

**Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens
Minutes of Annual General Meeting 19 July 2023
The Look Out Centre, 18.00 – 20.00**

Present: Sue Price Chair (SP); Allyson Andrews (AA); Joanna Clark (JC), Simon Cox (SC); Lynden Easton (LE); Will Gray (WG); Tina Higginson (TH); Carol Joseph (CJ); Christina Shiatis (CS); Simon Walton (SW).

In Attendance: Paul Shelley, Kathy Spanos.

VIPs: Cllr Dori Schmetterling, Deputy Mayor RBKC. Apologies from the Mayor RBKC and the Lord Mayor, WCC.

The Royal Parks: Andrew Scattergood (CE); Michael Rowland (Director of Parks); Wesley Kerr (Trustee TRPs); Jason Taylor (PM HP); Andrew Williams (PM KG); Rachel Dowse (Tech Officer KG); Russell Stevens (Head Gardener KG); Beth Handley (Head Gardener HP). (There were five Apologies).

Other: Vinny Kinsler (Met Police); Lou Raggett (Serpentine Galleries); Justine Locker (Kensington Palace); Graham Alderton (the LookOut Centre).

1. Welcome

SP welcomed all Trustees, official guests, staff from TRP and the LookOut Centre and 50 members of FHPKG. Apologies were received from 25 members, including Nickie Aiken MP, and ex Mayor RBKC, Cllr David Lindsay and Cllr Catherine Lindsay and two who voted by proxy - Pauline Hudson-Evans and Virginia Lovell.

2. Introductions

I. Andrew Scattergood, Chief Executive, the Royal Parks

He thanked the Friends for the support they give to Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens and for all the contributions they make to the successful running of these parks. Among several ongoing initiatives from investments were up to pre-covid levels, £12.5m was being spent at Greenwich Park for landscaping and Regents Park is obtaining 2 extra acres of brown fill land for a new English flower garden. Other projects involve new signage in the parks and a new website.

II. Graham Alderton, Operations Co-ordinator, the LookOut Team

He gave a short introduction on the history - there is a Victorian reservoir under the building, and the development of the LookOut Centre, from its origin in 1882 to the funding of £2m for its development since 2011. A range of family and community learning programmes and activities are held there with over 17,000 visitors per year.

III. Justine Locker, Director, Kensington Palace

Kensington Palace is now open five days per week – Wednesday to Sunday. The Orangery restoration project is now almost complete. An extension to the

rear of the building, funded by Clore, will open in September for school activities. The temporary structure housing the restaurant will be dismantled in February 2024 and a new restaurant opened in March 2024. There will be a series of photographs produced, documenting the restoration's progress. The new exhibition at KP – Crown to Couture is proving to be very popular and attendance figures are excellent.

3. Approval of Trustees' Report and Accounts

SP commenced by thanking all Trustees for their hard work during the year, mentioning the recent plants sale and boating evening enjoyed by several trustees and Friends.

Financial Statement: The annual accounts were approved and signed at the last Trustee's meeting and the AGM has now received the accounts. The accounts are also available on the Friend's website for members to read. Trustee CS who produced the accounts was available for answering any queries at the end of the meeting.

4. Appointment of New Trustees

Allyson Andrews (elected 22/03/2023) and Will Gray (elected 07/09/2022) – proposed by SC and seconded by member Richard Price.

5. Re-election of retiring Trustees on a three-year rotation:

Joanna Clark and Simon Cox – proposed by WG and seconded by CS.

6. Any other business

None

7. Presentations by the managers of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

Jason Taylor (JT) – Hyde Park

JT provided an update on events in the park over the last 12 months and an insight into future events and plans.

2022

November – January: Winter Wonderland. The latter event was very successful, and its fee ticket model ensured fewer crowds at peak times and also generated increased income for the parks.

2023

February: The parade ground areas were reinstated following the exit of Winter Wonderland.

April: Cannabis 420. 5000-6000 attended but heavy rain showers helped to disperse the attendees early.

May: The King's Coronation. Hyde Park was set up as an overflow from St James's Park and Green Park. Four large screens were watched by around 35,000 people from 6.30 am onwards.

June/July: BST summer concerts. These were extremely well attended by a mixed age group with more young people coming this year.

Open House: One week of free events were held to coincide with BST concerts and 548,000 tickets were issued. Four of the nine performers during the week were female.

Horticulture

The Nursery: The Friends held a successful plant sale in June after which surplus plants were offered to local schools and communities. The manager of the nursery, Rob Dowling was thanked for supporting the Friends with the sale. Around 150 volunteers are now registered to work at the nursery in four-hour shifts and the scheme is proving to be very successful for these people and the nursery staff who manage them.

Summer bedding planting: Interpretation boards are being installed alongside some bedding displays through work with IdVerdi's new park operations team. The HP apprentices have designed their own bed with a Dr Zeus theme. The Victoria border between HP and KG is now planted following clearing with help from volunteers.

Other

Boating and public swimming in Hyde Park: Over 200,000 boat rides and 8000 swims have been recorded so far this year.

Hyde Park Shop: This new shop opened in July and will operate during July and August from 10 am to 8 pm each day. There is a 10% discount for Friends who shop there.

JT finished by specially thanking all the teams for their hard work across the park.

Andrew Williams (AW) – Kensington Gardens and Brompton Cemetery

AW began his talk with a tribute to Theresa Short, his assistant park manager who very sadly died last month. She gave 33 years of service to the Royal Parks, 24 of which were specifically with Kensington Gardens. As a small closeknit team, AW reported that she is very much missed by all her colleagues, volunteers, the Friends and others she encountered during her time at the parks.

The Annual Update

Diana Memorial Playground: The one-week annual shutdown enabled maintenance and replacement of some playground equipment to take place. The longer-term project for the playground focuses on the replacement of the pirate ship and the refurbishment of other play pieces that prioritise water play, sand play and the tree house encampment. RBKC has been approached re planning guidance for the tree house development and refurbishment is likely to take place during the winter of 2024/25.

Horticulture – KG and Volunteers: The new head gardener, Russell Stevens, has led redesign and replanting of the borders at the Italian Garden Café and installed fencing to prevent dogs from damaging the planting. A new volunteer opportunity has been created at the Peter Pan Enclosure and the North Flower Walk and he also plans to increase volunteer numbers at the South Flower Walk.

Green Flag and Green Heritage Award: AW was very pleased to report that KG has retained both awards, with scores in the top band following the judgement on 11 May.

Tree Planting: This has taken place along Buck Hill Walk and the Broad Walk to replace missing and diseased trees.

Green Futures Project and Volunteers: 10,000 bulbs were planted at Peter Pan and further work on mulching and weeding of trees planted earlier was carried out by 300 teenagers as part of the project. It is to be evaluated for positive effects on these teenagers. The new allotment coordinator, Kat Wojnar is helping to deliver school sessions and volunteers continue to grow and manage vegetable planting and harvesting. A new shed and greenhouse are now on site.

Visitor Services: Notice boards to be renewed, new maps and welcome messages to be installed throughout the park, including new interpretation boards at the Albert Memorial and South Flower Walk by September 2023. The Friends were thanked for sponsoring the Bastion interpretation board at Buck Hill. Once completed and installed it will include a reference to the Friends.

Projects: Several were itemized.

- a. Repair of Queen Caroline Temple roof and other restoration.
- b. Upgraded South Flower Walk messroom facilities for contractors.
- c. Extended irrigation system at South Flower walk.
- d. Mount Gate toilets upgraded to deal with damp issues.
- e. Restoration of KG bandstand. Major works to be completed by September

and community events to be staged there in collaboration with the Community Engagement Team.

- f. Restoration of Albert Memorial over last 12 months.
- g. Repainting - all metalwork and litter bins at the Italian Gardens, gate and railings at Magazine Gate and the Serpentine South Gallery.
- h. Refurbishing – 50 benches along the Broad Walk.

Events: Gorilla Circus at lawn west of Albert memorial and the Carousel at the northern end of the Broad walk until early September.

Ecology: Yellow Rattle was planted at Buck Hill following its successful use in meadows at Brompton Cemetery where due to its parasitic nature, it reduces competition amongst coarser grasses in favour of other plants. Two new projects funded by a postcode lottery for the Help Nature Thrive project. First – creation of ecological scrapes in northern meadows to see if grassland communities can be re-established from dormant seedbanks in underlying soils. Second - creation of a shingle bank waterfowl refuge at the round pond away from people and dogs.

Bennie Connolly: AW acknowledged his contribution to landscape maintenance over many years as a contractor. He is now employed directly by TRP to continue working in the parks. The new contract manager is Richard Griggs, whose background also includes 30 years' service with TRP.

AW finished by specially thanking his team, the contractors, and other partners for their work across the park and for their commitment to improving the park for people and nature.

Questions for both managers

1. Update on conversion of gas lamps in HP?
Ans: Not completed – work still in progress.
2. Can people go into Winter Wonderland to see the lights without paying?
Ans: Not in the evenings but there are 20 free slots each afternoon.
3. Will there be a promenade from Hyde Park Corner to Marble Arch with South Carriage Drive and the QE Gates permanently closed?
Ans: Possibly, but TFL oversee the road system.
4. Green parakeets and other birds – how to control?
Ans: do not feed and try to retain a balance of all bird species in the parks.
5. Cannabis 420 – why not use water spray from airplanes to drown them out?
Ans: The police do their best to control and manage the event with limited resources.

6. How to manage abandoned e-bikes and scooters?

Ans: They should be left outside the parks as part of their payment. RBKC is installing allocated parking bays across the borough for e-bikes and fines will be issued to people who do not use them.

7. How to control speed of e-bikes and scooters in the parks?

Ans: If caught speeding, drivers will be fined, and six points added to their driving licence.

Conclusion of AGM meeting

SP thanked everyone for the very interesting questions, the speakers for their very informative presentations, the Trustees who organised all the catering and the Friends for supporting the charity in such a committed way. Drinks and refreshments on the terrace concluded the evening.

Carol Joseph: 27 July 2023