Chairman's Report for The Art Society, Taunton, Evening (TASTE) AGM 12th November 2026.

This is now my fourth Chairmans report for the Taunton Arts Society, Evening AGM. It is important to point out that the committee is very much a team, with everyone involved doing a considerable amount of work behind the scenes to "keep the show on the road". Late cancellations by speakers and venue changes result in additional effort to ensure our programme stays largely on track and this is often time consuming. Once again we have lost a committee member, Helen Speakman, who was co-programme secretary. Helen stepped down over the summer and we will miss her organisational skills, knowledge of art history and enthusiasm in addition to her husband Marks expertise in wine selection and supply. The position of Vice Chair is still vacant and as yet we have not found anyone to volunteer for this role.

On the positive side Annie James continues as our helpful, friendly membership secretary, in spite of enduring the fractious situation every September with members queuing up to renew their membership and those who have helpfully already paid, plus visitors, converge on the desk. In future we will try to have someone on the door who can tick off paid up members as they arrive, allowing them to get to the bar more quickly.
Neil Cottey continues as our efficient treasurer keeping an efficient and close eye on expenses and the ever rising costs of travel claims and lecture fees. Sara Kelly our secretary has brought her retail experience to the sale of raffle tickets and keeps the committee in order. She was also responsible for organising the private garden visit to Barcroft Hall in June and hopes to do something similar for members next year.
Hilary Vaughan-Thomas has "womanfully" continued single handedly in the role as programme secretary. Compiling and delivering an interesting and varied programme is a challenge but I think she is continuing the excellent work.

Our President and founder member David Yates has been invaluable with his suggestions, hospitality and general help. He is due to receive the Patricia Faye Fund Award for service to the Arts Society at the regional meeting in a few weeks time -a clear indication that the Society, nationally, as well as locally, is indebted to him.

This year we have again suffered a small reduction in our membership numbers but financially this has been balanced by an increasing number of visitors to our talks. While undoubtedly this is beneficial these visitor numbers are relatively unpredictable and this practice does not allow us the the same level of financial security as having membership fees paid up front. However one of the benefits of the Queens Theatre, in addition to the

excellent technical expertise provided by Ben Charles, is that we have lots of space so please encourage your friends to come along as guests if you cannot persuade them to be members.

The Zoom facility seems to be working well, though occasionally some individuals have difficulty accessing the links which seems to be related to individual IT issues. We can now usually see who is accessing the links and will continue to make sure this is of value to members. If any member would like access to these please let me know and I can add your name to the list.

The Central Office of the Arts Society is under new leadership and some of you may have heard their adverts on Boom and FM Radio. They have been encouraging local societies to apply for charity status.This offers us potential, albeit complicated, financial benefits. Previously this was all felt with and managed centrally but partly due to the name change from NADFAS (which was a registered charity) to The Arts Society which is not; this has become more challenging. Your committee has discussed this at length and concluded that applying for charitable status is currentlyt not a route we want to follow. However if anyone is interested in pursuing this on our behalf please let us know.

And finally, as always many thanks to you, our members for your continuing support and interest. Any offers of assistance to the committee or suggestions for topics and speakers to feature in our programme is always welcome.