

YHA's first Board of Trustees meeting since the AGM was held at YHA York last weekend. As ever, the sun shone throughout as we sat in the meeting room – if anyone wants to guarantee a sunny weekend away just ask me for the Board dates...



*Spot the hot air balloon - it really was a beautiful day!*

This time after a great hostel dinner, the evening entertainment was provided by YHA's very own Jon Smith, Head of Digital, who gave a tour de force presentation on YHA's digital journey, and thoughts for the future.

The meeting itself kicked off with a quick update on our position on international matters, in advance of the Hostelling International conference in Iceland later in the month. We then picked up on trading, where the Board heard from William Howarth, CFP, and Jerry Robinson, COO, about the tougher trading conditions that have affected us over the summer, and our current focus on boosting our volumes, particularly with groups.

Discussion continued with an update from Jake Chalmers, Property Director, on YHA London Stratford, where we continue to tick off the milestones before we finally get control of the land, and some early thinking on our future investment strategy and Key Performance Indicators.

We then moved on to progress reports on key projects. I updated the Board on the membership project, where we remain on track to introduce the new membership strategy over the next few months. Jerry updated the Board on recent progress in relation to volunteering, where the Board was very pleased to hear about the success of the new online Kinetics system, and the growth in youth volunteering. Jerry also presented a paper on customer feedback, which picked up on trends on guest satisfaction and complaints. While we have seen the recent increases in guest satisfaction levelling off, the Board was heartened to hear of a significant drop in complaints this year.

The meeting concluded with a paper on future options for the AGM, given the governance changes agreed earlier in the year, and a discussion on the potential for YHA to bid for some significant Government funding to help disadvantaged schools get more young people experiencing nature and the outdoors.

At lunchtime, Paul Keegan, Hostel Manager, gave a great presentation of the work he and the team have been doing to develop the business at York, including linking the hostel more closely to the local community. The increase in profile and local custom for the hostel and the café that has resulted is impressive.

Many thanks to Paul, Michelle and all the team at YHA York for hosting a really productive weekend, and to all who attended, including new Director, Anita Kerwin-Nye (a month before she starts!), Jon and Julie Lane, YHA's Head of Finance.

Next stop YHA The Sill in early December...