

Friends of Wanstead Parklands

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held 10 June 2021 via a Zoom online meeting

The meeting opened at 7:21pm after a slight delay as it was initially not quorate.

The following members were present –

Richard Arnopp, Ali Bajwa QC (+2), Peter Brimson, Paul Clements, Janet Cornish, Garrett Fitzgerald, Alison Frost, Diane Gardner, Greg Harper, Maureen Henderson, Gill and Alan James, Tricia Moxey, Ralph Potter, Adrian and Alison Russell, John Sharpe, Jo Shore and Simon Skelding

and

Geoff Sinclair, Operations Manager of Epping Forest (guest).

1. Welcome and introduction

The meeting was chaired by John Sharpe.

The agenda, [minutes](#) of the previous AGM of 11 March 2020, [Chairman's report](#) and [financial statement](#) had been circulated by email in advance. No comments had been received or additional business notified.

Apologies had been received from Angela and Graham Kane.

Mr Sharpe thanked those attending for their support and for making the effort to attend. The Friends' [constitution](#) required them to hold an AGM by the end of February each year. On this occasion a traditional meeting was impossible due to Covid-related restrictions and the committee had reluctantly opted for an online meeting limited to members only and necessary business. He outlined the etiquette for the meeting, which as intended to ensure that the presentations were not subject to interruptions but that everyone who wished to participate had an opportunity to do so. In particular, microphones should be muted by everyone who was not actually speaking, comments should be signalled by use of the raised hand feature and questions saved to the end.

2. Financial Report 2020

Simon Skelding presented the financial report. He said that the Friends had experienced a “quiet” year in 2020; as events and other fundraising activities were paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The litter picking initiative had involved some investment in equipment but had also helped to generate funds for the Friends in 2021. Membership revenue had been lower in 2020, but had recovered well so far in 2021. The overall impact had been a small decrease in funds in 2020. However, the financial position remained healthy with cash reserves close to £15,000.

3. Chairman's Report

Mr Sharpe picked out some key themes from his report for further comment. He began with projects.

A major development during the year had been an approach by the Heritage of London Trust, which had made a proposal to consolidate and reconstruct the landing stage outside the Grotto. This had been welcomed by the City of London, which had offered significant match funding. The work would be carried out once the necessary permissions were obtained.

The Friends had taken a long-term interest in signage in Wanstead Park, and two projects were finally coming to fruition. The Friends had raised funding for a number of directional fingerposts in oak, as well as

contributing to the cost of new Epping Forest entrance signs. The possibility of the Friends sponsoring an interpretation board for the Grotto was still under discussion as part of the wider project to improve the Grotto and its setting.

Mr Sharpe then handed over to Gill James.

Mrs James gave an update on the construction of a children's playground behind the Temple compound in what had been for many years a storage and utility area used by Epping Forest.

The play area would be much cheaper to install than a previous proposal. Rather than using a commercial design and equipment as it would initially use natural materials sourced from Epping Forest and be fabricated by the Forest workforce. The design team comprised representatives of the Aldersbrook School Parent Teacher Association, the Aldersbrook Families Association (AFA) and Epping Forest Operations Manager Geoff Sinclair.

The play area would have three zones for different age groups and there would be some wheelchair access. The site would be fenced with a no-dogs policy.

The play area would be built in two main phases.

- Phase 1 would be complete by Summer 2021.
- Phase 2 was anticipated to be complete by Summer 2022 and the main launch would be at that time.

Initial capital funding would mainly come from the AFA, which had been founded about 20 years previously to campaign for a playground for local children and had built up substantial cash reserves. The Friends of Wanstead Parklands would also be contributing. However, the second stage of the project would require an active fundraising campaign as some commercially produced equipment would be required.

Maintenance for the play area would mainly be an Epping Forest responsibility, but there would also be some community support.

Mrs James thanked all those who had played a part in bringing this long-standing local aspiration to fruition, in particular Geoff Sinclair and Epping Forest.

John Sharpe then resumed his report.

Mr Sharpe said that the Friends' relationship with Epping Forest and the City of London was paramount. The collapse of the original funding model for the Parkland Plan had been a source of disappointment and anxiety, later compounded by the uncertainties created by the impact of Covid on the City's revenues. However, all parties had sought to respond to the new situation creatively. For the Friends, the most urgent issue had been the state of the lakes, and they had pressed for early progress on Epping Forest's Water Management Strategy. He was pleased to report that three separate initiatives were currently moving forward and looking promising. In addition, Verderer Nicholas Munday had taken over as Chairman of the Wanstead Park Liaison Group and had already demonstrated a new dynamism and commitment in that role.

Mr Sharpe said that, for the time being, it was unlikely that the City of London would be willing to unilaterally fund very large scale works in Wanstead Park. Until this changed, funding models for projects would thus be a mix of public and private money, as well as grant aid where available. In that context there had recently been an application to Defra for £600,000 to support improved biodiversity and water management. Unfortunately, it had not been successful as it had not ticked all the right boxes.

Mr Sharpe concluded by highlighting some successes by members of the Friends' Committee.

- The programme of litter picks which had begun in June 2020 had become a real community good news story. Initially they had been conceived as a short-term response to the litter crisis which had been engendered by the influx of new visitors during lockdown. However, they had now become very popular and a fixture in many people's calendar. Mr Sharpe thanked Gill James and the other committee members who have up their time to lead them and staff the Friends' stall.
- Mr Sharpe thanked Richard Arnopp for continuing to build the Friends' presence on social media. The Facebook page currently had 2,637 members, and the Twitter account 2,105 followers. Success!
- Greg Harper had completely revamped the website which was now visually much improved and had a greater turnover of material.
- Paul Clements had made the quarterly newsletter into an interesting and varied publication of which the Friends could be proud.
- Fundraising efforts due to Peter Brimson and others had brought in resources which the Friends had been able to utilise in practical ways to improve the visitor experience in Wanstead Park.

Mr Sharpe paid tribute to former Chairman John Meehan and Jo Fensome who had stepped down from the committee during the year. He also thanked Nigel Franceschi, a former committee member who had done much to bring Dr Hannah Armstrong's forthcoming book to publication. [Wanstead House: East London's Lost Palace](#) was now fully funded and was due to be published on 1 March 2022.

4. Election of Committee Members

Richard Arnopp said that eight people stood validly nominated for the eight elected positions on the committee: Ali Bajwa QC, Peter Brimson, Gill James, Tricia Moxey, Ralph Potter, Adrian Russell, John Sharpe and Simon Skelding. These had been proposed by Greg Harper and seconded by himself.

The candidates were submitted for election as a block, with voting by means of the "raised hand" feature. They were declared elected without opposition.

Mr Arnopp reminded attenders that the new committee could co-opt up to five additional members at ordinary meetings and said that anyone interested in co-option – or simply attending committee meetings as an observer – should make themselves known via the chat feature or by email following the meeting.

5. Proposed Fees 2022

Mr Sharpe reported that the Committee proposed to raise the Friends' subscriptions, which had remained unchanged for some years. The intention was to support the increased focus on fundraising and come into line with similar local organisations.

Proposed new membership rates -

- 1 year Individual - £10.00
- 1 year Family - £15.00
- Lifetime - £90.00

The meeting agreed the new subscription rates without opposition.

6. Q&A

Garrett Fitzgerald said that he had come across instances of anti-social behaviour while walking his dog in the early morning. Most of this consisted of "low-level stupidity" rather than serious incidents. What should he do?

Geoff Sinclair said that keepers started work only at 7:00am, their first task being to open any locked gates. However, there was a limited emergency service outside working hours which could take messages. Particular instances of low-level bad behaviour could be hard to police, but he encouraged people to report them, as establishing patterns of undesirable activity could be helpful. Mr Sinclair said that a dog attack had recently resulted in a conviction, and about 14% of fly tipping incidents were also prosecuted – a remarkable success story by national standards. Epping Forest retained three former detectives with the Metropolitan Police to assist with investigations, focusing particularly on environmental crime.

Gill James asked how the introduction of car parking charges was going.

Geoff Sinclair said that the first phase had been rolled out and was “delivering what had been expected of it”.

Gill James said that she personally disliked paying via Ringo and would prefer to use a credit card.

Geoff Sinclair said that Ringo had been chosen because it offered the merchant a higher net income.

Janet Cornish said that there were currently large chunks of felled horse chestnut trees in St Mary’s Avenue. She wondered whether Epping Forest could make use of them for the children’s playground.

Geoff Sinclair replied that only oak was being used on account of its greater durability. All of the materials needed had been acquired from within Epping Forest as the result of arboricultural work.

Geoff Sinclair observed that Epping Forest had been very pleased at the practical support given by project partners such as the Friends. £53,000 had been raised in support of current projects, which was a big help.

Greg Harper asked about plans for repeating last year’s experiment with cattle grazing in Wanstead Park.

Geoff Sinclair said cattle would be returning in September and would be grazing on the eastern side of The Plain as before, plus the upper end of the Long Walk. He thanked Gill James and the large number of volunteers she and the Friends had mobilised to keep an eye on the cows in 2020. The success of the trial had raised the possibility of cattle eventually being introduced to other sites in the south of Epping Forest.

There was some discussion of the fencing introduced on Wanstead Flats to protect skylarks during their nesting season. **Gill James** said this had been beneficial in unexpected ways, with other birds, such as partridges, being attracted by the relative lack of disturbance. The fencing had also attracted public interest and helped raise awareness of local wildlife.

The meeting closed at 8:10pm.

Richard Arnopp