

**Dan Wass, CEO**

## Annual General Meeting 24 April 2025

Good afternoon, everyone. It is a pleasure to return here to the Hub for our 118th AGM.

Attendees at last year's AGM may remember that I mentioned that 2023 had presented more than its fair share of challenges - the path down from the highest peak in inflation for many years had been challenging and slow, the cost of living pressures still weighed on many households and despite base rates easing, competitiveness in both savings and mortgage markets had remained constant – and that we expected market conditions to remain delicate in 2024.

Well, without wanting to sound like a broken record – 2024 presented more than its fair share of challenges and I expect market conditions to remain delicate in 2025.

Market uncertainty may be the “new normal”, but our heritage and the durability of our business model are sources of real strength and afford us the opportunity to deliver member value in the short and longer-term. It's a pleasure to share the headlines from 2024 today.

Notwithstanding strengthened momentum across the business in H2 - 2024 was a year of consolidation given the priority placed on accelerating the repayment of our term-funding to the Bank of England and laying the foundations to our rolling investment in technology and change that will support our next phase of growth and long-term sustainability.

Advancing our repayment of TFSME to the Bank of England ahead of the 2025 deadline and preserving strength in our liquidity position meant that we moderated our new mortgage lending to £39m (compared with £59m in 2023) and eased our total assets marginally to £361m (down 5% on 2023). I am also pleased that our lending portfolio remained resilient, with low levels of arrears thanks to our very personalised approach to both underwriting and member contact.

As a mutual, we always seek to balance the interests of our savers and borrowers and in the context of sustained competition in both savings and mortgage markets, pressures on Net Interest Margin – the difference between income paid on savings and income earned on lending – were experienced across the sector. Our total income eased marginally to £7m and our costs increased to £6.1m as the Society faced into the same inflationary pressures of the wider economy, while maintaining investment in capability and systems for the long-term.

As a result, the Society's profits closed at £0.9m before tax – a reduction on 2023, but providing further strength to our capital base of £30.1m, which remains well ahead of regulatory requirements.

All in all - a resilient set of financial results, achieved in the context of persistent market uncertainty. And alongside our financial headlines, our 2024 annual survey of our 11,197 members saw 91% of members saying they were satisfied with the service they had received. Our charitable donations topped £25k to local causes.

With our mutual model (and lack of shareholders) we feel a real sense of duty to take a long-term view and I am particularly pleased that the Society was able to sustain its investment in our member proposition and support the community within which we are rooted.

In 2024 we made further strong progress across our 5 strategy priorities, and I'll draw out a particular deliverable from each – further information is shared in our Business Review booklet...

**Fit For Purpose** – *is all about placing financial stability and resilience at the centre of our growth ambitions.* We were pleased to extend our investment in technology (particularly security) and have laid the foundations for further targeted investments to strengthen our Society proposition over the longer-term. More on that shortly.

**Enduring Savings** – *is about how we seek to nurture growth in our membership through lasting savings relationships.* We launched a brand-new online service for savings members reaching product maturity and enhanced member experience for savings withdrawal requests.

**Crafted Lending** – *is at the heart of our purpose – bringing the best of our capabilities to craft lending solutions.* To that end, we enhanced our online application submission service for brokers, extended our Platinum proposition and refreshed our support services for members experiencing financial difficulty.

**Empowered Colleagues** – *reflects our commitment to realising a culture of continuous improvement, committed to inclusivity and the development and well-being of our colleagues.* We believe strongly that values count and are what set us apart – which is why we took great pride in the collaboration that informed our refreshed values in 2023 and extended that collaboration through 2024 across a range of well-being, development and diversity initiatives.

**Greater Good** – *captures our pride in supporting our local community and collaborating locally for the good of our communities and the environment.* We launched our first colleague led community fund in 2024 – designed by colleagues from across the Society, with criteria that embodies the values of the people that we work with and support community priorities. We were thrilled to award the first grant of £5,000 to Brighter Futures Together for the work they do to support young people's mental health and well-being.

And we were pleased to forge a new local partnership with the Bucks Business First awards – sponsoring the excellence in customer experience award, and CAB Bucks – for whom it was a privilege to support a few weeks ago at the London Landmarks Half Marathon.

The last few years have underlined for everyone the pace at which the world is changing. The Society's annual strategy review considered how we need to evolve in order to keep meeting the needs of our members sustainably and over the long-term. The groundwork was laid in 2024, but in 2025 we will advance our strategic priorities through our **Fit For Future** programme – a multi-year co-ordination of investment and evolution of our products and services that will underpin our next phase of growth.

Looking forward – 2025 is another milestone year for the sector and our Society calendar. This year marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building society movement in Birmingham and I look forward to joining those celebrations next month.

And later in May, we proudly celebrate 100 years of serving our members face to face, from our high street location in Chalfont St Giles. We look forward to marking that occasion with our local community and members.

Speaking of our support for the local community....

Towards the end of last year, the Society launched for the first time a 'colleague led' Community Fund and awarded a sum of £5k to **Brighter Futures Together** CIC, who are focused on creating projects and partnerships to boost young people's mental health and wellbeing.

I must also thank our members for their continued support towards our Greater Good commitment. Last year, you voted for **Aylesbury Homeless Action Group** to receive our annual grant of £5k from our 'Member led' Bucks Purpose Fund.

Aylesbury Homeless Action Group works tirelessly in supporting and advising those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or inadequately housed.

All of our work with the Bucks community would not be possible without the **Heart of Bucks** – who have been our key Charity Partner over the years. In congratulating them on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone, and wishing them the very best for the future.

Over the last few years, we have become accustomed to geo-political and macro-economic uncertainties. Very recent events make that feel like a gross under-statement. What is clear and certain, as the Society enters its 119<sup>th</sup> year, is that our purpose remains as relevant today as it was when the Society was first incorporated in 1907. Whatever the conditions, we will continue to be guided by our primary commitment to help people achieve financial security and home-ownership –

*The Bucks Way*

I would like to thank all my colleagues for their hard work - and you, our members, for your loyalty and support.

**Dan Wass, CEO**