



Monday 5th January 2015
The Lion Hotel

Minutes

- **Introduction**

Harold sent his apologies – but also some relevant notes on the topics for today.

- **Matters Arising**

12 members were present and everyone seemed pleased with the new venue: the venerable character of the famous Lion Hotel, the friendliness of the staff who had arranged the chairs in a circle for us and the reasonable cost of coffee and tea served to us in the room or at the bar. There is no rent to be paid for the use of the room and cars can be parked free. Some members feel aggrieved by the way we were made to leave the Senior Forum room on the Town Walls and it was agreed that Ann would go personally and speak to the person in charge. Ann will report back at the next meeting where it can be decided whether to pursue the matter further.

- **Discussion Topics**

A short summary of the subjects and discussions follows:

Should payment be made to surrogate mothers?

- First we established that it is perfectly legal in the UK for women to act as surrogate mothers but that payments could only be 'expenses'.
- Naturally the idea of expenses was agreed to be woolly; for example, if the surrogate mother had given up a job throughout some of the pregnancy, then the loss of earnings must surely be expenses.
- During the ensuing widening of the issue, more interesting was the question of who had 'parental rights' over the child – the biological parents or the surrogate mother who carried the baby? There was a recent case in Australia where the biological parents only accepted charge of one twin born, leaving the surrogate mother with the responsibility of the other twin, a disabled child. In other words, if you don't like the product you have paid for, can you refuse to accept it? Nobody liked the idea of commercial business in surrogacy as is the case with people selling body parts like the liver or a kidney but everybody felt sympathy with women (and it usually is women) who desperately want a child. Where there is money, it is very difficult to stop these transactions. We are after all, in charge of our own bodies and do not want to live in a 'nanny' state. Everyone agreed there should at the very least be a contract drawn up between the two parties before the procedure begins.

Should assisted dying be made legal in the UK?

- I think that Harold's notes sent by email are a good starting point:

I believe that there is a need for Parliament to debate a change in the law that would allow assisted dying, subject to safeguards for vulnerable people. Some terminally ill people suffer against their wishes at the end of life, and some take matters into their own hands, including travelling at great emotional and financial cost to die in another country. The law as it stands means that doctors cannot help a patient to die. Prosecution guidance, endorsed by Parliament, can be interpreted such that friends or family may help someone to die without medical advice, but ultimately the risk of being prosecuted cannot be ruled out. The need for improved access to end of life care is recognised; and it is acknowledged that there are concerns that a change in the law might threaten potentially vulnerable people. Nonetheless, subject to the inclusion of safeguards to protect vulnerable people, there is the need for a change in the law on assisted dying for the small but significant number of dying people who will suffer, even with the best care.

The great majority in the room were for the legalisation of assisted dying – some giving moving accounts of their personal experiences with the death of loved ones, and it was concluded that 'we must be grown up about this subject and be able to make our own decisions'.

Only two people wanted to stress what had been mentioned – that, in practice, doctors do have ways and means of respecting the dying person's wishes. For example, there is a known phenomenon in hospitals and nursing homes of patients 'turning their face to the wall' that is, wanting to refuse all curative attempts or even sustenance. Even in Holland, where assisted dying is legal, only very few take up the option, so we must assume the old ways still pertain.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming opinion in the room was for legalisation of assisted dying.

Windfarms, solar farms, hydro-electric plants: Are you for or against?

- This topic got split up into too many subjects. This was due to Vivienne interpreting Pam's topic. In fact Pam wanted to discuss all eyesores in town and country, but of course as soon as windfarms were mentioned, members wanted to talk about green energy, so in that context, windfarms were agreed to be harmless to the environment. That sparked off figures quoted regarding the efficacy of windfarms, which was said to be disappointingly low – and certainly some people resented the fact that the commercial winners, as with solar farms, are the landowners who are granted huge sums in perpetuity for the use of their land.
- Nevertheless, nuclear energy leaves a negative legacy in the earth that lasts for 20 000 years so we must embrace 'green' energy. Everybody agreed that we should be building houses with better insulation.

- Then we could move back to the original subject and Pam wanted to have our agreement on other eyesores, in particular, garish shop signs and headings in our beautiful mediaeval town – one shop had been empty for 5 years and yet the town seemed to have no power to take down the offending shop heading. We all agreed that it was more than annoying, it was unacceptable, as was the plan to erect solar panels on the frontage of flats around the old market square. Town planners seem to accept mistakes were made in the past – such as the new indoor market on Shoplatch, but never learn from them.

Do you have to be good-looking to be popular?

- A light-hearted subject to round off the session? It certainly set pulses racing. However, there was very little division of opinion – not surprising since we were (almost) all ladies of a certain age (just one chap today). Very soon we had categorised the topic into some basic truths:
 - It is different for men and women: If you ask a man what he looks for in a woman he will say ‘good looks’, whereas a woman is apparently looking for ‘power’, which could be money, social position or job situation (e.g. Berlusconi, Bernie Ecclestone)
 - Those good looks give a woman power – so said Sophia Loren
 - With age, those good looks can be replaced by ‘elegance’, whereas men retain their ‘power’ even when older.
 - Those news presenter pairs, consisting of a much older man and a good-looking young woman, say it all.
- **Future Discussion Topics**
 - **To what extent does advertising fuel widespread discontent in our society?**
 - **Is cancer a good way to go?**
 - **Should a remark to a woman that she is pretty, be regarded as sexist?**
 - **Should celebrity footballers be allowed to return to their well-paid jobs after committing sexual crimes?**
 - **Women bishops – a good thing?**
- **Date of Next Meeting**
The next meeting will be held on **Monday 2nd February 2015 at 1000hrs** at The Lion Hotel, Wyle Cop. Viv offers her apologies now as she will be in Geneva. Would someone step in and chair the meeting please?

