

Highfield Park Trust

Minutes of 27th Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 19 September 2023 at 7.30 pm
Highfield Park Visitor Centre

Present

Trustees

Tim Abbott (Chair), Mike Curtis (Treasurer), Sue Gaylard, Sarah Graham, Roger Thomas, Nicola Ward, Ben Weeks

In attendance

Richard Bull (Park Manager & Company Secretary), Peter Cook, David Green (Auditor - Gowers), Carol Prowse, Michael Reibscheid

1 Welcome

Tim Abbott opened by welcoming everyone to the meeting.

2 Apologies for absence

Kevin Barnes, Chris Rook

3 Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting

The Minutes of the AGM held on 20 September 2022 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

4 Matters arising

4.1 There were no matters arising.

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.

5.2 Finance: The financial position of the Trust is stable but remains tightly balanced. We continue to maintain effective financial management, controlling costs and developing income streams and applying for grants. Our capital fund manager, CCLA, continue to do a good job.

Since the pandemic lettings in the park have slowly returned.

We have continued to save for capital projects. Expenditure has included the continued replacement of handheld petrol equipment with battery powered equipment. We have delayed the replacement of our older tractor and mowing deck. There are still plans for other projects including renovation of Cell Barnes pond, re-surfacing of paths and the basketball area and new play area equipment to name a few. We continue to act prudently to ensure value for money.

5.3 The Trust has started an initiative to increase donations to the Trust, including a regular emailed newsletter, greater social media presence, donate button on the website and cashless donation plates.

5.4 A number of grants were received during the last year from: Colney Heath Parish Council, Communities 1st, HCC Locality Budget, Blackmore Foundation and Simon Gibson Charitable Trust. It was noted that due to boundary changes the Trust is no longer part of Colney Heath Parish and so we will not receive any further grants from them. The Trust thanked Colney Heath Parish Council for their generosity over the years. Gem Cables have generously supported the trust through the tree sponsorship scheme.

5.5 The Trust has received help from a number of volunteers, in particular the regular Highfield Helpers group and two corporate groups from AECOM. Also several other individuals have helped with maintain the visitor centre gardens and planters. We hosted students work experience from six local schools and participants in the Get

- Active Get Outdoors project. As always there have been people picking up litter on their daily walks. He thanked them for all their work on behalf of the Trust.
- 5.6 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 the board membership. He also outlined the changes to staffing and thanked them for their work.
- 5.7 The main focus of work this year has continued to be general maintenance activities, we have continued to improve biodiversity leaving areas of the park unmown to encourage both flora and fauna. There has been work in our various gardens, coppicing in Hither Wood and clearing of undergrowth around some of the specimen trees. It has been necessary to undertake refurbishment work at both the Pavilion and Rowan House as well as some drainage work at Ladybirds Nursery. Several pathways have been resurfaced including the main track to the pavilion, the track outside Earthworks and the path leading from the YMCA gym to the football field.
- 5.8 Unfortunately there have been a number of acts of vandalism including arson at the allotments, burnt out motorbikes and graffiti.
- 5.9 Plans for restoration of the Cell Barnes pond continued through the year with applications to the National Heritage Lottery Fund being submitted. Unfortunately, we were not successful and we are now looking at alternative ways to fund the project. There are a number of other projects the Trust would like to progress including a wildlife area near the visitor centre, extending a play area, resurfacing of paths and enhancement of wildflower areas in the park.
- 5.10 The Trust is mindful of the large number of trees within the estate, particularly those with TPOs. The costs associated with the management of these trees is increasing, quite a lot of work has been carried out this year and this is very likely to continue in future years.
- 5.11 The Trust continues to work successfully with a number of groups, including SACYFC, allotment holders and archers, there were also several 10k runs. As part of Inter-faith day, we welcomed members of St Albans Masorti Synagogue, St Saviours Church and Mauritian Muslim Association who carried out some border maintenance around the visitor centre. The Trust ran some very successful events including the development of the forest school, programme, apple day, wassailing, bat nights, a history talk and history walk, mini-beast safari, Luna cinema and outdoor opera. He outlined the proposed programme of events for 2023/24.

6 Presentation of Accounts year ending 31 March 2023

Copies of the accounts will be made available on the Trust website following the meeting.

- 6.1 David noted that the results for the year ending 31 March 2023 are all contained in the draft accounts and he then went on to make the following points.
- 6.2 Financially speaking 2022/23 was a good year, following on from the previous year, showing a continued recovery from the effects of COVID-19. The operating surplus for the year (before accounting for depreciation) was £56,577. It is noted that depreciation is an accounting adjustment to reflect the use of the fixed assets of the Trust and not a cash movement. After depreciation the net deficit for the Trust was £20,392. The depreciation is more than balanced by the generation of income from the properties and premises each year.
- 6.3 The overall value of the assets held by the Trust as at 31st March 2023 is now over £10M and much of this is the values of the property held.
- 6.4 The Investments reduced in value between 31st March 2022 and 31st March 2023, but interestingly by a much smaller proportion than others, which indicates the resilience of the funds in which the Trust is invested. Generally, those funds have seen growth over the longer term, and it is important to note that the Balance Sheet value at 31st March 2023 represents a snapshot of the value of the Investments, a figure which is constantly moving, of course. The drop in value of investments, as at 31st March 2023, across the market generally may well be attributable to the effects of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.
- 6.5 Current Assets on the Balance Sheet are slightly lower in value at the year-end as compared to the previous year, but there is more short-term cash held within the Investment portfolio (see note 8 to the accounts) than previously which means that

the Trust has more than sufficient access to cash funds for working capital. Indeed, amounts more formally invested in the Investment within the portfolio itself can be turned back into cash at short notice if it is required.

- 6.6 The reserves of the Trust are substantial and all in all the results shown in the financial statements represent a solid position and good financial management suggesting steady and sure progress financially for the Trust ongoing.

7 Adoption of Accounts

- 7.1 A motion that the annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023 be adopted was proposed by Mike Curtis and seconded by Roger Thomas. **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 2023/24 financial year was proposed by Sarah Graham and seconded by Ben Weeks. **This was passed.**

9 Questions & Discussion

- 9.1 As the outgoing chair of CHPC and a long standing local resident Peter Cook thanked all trustees and staff for their work over the last 27 years. He raised the links with the new unparished ward. Tim explained that relationship with the local councillors was good and a meeting has been set up. It appears that it will be unlikely that the Trust will be able to apply for any grants from this group. The Trust has good working relationship with individual officers of the SADC however, there has been some frustration with the council in particular their responses concerning the local community plan and Watling Chase Community Forest. HCC has stated that it will involve the Trust in its Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 9.2 Richard informed the meeting that the owners of Ladybirds Nursery, Bernadette Lee and Julie O'Kelly have sold their share to another company, who will continue to operate the nursery under the Ladybirds name. Bernadette and Julie wanted to express their thanks to the Trust and to John Ely and Richard Bull in particular for all their support over the years and to wish the Trust well in the future.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and wished them well. The meeting closed at 8.43 pm.