also need to be drawn in. People need to be targeted. Investors will follow new ventures. Note: The site is **not** a forum, no comments are allowed.

The AGM followed.

1. Apologies: Ian Fradgley
2. Minutes of the last meeting – not available
3. Chair's Report – there was a wide variety of talks and the meetings were well attended and appreciated. The Stratford Heritage Exhibition, set up in conjunction with the SBT, was very successful. It was run by volunteers, including having a first aider for every shift. There were many visitors, and it was well received, and visitors made purchases and gave donations. Next year we shall have more speakers and another exhibition.
4. Treasurer's Report – There are still Restricted Reserves for StratFire. There have been more plaques and the society has a healthy bank balance. StratFire still has £9,000 to spend as the dendrochronologist has been indisposed. Re. the Stratford Heritage Exhibition there were 7,526 visitors to the exhibition. Bob Bearman commented that the latest plaques were due for delivery and will be laid soon. This phase of the project is ending and the leaflet will be revised, with walks along the spine being offered.

5. Stratford Heritage Exhibition (SHE) – Ellie Stevenson (chair of the SHE Steering Committee) reported. In February 2025 the Stratford Society took responsibility for implementing and overseeing the exhibition, having been approached by David Austin and others; the long-term aim being to establish a permanent museum/heritage centre. The exhibition was open from July to September, 4 days per week (after the first two weeks), Thursdays to Sundays, a total of 48 days. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT) provided support including access to Harvard House, and contributed display cases, images and artefacts. It also provided building training for volunteers. There were 27 volunteers, including 9 first aiders. Volunteers worked in pairs, with a morning and afternoon shift, plus a lunchtime shift later on which covered the handover period and was particularly useful at this time of day. Volunteers could sign up for shifts via the SignUp website.
6. The exhibition was free to enter and we had over 7,500 visitors in the three months. £1,435 was received in donations, and sales of artwork, books and cards contributed £421 to the Society. Stratford District Council also supported the exhibition. There were 528 feedback forms completed and over 1,400 comments in the visitors' book. The exhibition included an original drawing by Ken Morgan of The History of a Bridge, nine interpretation posters on different themes, four display cabinets containing historical artefacts (objects), several maps (which were very popular) and a video looking at Harry Cowan's canal basin model. The children's colouring table was also popular. The exhibition was promoted via the Society's website and through printed flyers.

   The demographic distribution (as shown by the feedback forms) was as follows – 79% were over 45 years; 65% were over 55; 90% identified as white/white British; 88% were from the UK and approx. half of these were local (i.e. a CV37 postcode). The average number of visitors per day was 156 but obviously this varied. On Saturday 16 August, the day with the most visitors overall, there were 285. Saturday was the most popular day in the week with 2,153 people visiting on a Saturday, in total. In terms of the three most popular weeks, these were in August, with the last week in September being the fourth most popular week. Volunteers tended to divide their time between working inside and standing outside to greet people and encourage them to visit the exhibition. 53% of visitors were just passing by, so that was a good strategy. 18% of visitors heard about the exhibition through word of mouth and 8% from social media. 97% of visitors rated their experience of the exhibition as good or excellent and no-one rated it as 'poor'. 75% of people rated the interpretation posters and objects as the types of content they liked best and, in terms of themes, early Stratford followed by people, then industry were the most popular topics.

   In terms of the future, people wanted more objects and a larger display space, and more interactive activities. People also wanted to see the whole of Harvard House (the exhibition was on the ground floor). The exhibition will be held in Harvard House again this year (2026) with new content. Themes will include the 100-year anniversary of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre fire, the 200-year anniversary of the Stratford and Moreton tramway, Tibor Reich and his work, suffragists/suffragettes, the Clopton House War Hospital, Stratford's heritage lamp posts and little-known women including patchwork artist Hephzibah Harris. A permanent heritage centre is a major aim, one where we can showcase the town's development and the history of its people and industry. Members of the audience also expressed an interest in the two world wars, in relation to Stratford.
7. There was a request for members to participate in the Shakespeare's birthday parade.

8. The members present accepted the Report and Accounts. They will be on the website for others to view.
9. The Independent Examiner for the accounts – Burgis and Bullock were proposed by the Treasurer and accepted by the members.
10. Election of Officers and Committee members. Lindsay MacDonald has resigned as Deputy Chair, and Margaret Cund (Planning) is willing to take his place. There is a vacancy for a Secretary, which is an important role. At present the Committee is taking it in turns to write the minutes.
11. AOB – There was a query about governance. Essentially it is an overseeing role to ensure that the Society keeps to the constitution and to relevant legislation, like copyright. Thanks were given to last year's officers and congratulations to the volunteers. The Society has made good progress and funds are healthy. Lindsay MacDonald appealed to members to step up as it is important for new blood to come into the committee. Lindsay served for 8 years, as Membership Secretary, Secretary, Chairman and Deputy Chairman. New members can be co-opted for the current year.

Report by Helen Elliott, Publicity Officer