

Highfield Park Trust

Minutes of 24th Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 22 September 2020 at 7.30 pm
Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Present

Trustees

Tim Abbott (Chair), Kevin Barnes (CHPC), Juliet Crisp, Jamie Day (SADC), Dreda Gordon, Sarah Graham, Rory Percival, Roger Thomas

In attendance

Richard Bull (Park Manager & Company Secretary), Ian Carter (Auditor - Gowers), Lisa Dunstan (LKP)

Sue Back, Mary Anne Bonney, Peter Cook, Liz Day, Paul Leggatt, Pat Leggatt, Carol Prowse, Katja Strahl-Draper, Michelle Thompson

1 Welcome

Tim Abbott opened by welcoming everyone to the meeting.

2 Apologies for absence

Mike Curtis (Treasurer), Romita Das, Sue Gaylard, Joe Gray, Muriel Johnson

3 Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting

The Minutes of the AGM held on 24 September 2019 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

4 Matters arising

- 4.1 Bonfires on the allotments: The allotment association guidance on bonfires is available but events have been overtaken by Covid-19 guidance which is still in place.
- 4.2 Untended plots at the allotments: the situation has improved and all allotments holders not tending their plots have been written to, although there have been extenuating circumstances this year. Given the long waiting list there will be a rigorous process before allotments are re-let.
- 4.3 There has been a change in mowing to encourage more wildflowers, this has been successful although the planned works to plant more areas of wildflowers has not been undertaken due to the staff shortages during the pandemic lockdown.
- 4.4 Dog bins: A larger bin was installed, however, this did not solve the issue so a further bin was installed at Stanmore Chase to create extra capacity, this seems to have solved the issue.

5 Presentation of Annual Report - Chairman

The Chairman presented his annual report to the meeting.

- 5.1 He started by presenting the aims and objectives of the Trust, a brief overview of the finances and a review of the events and activities undertaken during 2019-20.
- 5.2 The financial position of the Trust is stable and we continue to maintain effective financial management, controlling costs and developing income streams. The income from letting the Visitor Centre and West Lodge have replaced the lost income from the telecom mast, although income from the visitor centre has ceased since the Corona Virus lockdown in March. Capital project plans are in place, the main one remains the resurfacing of the park's paths. Other projects include re-surfacing the basketball area, new play area equipment, replacement van, new tractor mounted mower.
- 5.3 Grants have been received during the last year from: English Woodland Grant, Colney Heath Parish Council, St Albans District Council and HCC Locality Budget.

- Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in an application to Veolia landfill fund for a grant towards financing the resurfacing of the footpaths.
- 5.4 The Trust has continued to work with a number of volunteer groups including the regular 'Highfield Helpers' Oaklands College and corporate volunteers. There were volunteers from AON Hewitt, PWC, Premier Foods and AECOM. Several local volunteers have continued to help through the lockdown. Tim thanked all for their efforts on behalf of the Trust.
 - 5.5 He went on to thank all the trustees for their hard work, enthusiasm and dedication to the work of the Trust. He outlined the recent changes to staffing and the current staffing structure. He welcomed Tom Grant to the position of Gardener / Grounds person.
 - 5.6 The park has seen a huge increase in numbers during the pandemic lockdown with many people discovering it for the first time.
 - 5.7 The Trust has been delighted to receive several awards for the Visitor Centre, including from St Albans Civic Society, Hertfordshire Association of Architects and Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. It makes all the hard and careful work that went in to building it worthwhile.
 - 5.8 The main focus of work this year has been general maintenance activities, staff vacancies and the pandemic have upset some of the plans, however, the restoration of the Arcure hedge was started and changes to the mowing regime to increase the biodiversity within the Park have been put in place.
 - 5.9 Other activities have included the purchase of three additional wooden sculptures that will be installed shortly. There are also plans to carve one or two of the 'standing' dead trees. The initial part of the history project has been completed, plans to make it more accessible are underway. Due to a generous donation from a local resident the rotary pond project has been started and we hope to complete this over the next couple of months. Other projects include continuing work on the Arcure hedge, restoration of Cell Barnes pond, resurfacing paths and refurbishing of the basketball area.
 - 5.10 The Chairman described the results of the community engagement survey, undertaken at the end of 2019, which rated the park 3.6 out of 4. There were some conflicting results but there were requests for more play areas, more emphasis on nature, more events and a café. Engagement with the local community has continued with a number of organisations including Hertfordshire Health Walks, St Albans City Youth Community Football Club, Elswood Bowmen (Archers), St Albans Boot Camp, allotment holders, the Petanque club and the Community Development Association (CDA), Cunningham Hill Junior School, Hope & Homes triathlon, small-sided football competitions, archery and tournaments and 10K runs. The number of events running in the park has obviously been impacted by the pandemic.
 - 5.11 The Trust has met with Chris White SADC leader and Daisy Cooper MP for St Albans to introduce them to the park and explain plans for the future.
 - 5.12 Unfortunately one of the consequences of the lock down has been an increase in anti-social behaviour around the park. A meeting with the police and other local stakeholders was convened to try to tackle some of the issues.
 - 5.13 Unfortunately all the events since March this year have been cancelled due to the pandemic but the Trust ran a number of successful events since the last AGM including: Apple Day, Bug Hunt, 'Barts in Herts' history talk, Wassailing and a number of 'bat nights'. Future events for 2020 include Apple Day, Bug Hunt and the History talk. We hope to be able to offer a full range of events in 2021.

6 Presentation of Accounts year ending 31 March 2020

- Full copies of the accounts will be made available on the Trust website.
- 6.1 Ian Carter started by drawing attention to the notes and references throughout the accounts in relation to COVID-19. Although the outbreak would potentially only have a small effect on these accounts to 31st March 2020, it is important to consider its impact. The trustees, despite the potential effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, consider that the Going Concern basis of the preparation of the financial statements remains

appropriate. Similarly, in the opinion of the trustees, no adjustments are required to the results or carrying values of assets or liabilities.

- 6.2 The statement of financial activities is a record of the incomes and expenses for the year ended 31st March 2020.
- 6.3 Income increased in the year from £249,331 to £240,247. Grant income decreased from £31,013 to £14,475. In 2019, the largest grants were from Heritage of £8.3k, £10.8k resurfacing grant and £7.3k for pitch maintenance. The largest two grants in the current year were for pitch maintenance of £9.1k and for resurfacing of £2.9k from St Albans DC. Investment income is broadly the same £54,814 compared to £54,202, while rental income has continued to grow after a very significant increase last year, £113,690, compared to £107,363 last year. The rent from the telecoms mast included a payment of £15,134.79 from Telefonica. Sports and Sundry income have increased from £29,745 to £32,655. Event income is broadly comparable to last year; however, these are likely to be affected in the 2020/21 financial year.
- 6.4 The overall expenditure went up from £241.900 to £311.800. Depreciation accounts for a lot of this increasing from £35,093 to £71,189. This is a result of a reclassification in the asset classes, due to a change of use within the Trust. Park maintenance costs represented the other biggest increase in the costs, rising from £16,116 to £49,107. Football pitch maintenance costs and the resurfacing works amounting to approx. £35k were covered by designated grant income, so the remaining costs are comparable to last year. Staffing costs have remained at the same levels, despite some changes in the team. The fundraising account went up down from £7.1k to £2.3k due to WW2 commemoration event costs in 2019, not repeated in 2020. Expenditure on charitable activities was broadly in line with last year, and appears to have been well controlled by the Trust.
- 6.5 Unrealised gains: In 2019, there were several large increases in the values of the Investment Properties and also in the Listed Investments. These are 'unrealised gains' – the Trust can't spend them as they are only 'paper' gains, only realised if either the property or the investments were sold. The Listed Investment gain is particularly impressive, given the changes in the previous year to build the visitor centre. In 2020, the increases were not repeated, the listed investment funds fell in value by £32,779 from £1,503,814 to £1,471,035. The investment property values increased by £19,230, which is not unexpected as they are based on an insurance rebuild value, which are expected to increase slightly year on year. Overall, there has been a net decrease in the Trust's funds amounting to £76,022.
- 6.6 Balance Sheet: This is a snapshot/a photograph of the assets and liabilities of the Trust on 31st March 2020. The investment property values have increased by the revalued amounts (£19k) and there have been some other small additions in the year amounting to £708. Depreciation has decreased the net book value of the assets by £79,349, which means that in total the values have reduced in total from £7,574,000 to £7,515,000. The unit value of the listed investments has decreased by £32,779. Movements have been verified against CCLA reports (providing a much more detailed analysis of global financial issues which affect the investment funds). Cash in bank has increased compared to last year, it continues to be an area well controlled by the Trust. The decrease in Trade creditors is because most of the invoices were paid right before the year-end. Again, overall, there has been a net decrease in the Trust's funds amounting to £76,022.
- Note: the unreserved general reserve (effectively the day to day reserve) has increased from £111,495 to £132,799. This will be important given the difficulties faced in the accounts to 31st March 2021.

7 Adoption of Accounts

- 7.1 A motion that the annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020 be adopted was proposed by Kevin Barnes and seconded by Sarah Graham. **This was passed.**

8 Appointment of Auditors

- 8.1 A motion that Gowers Ltd be re-appointed as the Highfield Park Trust auditor for the year 2020/21 financial year was proposed by Jamie Day and seconded by Roger Thomas. **This was passed.**

9 Questions & Discussion

- 9.1 Roger Thomas thanked Tim Abbott and Sarah Graham for their work particularly in engaging with the community and political leaders both in person and on social media and Richard Bull for his work. Tim responded saying it was particularly important to raise the profile of the Trust and to inspire the next generation of trustees.
- 9.2 It was noted that next year is the 25th anniversary of the Trust and plans for a series of celebrations are underway.
- 9.3 Peter Cook thanked the Trust for their work with Colney Heath Parish Council and looked forward to a continued fruitful relationship.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and wished them well. The meeting closed at 20.38.