

Background to the 2023 SHARP AGM

To set the scene for the 2023 AGM at which an 'interim' Constitution is being proposed, the SHARP Committee felt that a little background may be helpful.

SHARP's 2009 crisis - the dawning of 'people's archaeology'

'Digging Sedgeford – a people's archaeology' (2014) describes the journey SHARP's founder, Dr Neil Faulkner, went through to establish the principle of 'democratic archaeology'. This included a 'first crisis' in 1996/7 where hierarchical principles were challenged and replaced by an experiment in public archaeology; and a 'second SHARP crisis' in 2008/9 when again a formal attempt was made to take over the project and impose a 'top-down' structure on it. Subsequent to this 'second crisis' the 2009 constitution therefore was agreed, establishing that all Committee members would be Trustees, and providing all members of SHARP with voting rights.

SHARP's 2018 amended constitution – democracy suspended

A situation in 2018 resulted in a new constitution being written and submitted to the Charities Commission with the following details amended as detailed in the minutes of the committee meeting from 14th October 2018:

"3. Constitution

This has been rewritten and was approved by the Trustees prior to this meeting. A copy of the Constitution is attached to these minutes. [] highlighted some of the changes from the previous Constitution –

- *Membership is now through becoming a 'Friend of SHARP' for which a fee will be payable.*
- *The Trustees have the power to refuse a membership application, and to cancel their membership at any time– their decision is final, there is no right of appeal.*
- *A Friend of SHARP may attend AGM but has no voting rights.*
- *AGM voting rights are restricted to Trustees, Directors, Committee members, and those appointed to the team for that digging season."*

Trustees were no longer required to retire and be reappointed at AGMs, but were instead appointed by other Trustees. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Constitution required annual AGMs to be held, it is clear from our records that no AGMs have been held by SHARP since 2017. Whilst this may be explained in part by the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of SHARP's Founder Director, Neil Faulkner, nonetheless the new SHARP Committee apologises to the membership for this hiatus in democracy.

The 2023 AGM and proposed 'interim' constitution - returning SHARP to its members

Another situation arose after the 2022 season which resulted in several of the trustees choosing to leave the organisation. This left only a few remaining trustees and so there was a need to recruit new committee members.

In doing so, however, a number of issues regarding the constitution came to light; and it was felt they were worth investigating.

The primary issue was the change in definition of who was a member of SHARP, as noted above. From its inception, it was conceived as a democratic dig where everyone had an equal say, as was reflected in the earlier, 2009 constitution.

This situation has left us spending a lot of time and energy sorting this out, instead of being able to fully concentrate on the archaeology, which let's face it, is why we're all here. So a team of people comprising of current, past and present 'SHARPIes' have been working hard to pull together the threads of what needs to be done to make SHARP be what it set out to be. A big part of that is finding out what everyone else involved in SHARP thinks too and how we should move forward into the future; a bit of democracy and consultation.

The starting point is the constitution, and we have created an interim one, based on the Charity Commission model for an Association Charity with a wider membership, which reinstates the full membership voting rights, for agreement at the AGM in July 2023. We then plan to consult the wider membership and community of SHARP before we decide the best course and finalise a constitution which will enable us to become a CIO – a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, if that is what the membership decides.

Moving towards a CIO will give people who would like to become trustees the reassurance of limiting their exposure to personal liability as a result of joining SHARP and we can therefore create a diverse and multi-skilled Board. Indeed, the prospect of SHARP becoming a CIO has already encouraged a large number of Committee Members to come forward and seek nomination as SHARP Trustees.

Both of these moves: to encourage wider membership in the running of SHARP as Trustees, and also to restore membership voting rights, take SHARP back to the principles of 'democratic archaeology' upon which it was founded.

We have had to reconstruct a membership list in order to be able to invite those who would once again be eligible under the proposed interim constitution to the 2023 AGM. We have done so by asking those registered on the SHARP website distribution list and through social media advertising who would be eligible members to confirm their details with us. From 2024, however, we will have the contact details of all eligible members.

SHARP Constitutions

The original 2009 constitution, amended 2018 constitution, and proposed 'interim' 2023 constitution are attached here:



SHARP_2009_Constitution.pdf



SHARP_2018_Constitution.pdf



SHARP_proposed_interim_Constitution_2023.docx

The Charity Commission's model constitution, including notes on its interpretation, etc., may also be found here: [Setting up a charity: model governing documents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/setting-up-a-charity-model-governing-documents)