

Friends of Abbey Fields

The Seventeenth Annual General Meeting

Held on Tuesday 3rd September 2019 at the Kenilworth Centre, Abbey End, Kenilworth

1. Welcome

The Chair, Ojars Bartmanis, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. Six committee members, 17 members and two non-members were in attendance.

The meeting was inquorate as the constitution states that "A quorum at a general meeting shall be 10% of the membership excluding the officers and Committee of the Society". The current membership level would require 20 members, in addition to the committee, to be present.

As there were no contentious issues to raise it was decided to proceed with the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Richard Dickson, Anne & Tony Gilmore, Rose Ruddick, Alix Dearing, David & Linda Pettifor, John Harris, Rowena Hill, Rob Blacklock, Bill Burton, Pat & Gordon Cain, Heather Alford, Gordon Mitchell, Anne Smith, Clive Stone & Sue Searle.

3. Acceptance of the minutes of the last AGM held on 25th July 2018

These were accepted.

Proposed by Maggie Bartmanis. Seconded by Rosamund Comins.

4. Treasurer's Report and Accounts and Acceptance of 2018/19 Accounts

The treasurer, Rachael Horgan, presented the accounts and clarified that although there appears to be a large difference in subscriptions received between this year and last, they were in fact similar, but the timing of payment meant that some subscriptions were not received in the accounting year to which they related.

Gift Aid was collected this year, and the fee paid for the Lions' Show was carried forward as the event was cancelled due to the weather.

There was expenditure for litter picking equipment for the School Club, currently used by Priors Field school but with the intention to involve other schools in the area. FOAF purchased a tree that was planted in Abbey Fields.

Other expenses were refreshments provided to the volunteers after the litter picks, and the miscellaneous items included the remembrance day wreath, spare keys for the notice board, and vouchers as a thank you for the use of the premises where FOAF equipment is stored.

This year's expenditure has been the same as last, but the income has been less as there were no calendar sales.

The accounts were independently examined by John Harris.

The accounts were accepted.

Proposed by Alison Wiggins. Seconded by Clive Peacock.

5. Brief Reports

Membership:

Sam Sexton reported that since the last AGM in July 2018, we've had nine new members and one has died.

We now have 186 personal and two corporate members, plus ten honorary ones. 136 personal members have paid for the coming year (new or renewals), with 50 yet to renew. One corporate member has renewed.

The take-up of receiving the pdf version of the newsletter (60 last year) has continued and we are approaching parity of pdf and paper copies – 90 via email and 95 by post.

The renewal process was simplified this year as we didn't have to ask the GDPR questions and the easier the process, the better for all concerned. This change generated an increase in the number of payments by BACS. Emails went to all but nine members, who don't have email addresses, so they received the same message on paper.

Sam thanked those who have made additional donations with their renewal payments and in particular - Liz Lofthouse, for a significant donation from the sale of her books, for which we are very grateful. We also had another generous donation from Maria McCaffrey, who was also thanked.

Sam confirmed that whilst he would officially be leaving the committee after this meeting he would be prepared to continue with the Membership Secretary duties until the end of the calendar year or until a replacement is found, whichever is the sooner. He also committed to provide whatever support is needed to his successor.

Webmaster:

David Emsley reported that this year we have tried to make more use of the Friends of Abbey Fields Facebook page as a vehicle to keep members and the public advised about forthcoming events, such as the AGM and Litter Picks, or advised about recent events, Litter Picks, Maintenance Activities such as Himalayan Balsam or Dock removal, and our various walks. We have also promoted successfully our activities in Kenilworth Vibes Facebook pages. The website continues to be the repository for more details of our activities both historical and current. It is particularly useful as a means to allow Friends of Abbey Fields members and all other interested persons to see what this organisation is about and more importantly what has been achieved since Friends of Abbey Fields started some 17 years ago.

The FOAF website has received an average of 379 visitors per month with an average of 536 visits per month suggesting that the website is being used quite regularly.

The Facebook page, which is measured differently, indicates that we have 228 followers - i.e. people who have decided that they want to have our posts appear on their Facebook pages. This time last year we had only 69. The Facebook page has reached some 2500 persons of whom 1500 are in Kenilworth and surrounds – interestingly it spreads as far as USA, Hong Kong and New Zealand. 61% of our readers are female and 70% of our readers are between the ages of 25 and 54, which speaks volumes for Social Media channels.

Events and Litter Picks:

Richard Gillard reported that the main events since the last AGM have been successful. These included the Moth Evening last year, Bird Walk, Tree Walk, and Bat Walk. Unfortunately, the Moth evening last month was abandoned due to heavy rain. In general, the attendances have been very healthy, for example we had 35 for the Tree Walk and 45 for the Bat Walk.

Richard requested feedback and suggestions for improvements to the format for the events as we want them to work as successfully as possible for everyone.

Since the last AGM we have had 8 monthly litter picks. These have been well attended, typically with 20 adults and children. The quantity of litter collected has been substantial, often retrieved from hard to reach places.

We have also helped with the removal of the non-native Himalayan Balsam that could become rampant if not controlled. These are enjoyable events, and social occasions with the provision of coffee afterwards.

We have taken part in a couple of working parties and hope to continue with these in the future. These have involved tasks such as Dock removal in the wildflower meadow, cutting back Brambles, and Himalayan Balsam removal.

A new initiative this year was to start to get schools interested in the opportunities that Abbey Fields provides as an educational facility. As a start, we invested in litter picking equipment for children, including Hi Vis jackets with the FOAF logo printed on them. The first group of children, from Year 6 at Priors Field, had a successful afternoon in June. We hope to extend this to other classes and schools and then we want to extend the links with schools to other activities.

6. Chair's Report

Ojars Bartmanis began by thanking the committee as trying to find volunteers who give freely of their time is difficult and finding volunteers with the appropriate skills is doubly difficult.

He continued by giving special thanks to Rob Blacklock for the use of his shed for storage, Liz Lofthouse for generous donations from the sale of her book based in Abbey Fields, John Harris for continuing to Audit our Accounts and to Jon Holmes & his team at WDC, who do a wonderful job.

He continued that it has been a bitter-sweet year. The events have been very successful and better attended than ever. We had our first activity with Priors Field School where over 30 children were involved in a litter pick, and we are keen to engage more with the younger generation. The new Kenilworth Town Council have declared a climate emergency in the town, which should prioritise support for the environment in the Council's future decision making.

However, he described the committee as fragile, having had 100% turnover in the last three years. Catriona Woods has resigned as Newsletter Editor, for personal reasons. Sam Sexton has resigned as Membership Secretary but is prepared to continue with the duties until the end of the year, if necessary.

There are also threats to Abbey Fields which have started to manifest themselves; including an increasing population caused by over 2,000 new homes and the pressure for more formal pathways; the development of the swimming pool and the disruption and destruction this could lead to; the potential pressure for car parking space; the potential for a Cycle Track directly across Abbey Fields.

FOAF have been actively involved in many of these issues and have been lobbying with local councillors and gathering factual evidence to support our case, which has been time consuming and challenging.

The Chair explained that there was lack of experience in green matters and that there is minimal mapping of what lives in Abbey Fields and appealed to the membership for their assistance in recording birds, insects, moths and bats seen in Abbey Fields.

7. Election of Officers and Committee for 2019/20

No new volunteers came forward for any of the committee positions, and the following were prepared to be re-elected:

Chair – Ojars Bartmanis

Proposed by Judy Ryan. Seconded by Clive Peacock.

Secretary – Sue Martin

Proposed by Ojars Bartmanis. Seconded by Sam Sexton.

Treasurer – Rachael Horgan.

Proposed by Ojars Bartmanis. Seconded by Rosamund Comins.

Webmaster – David Emsley.

Proposed by Ojars Bartmanis. Seconded by Maggie Bartmanis.

Events Co-ordinator – Richard Gillard.

Proposed by Ojars Bartmanis. Seconded by David Emsley.

Vacancies remain for Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor.

8. Life Membership

The Chair advised that Sam Sexton, our Membership Secretary, has decided to resign. He added that Sam being the loyal servant that he is has agreed to stay in the role until the end of 2019 or until we find someone else, which typifies Sam's commitment.

The Chair wanted to take the opportunity at the AGM to formally recognise the contribution Sam has made to FOAF over many years, and his loyalty and the quality of his contribution is acknowledged. In the past, he has been doing several of the committee roles without complaint and just did what was necessary. Sam has been a great person to be managing communication given his love of the English language and punctuation!

The Chair thanked Sam for his support to the committee in general and to him personally over the last three years. He concluded that Sam's contribution has been immense and that he will be missed.

Sam was presented with a certificate of Life Membership of FOAF and a small gift in recognition of his contribution.

Sam responded by thanking the membership, although he felt that having served on the committee for only five or six years he did not feel worthy of it. The Chair confirmed that FOAF wanted to offer him Life Membership and were delighted that he had accepted it.

9. Amendment to the Constitution Wording

In advance of the meeting the membership had been advised of a proposed change to section 2A of the constitution.

The current wording of section 2A is "To liaise with Warwick District Council and other interested organisations to ensure that Abbey Fields, Kenilworth, Warwickshire is maintained in its present semi-natural state."

The proposed new wording for section 2A is "To liaise with Warwick District Council and other interested organisations over any proposals for changes to Abbey Fields, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, with the protection of its semi-natural state being our prime consideration."

There are no other proposed changes to the constitution wording.

The Chair explained that the current use of the word "ensure" implies powers that we don't have, and that whilst we will always do what we can to protect Abbey Fields it was felt more appropriate that this should be our "prime consideration".

Regrettably, due to the meeting being inquorate it was not possible to vote on whether to change the constitution in this way. However, an indication was taken and of the 17 members (excluding the committee) who were present, 12 would support the change of wording, no-one was against the change, and therefore five members abstained.

A discussion followed regarding the issue of the meeting being quorate. As advised in section 1, at the current membership level 20 members in addition to the committee would be needed.

It was noted that only 136 personal members had actually paid and including corporate members and life members, this would have made the meeting quorate if those who had not yet renewed were not counted. However, the constitution states that membership only lapses if payment is not received by 1st October. To change this in the constitution would require a quorate meeting to vote on it.

Allowing proxy voting was suggested, but this also is not allowed for in the constitution and would require a vote at a quorate meeting to change it.

Holding an AGM after the 1st October was suggested as a possible way to make changes to the constitution.

Currently, the constitution wording remains unaltered.

10. Any Other Business

- Ruth Colgan congratulated FOAF for getting the childrens' litter pick up and running due to the time and energy needed for this. She suggested getting children involved in more ecological things, such as the Citizen Science Project. She also mentioned that at wildlife sites elsewhere there are boards for people to record sightings, and although a physical board may not be practical, using Facebook was suggested. This idea was received positively and it was also noted that Warwickshire County Council have a database of wildlife sightings.
- Clive Peacock commented that despite the lack of calendar revenue this year the balance in the account had remained steady. He suggested replacing the calendar with Christmas cards, where children could photograph or draw how they feel about Abbey Fields. This would potentially be much simpler to achieve than the calendar. The idea was positively received, but the Chair advised that a volunteer would be needed to champion this. Clive was prepared to consider taking this on and will confirm to the Chair in the next couple of weeks.
- Joanna Illingworth asked if members could be notified of the Heritage Open Days taking place in Abbey Fields in mid-September. Joanna will provide the details to the secretary and webmaster so that these can be emailed to members and put on the website. Joanna also advised that there had been a lovely service at St Nicholas's Church last week to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the founding of the priory by Geoffrey de Clinton.

- Louise Griew noted that when the path to High Street / Malthouse Lane was replaced recently it had been done in black tarmac and felt that the sandy type would have been more in keeping. She enquired whether there was scope to lobby in respect of future works. The Chair advised that we had lobbied about this, but unfortunately did not get our desired outcome.

The official business of the AGM concluded at 20:35 and was followed by a short break for refreshments. Anthony Simmons from Leamington Angling Association gave a very informative and entertaining talk about the annual removal of the fish from Abbey Fields lake.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking Anthony Simmons for his talk and thanking everyone for attending. He believes the next year will be a challenging one but that between us all we can minimise the impact on Abbey Fields to ensure that what we have enjoyed all our lives is preserved for future generations to come.