

Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens
Minutes of Annual General Meeting 06 July 2022
The Look Out Centre, 18.00 – 20.00

Present: Sue Price Chair (SP); Joanna Clark (JC), Simon Walton (SW); Tina Higginson (TH); Carol Joseph (CJ); Christina Shiatis (CS).

In Attendance: Will Gray, Paul Shelley, Kathy Spanos.

VIPs: Felicity Buchan, MP for Kensington; Cllr David Lindsay, Mayor of RBKC; Mrs Catherine Lindsay; Cllr Will Lane, Queen's Gate Ward, RBKC; Cllr Roberto Weeden-Sanz, Queen's Gate Ward, RBKC; Cllr Ryan Jude, Lancaster Gate Ward, WCC; Cllr Max Sullivan, Bayswater Ward, WCC.

1. **Welcome:** SP welcomed all Trustees, official guests, staff from TRP and the LookOut Centre and 30 members of FHPKG. The newest member of FHPKG, number 830 in membership was given a special welcome.

2. **Introduction from the LookOut Team**

Ledy Leyssen gave a short introduction on the history and development of the LookOut Centre, from its origin in 1882 to the funding of £2m raised for the new centre developed since 2011. She described the range of family and community learning programmes and activities held there.

3. **Approval of Trustees' Annual Report**

SP commenced by thanking all Trustees for their hard work during the year, mentioning the recent plant sales and forthcoming bandstand concerts. There was a special thanks to SW for his role as treasurer to the Friends over many years. This role has now been transferred to CS.

Financial Statement: The annual accounts were approved and signed at the last Trustee's meeting and the AGM has now received the accounts. SW was assisted by Richard Price in finalising the accounts and both are happy to respond to any questions about the accounts from the Friends. The accounts are also available on the Friend's website for members to read.

4. **Resolutions**

Two new Trustees were appointed:

Christina Shiatis and Lynden Easton – proposed by CJ and seconded by member John Payne.

Re-election of retiring Trustee on a three-year rotation:

Tina Higginson – proposed by Olivia Graham and seconded by SW.

5. Any other business

None

6. Presentations by Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens Managers

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.

2021

Late summer - Swim Serpentine.

October: The Royal Parks Half Marathon.

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.

2022

March: Four mounted inspections (150 horses) of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiments. No damage occurred to the football pitches used for the inspections.

April: 41- gun salute to commemorate the Queen's birthday.

April: Cannabis 420

May – June: Two extra 'bonus' gun salutes for the jubilee celebrations.

June: Celebration of Queen's Jubilee. Hyde Park set up as an overflow from St James's Park and Green Park. Four large screens watched by 7,000 people.

June: 150th Anniversary of Speakers Corner, commemorated by a group of the regular speakers who came and spoke in the park.

Horticulture

Old football pitches - spiked and seeded twice, fertilised and top-dressed.

Bowling Green - new maintenance regime including hollow coring, topdressing and over seeding and upskilling of maintenance team.

Horse ride improvements - carried out by the Landscape Maintenance Team on 5km of tracks with 500 tons of crag sand, equating to 25 lorryloads of sand.

Summer bedding planting – now designed and planted by HP team. For first time, TRP managed whole process from growing to planting now that Hyde Park Nursery has come in-house.

Other

Boating and public swimming in Hyde Park - now operated in house by TRP. A new fleet of 150 boats and three new safety boats, two of which are electric are now in operation, together with new management team led by Nina Renwick.

New Head Gardener in Hyde Park - Beth Handley. Head Gardener roles are new positions in each of the Royal Parks with a focus to improve horticulture and provide opportunities for volunteers to come and get involved in the park.

Andrew Williams (AW) – Kensington Gardens and Brompton Cemetery

AW provided an update on several exciting projects and some routine activities. The charity is in strong financial health and has developed a 5-year strategy that sees considerable investment across all sites, Kensington Gardens included.

2022

February: Full moon (Storm Moon), a precursor to Storm Eunice resulted in 'red' weather warning. All parks were closed for safety reasons and six mature trees were lost as well as significant damage to others. Volunteers from Bloomberg created a deadwood habitat from one fallen tree.

Volunteering

For several years Bloomberg have been involved at Buck Hill and the Long Water enclosures. Shire horses continue to support traditional meadow management approaches to some of the most important grassland communities. Assistant Park Manager Theresa Short, is considering if this approach can be expanded to other areas. Annual coppice work and glade management in the Long Water enclosures continues, led by Russell, the outgoing Technical Officer; a further 6000 native bulbs have been planted and coppiced material was used to create more dead-hedges.

March: Three volunteer sessions brought together 39 volunteers, a contribution of 151.5 volunteer hours. The finance team also had a day's volunteering at the North Walk. Alongside short runs of estate railing which now protect path intersections from foot traffic, KG is planting large numbers of woodland bulbs and wild primroses to divert wear and tear elsewhere.

Volunteering Strategy - adds value right across the charity with 1800 volunteers active and 30 corporate volunteering sessions held across all sites. >90% of all volunteers think the volunteering is of a good or very good standard. A regular monthly Conservation Group to be held in Kensington Gardens later this year. The introduction of a Ranger service should commence in 2023.

Allotment volunteers continue to assist the allotment co-ordinator in planning and planting. Works to the new shed have been completed. New public facing signage is also planned. Cropping has been excellent except for the complete theft of the bumper crop of broad beans. The annual allotment celebrations to be held in September.

At the South Flower Walk volunteers continue to enhance and augment the efforts of contractors, offering a new way of working. Tina, Sandie, Siobhan, Randy, and Simon from the Friends were thanked for their commitment to this work.

Important development this year is the recruitment of Head Gardeners to oversee gardening volunteers and the contractors' horticulture teams. Russell Stevens becomes the first Head Gardener at KG. He will coordinate horticultural efforts at the South Flower Walk, the North Flower Walk, the Peter Pan Enclosure, the Diana Memorial Playground and parkland shrubberies. In time, he will engage more volunteers to support this work.

Maintenance

Budgets are available to upgrade notice boards and to create new interpretation panels at the Albert Memorial, the South Flower Walk and Buck Hill. Final stages of text have been written by the internal Content Writer with support from volunteers from the Royal Parks Guild.

Delayed plans from 2020 now underway to refurbish and redecorate the ornamental railings around the perimeter of the Albert Memorial. Cyclical cleaning of the marble Frieze has also been completed.

The Kensington Gardens bandstand to be restored, aiming to resolve the long-standing issue of inadequate safety railings that have up to now, limited the bandstands use.

Funds are secured for the Diana playground with a focus on the replacement of the pirate ship and the refurbishment of other play pieces prioritising water play, sand play and the tree house encampment. Plans will be in place by the end of this financial year with delivery taking place next year.

Redecoration and roof repairs are planned to the Queens Caroline's Temple. Other projects are budgeted to resolve long-standing surface water drainage issues and improvement to contractor facilities at the South Flower Walk.

The first phase of the Long Water enhancement works completed in April. Swans nested almost immediately on their repaired island and the extended gravel beach is getting good use by loafing waterfowl. Plans to lay coir matting impregnated with marginal aquatic plants directly onto the areas where the reedbeds were extended with natural colonisation of existing reed are also playing a part. Practical lake habitat enhancement works will continue this winter. Aim is to create a new gravel refuge in the Round Pond, providing respite for waterfowl from dogs and visitors.

A survey and monitoring protocols for pollinator populations to be implemented, including at the pollinator beds in the North Flower Walk created in partnership with the artist Daisy Ginsberg and the Serpentine Galleries. Also continue to retain standing deadwood and be proactive in the management of the veteran trees.

It is hoped to create several ecological scrapes involving the removal of vegetation and topsoil, to expose nutrient poor acidic subsoils to allow dormant wildflower seed banks to emerge. The recently laid flower rich turf at Mount Walk has established very well making a significant landscape impact.

A small number of apple trees have been introduced in the NW corner of the park. Investment in Dutch Elm Disease resistant Elm cultivars continues. Tree avenue restoration at Buck Hill Walk now confidently features Elm once again, linking into the Elms for London project. This coming season will see the replacement of horse chestnuts lost to bleeding canker with species including Small Leaved Lime and Indian Horse Chestnut.

Seasonal summer bedding displays at the Italian Gardens are based around soft pastel colours of pink, yellow, chartreuse and blue shades, all laid out by Russell in Art Deco patterns and symbols.

Education

The learning team continue their programme of walking tours including bat walks, tree walks and tours of the Albert Memorial. New bird walks have been a huge success and our first cohort of volunteer guides are being trained this summer.

Two Forest School programmes have run in KG, one for toddlers with 90 participants and the other for a group of 15 Home Schooled teenagers. Forest School will continue to broaden as resources increase.

The Green Futures programme nears the end of its first successful year. Over 200 children from local state schools at key stage 3 and key stage 5 have been engaged in conservation activity across Hyde and Kensington. The older children plan and create the conservation programme which the younger children then undertake. This term the children have been doing Butterfly Transects and meadow sweeping as well as monitoring Indicator Species in the Italian Garden pools. Next year up to 700 children are expected to take part.

Colicci completed a refurbishment of the Italian Gardens Café. KG is managing many repeat events, including walks in aid of Parkinson's and Animal Welfare charities. Play value at the playgrounds has improved with the installation of a new dendrophne at the Diana playground and Turning Tyres has been installed at Buck Hill.

Summary

The charity is at a watershed moment where clear, confident organisational strategy, supported by increased funding is driving quality improvement for people, for place, and for nature at a park level. The KG team is committed to delivering on-going enhancements as it undertakes this work.

7. Questions for both managers

1. Helicopters and Buck Hill – how is the area managed when flights are happening? Ans: The police control the area.
2. Income from the BST concerts – do TRP benefit? Ans: Yes, revenue is distributed to all TRPs.

3. Bats – are they increasing? Ans: Possibly as there are dedicated trees for them to nest in.
4. Green parakeets – how to control? Ans: do not feed and try to retain a balance of all bird species in the parks.
5. Toilets – lack of in the park. Ans: Westminster Council responsible for some closures but TRP provides many facilities.
6. New gates at Queensway end of KG? Ans: Work to start in autumn in collaboration with Westminster Council.
7. Rats in the chicken sheds at allotment. Ans: Chickens are their natural bedfellows but better control of them to be investigated.
8. Cash in the cafes – is it coming back? Ans: unknown but will enquire.
9. Albert Undercroft – will it open again for visits? Ans: Not for the general public but perhaps for Friends next year.
10. What is the biggest challenge to the parks, other than the weather? Ans: People and too many of them.

8. 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: 08 July 2022