

Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

Minutes of MEMBERS' MEETING on Wednesday 25th May 2021

Held on Zoom

Present online: Sue Price Chair (SP); Simon Walton (SW); Joanna Clark (JC); Tina Higginson (TH); Jill Leuw (JL); Simon Cox (SC); Carol Joseph (CJ); Lynden Easton (LE); Sue Heywood (SH)
For TRP: Tom Jarvis, Director TRP, Jason Taylor, Manager HP and Andrew Williams, Manager KG

In Attendance: Kathy Spanos

Apologies: 6

Welcome

SP opened the meeting and welcomed the 68 attendees. She thanked all those present online for attending and John Heywood, Independent Examiner for his contribution. She advised that since this was not an AGM, a financial report would not be presented, but that the Financial Statement could be found on the Friends' website.

Membership

LE reported a 30% increase in members, to 770, over 2020, with 54 joining in Jan – May 2021. 50% qualify for Gift Aid. Lockdown has increased appreciation of our parks, plus word of mouth, Friends' information on noticeboards and the recruitment efforts of our indefatigable Chair have helped a membership surge. The regular Blogs are very well received.

Park Director and Managers' Reports

Tom Jarvis:

Lockdown has shown that our parks matter. Unprecedented pressure from large numbers of visitors and attendant behaviours and more extreme weather patterns have accelerated the need to respond to real changes in the scale and range of the challenges ahead, the foremost being climate change. Our parks are a landscape held in trust which is not permanent. He cited the example of flowering cherries, now dead through lack of moisture, and the horse chestnuts on Rotten Row, which are showing clear signs of stress. Charitable status is beneficial but the parks need to find new income sources whilst being visitor led. Managing required changes means maximising natural systems of management and promoting biodiversity. Examples of this are reducing short mowing and introducing more meadow areas to the benefit of wildlife. A better balance between horticulture (formal bedding) and biodiverse areas will emerge as the parks and stakeholders move forward. Our parks will change. 70% of the trees in HP are mature and require an active replacement strategy. The impact of Covid is short term, but climate change has more impact and a 15 – 20 – 25 year view is needed. Bold initiatives will foster HP and KG as world leaders in sustainable management. He thanked the parks' teams for their commitment and passionate engagement with the work in hand.

Andy Williams:

The ground retains a good moisture level thanks to recent rainfall with the prospect of better weather to come. A testing winter and excessive footfall in places have resulted in grass damage and erosion, which will be repaired in the autumn. Harrowing by the shire horses has increased wild flower seeding. Using Lottery funds, delivered through Mission Invertebrate, four playful family friendly sculptures were installed on North Flower Walk. There is a new wooden platform by the Long Water. Throughout 2021-22 there will be a focus on improving soil quality and habitats around the Long Water and the Round Pond. Swans' Island has been repaired with a pair of nesting birds in residence with 4 or 5 cygnets. More trees are being planted on Lancaster Walk, with irrigation bags in use. Some horse chestnuts have been lost to bleeding canker; the felled trunks are left in situ, to benefit wildlife and provide casual seating. New infrastructure includes four single storey cabins for maintenance staff, 39 benches around the park, Tap and Donate machines, and repairs to the playground with upgraded seating. The immersive Van Gogh Alive exhibition will run from 4th June until 26th September and early booking is advised. Allotment volunteers have returned and applications are invited. Diverse mixed planting in borders has helped pollinators and the magnificent display in the Italian Gardens has provided a long run of dramatic colour.

Jason Taylor:

Visitor numbers have declined with the end of full lockdown but will rise again in the coming months. Catering, sports and boating are back to normal. Covid testing on North Carriage Drive has been going for 13 months. As with KG, there has been significant grass erosion due to increased footfall. The HP team has worked throughout, with the following projects underway or complete: over-seeding of the Parade Ground and the Old Football Pitches, which are now very green; Lido Leisure Centre upgrade; Tap and Donate machines installed; Speakers' Corner gas pipe works nearly finished. Spring bedding is being replaced now. Bulb planting using a mechanical planter takes place over several months. Animal feeding by the public will be stopped permanently in June. Events scheduled for May and onwards from the BST concerts and BBC Proms to gun salutes and guard changing have been cancelled but the TRP Half Marathon, Swim Serpentine and Winter Wonderland are expected to go ahead. Small events will be taking place after June 21st.

Unauthorised protests (BLM, Anti- Covid, XR and recently, Palestinian Solidarity) have been difficult to control as the Parade Ground has been open and accessible. Hopefully this situation is temporary. Following temporary trials of wheelie bins in various locations, 21 smaller new bins carrying the RPs logo and guidelines have been installed, resulting in more efficient rubbish collection, and requiring 50% less labour and 80% less vehicle movement. The HP Management Plan for 2021-22 will include a History of HP, and will focus on 10 character areas. JT thanked all those involved in ensuring the wellbeing and stewardship of HP, the gardeners, maintenance teams, concessions and the Friends.

Chair's Thank you

On behalf of the Friends, SP thanked all three managers for their excellent presentations and wonderful photographs.

Questions

Bat Survey: AW reported that the last one was carried out in 2018, with thousands of bat recordings and a stable population with 5 species noted.

South Carriage Drive: this remains closed, on safety grounds, but TFL has now agreed to accept liability for a new road layout.

Cycling/ E-Scooters: JT confirmed that E-Scooters are banned and no trials are performed in the parks. Cycling infringements are monitored and TRP work with Parks Police. Additional white lines are being installed.

Elephants: These will not come to HPGK but will be installed in St James' Park for 6 weeks in June.

Pond Dipping Platform: this is a managed space for learning teams with young children and there is no public access.

Serpentine: Boating has resumed; swimming will start again in July. Changing rooms have been redecorated.

Long Water: The missing bench will not be replaced. Grass cover is being improved to increase rain runoff.

The Orangerie: Reopening soon as an exhibition space featuring Princess Diana's wedding dress, and focusing on Princess Margaret and Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother. Catering is available in the Pavilion.

Plants under mature trees: This is encouraged to reduce public access and resulting compaction.

Plant Sale: Scheduled for 29th June from 10 am to 3 pm. CJ advised that booking is online or by telephoning her. TH advised that booking is also possible via Event Brite.

Birds: a new campaign to discourage feeding and allow nature to be wild will be announced in 2 weeks' time.

Fund Raising: SP enquired whether there are any smaller projects which individuals might consider supporting. Parks managers to notify.

Thank you

LE introduced Friends' member Dimity Spiller, who paid tribute to SP and warmly thanked her for her dedication and commitment to the work of the Friends in supporting the parks.

Sue Heywood
14 June 2021