

# Flamsteed Astronomy Society and Royal Museums Greenwich

Proposed Strategic Way Forward  
The What, Why and the How  
1 October 2012 Version 1.0

*Presentation to the Flamsteed Astronomy Society AGM  
by Mike Meynell and Malcolm Porter*

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# Background

- In response to a significant increase in our membership numbers in the past year, the Flamsteed committee tasked Mike Meynell and Malcolm Porter with negotiating a future strategy for the society with the Museum.
- A working party was formed with the museum consisting of:
  - Chris Styles – Director of Communication and Visitor Experience
  - Marek Kukula – Public Astronomer Royal Observatory Greenwich
  - Rob Edwards – Head of Science Education Royal Observatory Greenwich
  - Rosemary Gilbert – Head of Development
  - Rachel Harrison – Membership Manager
  - Mike Meynell – Flamsteed Astronomy Society
  - Malcolm Porter – Flamsteed Astronomy Society
- After a series of meetings with the museum a draft strategy was agreed by the Flamsteed committee on Wednesday 26 September. We are now presenting this strategy to the AGM to ascertain membership feedback.

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# Flamsteed Astronomy Society – History and Objectives

The society was formed in 1999 when Jane Bendall was asked by the Friends of the Museum to set up and run an Astronomy Society. Our first chairman was Eddie Yeadon. Lin Potter took over as chair in 2003. After the demise of the 'Friends', we became part of the museum membership in 2007.

The objective of the Flamsteed is to enhance the enjoyment and understanding of astronomy for its members, while supporting the programmes delivered by the ROG and promoting the public profile of astronomy.

The Flamsteed Astronomy Society operates from under the umbrella of Royal Museums Greenwich (RMG) and has been largely integrated through the museum membership.

All Flamsteed members are also members of RMG and pay an additional sum in order to be members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society.

The Flamsteed is unique amongst astronomy societies, both in the broad range of understanding, interests and skills of our members and the relationship we have with a national museum. No other society can offer such a range of unique facilities.

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# Benefits to Our Members

Up to 10 Flamsteed lectures per annum, held in the National Maritime Museum lecture theatre, with many eminent guest speakers.

Observing evenings, telescope workshops, solar viewing activities and a radio astronomy group. Regular monthly social meetings in the pub.

Access to and opportunity to work with professional astronomers at the Royal Observatory.

Private Royal Observatory tours, including the 28-inch refractor and possible private tours of the National Maritime Museum.

Free entry to the Cutty Sark.

Free fast-track entry to the new special exhibition programme at the Sammy Ofer Wing.

Free-of-charge access to the Peter Harrison Planetarium, Flamsteed House and the Meridian Courtyard.

Personal invitations to private views and an exciting programme of Members events.

10% discounts in shops, cafés and the new 16 Seconds West Brasserie overlooking Greenwich Park.

Concessionary discount on adult learning talks and courses.

Access to the elegant Members Room.

Quarterly newsletter and bi-monthly e-newsletter.

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# Benefits to the Royal Museums Greenwich

Ready pool of volunteers for observatory tours, Evenings with the Stars, solar viewing, etc.

Available access to a pool of intelligent, educated amateur astronomers who can:

- Provide support and input to the RMG's educators
- Provide lectures in areas such as telescope workshops, astro imaging etc.
- Work, in conjunction with the RMG, with external media providers such as the BBC, Channel 4, etc.

Provides a logical next step from the learning programme at the museum for those who are interested in continuing their interest in astronomy.

Solar viewing and (in the future) Radio astronomy provide active observing opportunities for visitors to the museum.

If telescope and astrophotography workshops are opened to the public, they may help to generate income for the museum.

Improves the profile of astronomy in the community through free observing events (Blackheath), social evenings, Flamsteed website and social media links.

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# Membership Survey Results

As the Society experienced significant growth in membership numbers since the start of this year, members were asked their opinion on continued growth of the society, capping membership numbers, bookings for lectures and ways of adding capacity. All options were scored on a scale of 1-6 where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 6 is 'strongly agree'.

Question – “Do you agree or disagree with...”	Agree	Disagree	Median Score	Notes
Continued growth of the society?	<b>51%</b>	49%	4	There would appear to be a demographic split between long-term and short-term members, with long-term members more in favour of a membership cap.
Capping membership numbers?	46%	<b>54%</b>	3	
Introducing ‘two-tier’ membership?	28%	<b>72%</b>	2	
Introducing booking on a ‘first come, first served’ basis for lectures?	<b>75%</b>	25%	5	Charging per lecture was clearly rejected. There was a majority in favour of booking on a ‘first come, first served’ basis across all demographic groups.
Charging per lecture?	22%	<b>78%</b>	1	
Holding extra ‘matinee’ lectures?	48%	<b>52%</b>	3	The introduction of matinees has practical constraints. Televising to an overflow area is under investigation.
Televising lectures to a big screen in an overflow area?	<b>54%</b>	46%	4	

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# Working Together with RMG

RMG have agreed that all lectures will continue in the NMM lecture hall, will remain free and that booking will be through the standard booking system, but with an improved user interface (process for the acquisition of a new booking system has started).

RMG staff will manage the entrance desk at lectures and will manage the provision of catering at lectures.

The Museum has no plans to actively promote Flamsteed membership. Equally, there are no plans to cap membership levels. Any growth should be organic.

Currently there are two special interest groups (solar and radio) and consideration should be given to adding additional special interest groups, such as observing and astrophotography.

Look at ways of improving the Flamsteed membership offering (e.g. private / curator tours of ROG exhibitions).

We are undertaking a review of the financial benefits of the Flamsteed to RMG, so that we have a better understanding of income, costs and intangible benefits.

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# Overall Strategic View or more specifically what might the Flamsteed Astronomy Society look like in two years time?

No cap on membership numbers, but unlikely to have significantly more members than today. On going monitoring of membership numbers with the Membership office.

Bookings for lectures on a 'first come, first served' basis, with televising to an overflow area to allow for 'walk-ups' on the night.

More interest specific groups to add understanding and improve socializing.

More support and assistance from RMG and more support to RMG from the Flamsteed.

More Flamsteed interaction with the public directly and through social media and increased involvement with the media. Dedicated media contact at RMG for all media enquiries and approaches.

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# Next Steps

- Take the considered views of the membership present and, where possible, incorporate them into this proposed 'Way Forward'. We are looking for an 'in principle' agreement that members present would like us to go back to the museum to gain final agreement on this strategy.
- Subject to the above, seek formal agreement with the RMG to the direction proposed.
- Incorporate the related changes into the Memorandum of Understanding (the document that defines our relationship with RMG).
- Work closely with RMG staff to move this directional outline into a clear strategy, together with deliverable tangible benefits to the RMG, the public and, most importantly, the Flamsteed Astronomy Society Members.

**To borrow a famous phrase from a very famous person**

**“Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps, the end of the beginning.”**

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# Questions

- Happy to take some questions this evening or email [flamsted@rmg.co.uk](mailto:flamsted@rmg.co.uk) with your feedback
- This presentation is on the website <http://flamsted.info/> under "***About us -> Committee Corner***"
- Direct link:  
<http://flamsted.info/minutes/FASstrategyV1.pdf>

