

# suffolk Humanist & secularist NEWS

January 2011

*And a very Happy New Year to all our members*

2011 is not just a new year, but marks the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our group. We plan to formally celebrate this later in the year, but to kick off, on 11th March Margaret Nelson – one of the founding members – will be talking about the background and history of the group.

Media things....

If you are quick you will be able to catch an interview with committee member Tom Boles

## BHA CONSULTATION ON WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

The BHA is undertaking a consultation process and we have received the 16 page discussion paper and the 17 page questionnaire addressing a number of issues relating to how the BHA and Groups work together. The deadline for this 31<sup>st</sup> January.

Much of the questionnaire is concerned with collecting simple factual information e.g. age of group, numbers, frequency of meetings etc. but also included are several questions which may radically affect the future structure of the BHA and groups.

OUR MEETING ON TUESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> JANUARY WILL PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THIS BUT FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT MAKE IT, THIS NEWSLETTER CONTAINS A COPY OF THOSE QUESTIONS WHICH WE FEEL ARE OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO MAKE THE MEETING ON TUESDAY (AND WE KNOW THAT GENERALLY JANUARY MEETINGS ARE POORLY ATTENDED) THEN PLEASE LET US HAVE YOUR OPINIONS BY LETTER OR EMAIL BEFORE THE END OF JANUARY.

This section seeks your views on the issues raised in the "Working Better Together" document and provides an opportunity to hear your other thoughts and ideas.

**16. The paper lists the following as the main ways in which the BHA Board believe local groups of humanists can contribute to the advancement of the BHA's new strategy locally. To what extent do you agree with them? (See also next question)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Build and sustain a sense of fellowship for humanists locally, for mutual support, development and discussion of ethical issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campaign on local issues in line with national aims (for example on new faith schools).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Provide support for national campaigns locally (for example by encouraging people to write to their MP or arranging local lobbies of MPs).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase understanding and promotion of Humanism locally (for example on local radio or in local newspapers).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage local people to join the BHA, to help maintain its financial health.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promote Humanist Ceremonies, liaising with local celebrants.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engage on behalf of the BHA with local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs), schools, and other local bodies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop and maintain a close relationship with the BHA, including providing locally-informed input and feedback on policy and practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Are there other ways in which you think local groups can contribute? Any other comments?**

**17. Thinking about the role of your group in carrying forward BHA's aims and values, and the BHA's view of the role of local groups, what do you see as the main challenges and/or concerns?**

Given below are some of the points that have arisen in preliminary discussions. Please indicate how important (if at all) they are in your case, and add any others that are missing. This question will help us think about how best to enhance the effectiveness of the BHA/local group relationship.

	Very Significant	Significant	Neutral	Insignificant	Not an issue at all for us
Finding enough people who have the right competences, enthusiasm and time to do the work we would like to do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty in attracting new members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inadequate funds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differences of view within our group and its leadership on some of the BHA's aims and/or values (please give any details below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of knowledge in our group on BHA policies and activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of influence on BHA policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Losing some of our independence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We are also affiliated to the NSS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Too much emphasis on doing everything on-line - a lot of us prefer paper

Concerns about the way the BHA interacts with us on a day to day basis (please give details below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of alignment between BHA-appointed Local Development Volunteers and our local group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Differences of view with the BHA on celebrants (please give more details below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confusion between membership of the local group and separate membership of the BHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constitutional difficulties prevent us making the changes we would like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please give any more details and any other challenges you are concerned about.

18. On the positive side, what would you like to see changed in the relationship between the BHA and local groups to make the whole thing more effective?

19. Some local groups would like to become "branches" of the BHA. From the viewpoint of your group, and in the context of the strategy, do you think that would be a good idea? Yes: Definitely a good idea, Probably, Neutral, No: Probably a bad idea,

What do you think being a “branch” would mean?

20. The paper lists the ways in which the BHA currently supports local groups. In the context of the new aims and strategy, and the future roles of local groups, what other things could the BHA usefully do (subject to funding and resource availability)?

Some ideas suggested in preliminary discussions are given below. Please indicate how useful you think these would be, and any other ideas that should be given consideration.

	Very Useful	Useful	Neutral	Useless	Worse than useless
Stimulate the development of new groups in areas not currently covered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop a network of experienced local group focal points in various parts of the country to support those who wish to establish new groups and/or develop existing groups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop briefing packs on key topics, making use of local group experience/expertise and other inputs (for example, how to: attract and retain active members; campaign against a new faith school; establish links with SACREs, schools, voluntary organisations, “Inter-faith” groups etc; get the most out of local media; deal with Councillors and Council Officers; interact with local faith groups).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide training days	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accumulate and maintain a library of slide packs and other materials.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage informal networking between local groups, including ways to overcome geographical barriers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage coordination of communications to/from Affiliate Groups and BHA staff to avoid email confusion/overload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Is there anything else you think the BHA could contribute to the success of local groups?**

**21. In what other ways do you think the BHA's strategy can be advanced at a local level (either by local groups of humanists or otherwise)?**

**22. In addition to the BHA's strategy & aims, and the needs & priorities of local groups, the paper points out three additional factors that need to be taken into account in thinking about the future relationship between the BHA and local groups:**

- New political and economic environment
- Growth in BHA members, supporters and ceremonies
- More players in the field

**What other factors do you think should also be taken into account (if any)?**

**23. What do you think are the implications of the above factors (including any that you have added) to the current review of the relationship between the BHA and local groups?**

**24. The paper gives four criteria against which the success of any change to the relationship between the BHA and local groups could be judged:**

- Enable local groups to play their part in pursuing the BHA's strategy locally. Allow the BHA to pursue its strategy locally
- Meet the needs of local groups
- Be supported as a result by the great majority of (ideally all) local groups and other stakeholders, and by the BHA Board and Management. (It must be a "win-win")
- Be able to be implemented in practice in a reasonable time (say by January 2012) without absorbing too much effort on either side
- Not add significantly to costs or resource demands without compensating by increased revenue, increased resources, or diversion of existing resources.

**Are these the correct criteria for success? If not, what should they be?**

**25. The paper includes learning from some other organisations. What additional points could we learn from other organisations with which you are familiar?**

26. Anything else you would like to add?