

Friends of Abbey Fields

The Eighteenth Annual General Meeting

Due to the coronavirus pandemic the AGM was held by email and post with a closing date of Thursday 3rd September 2020.

Much of the information in these minutes was circulated in advance, in the document entitled "Agenda & Information", and for the purpose of consistency of AGM minutes is included again here.

1. Welcome

Welcome to the first virtual AGM of Friends of Abbey Fields! Many things have been very different this year and our AGM is no exception.

The committee had proposed to the membership that the AGM be held "virtually" this year due to the ongoing situation with coronavirus, and the majority of members who responded were in agreement with this.

All of the information that would have been presented at a meeting of the AGM was provided to members either by email or by post (for those members without email).

The FOAF Constitution defines a quorum as being 10% of the membership, excluding the committee. Our current membership is 174, of which five are committee members, therefore 17 members needed to vote to make this meeting quorate. I am delighted to report that responses were received from 41 members, in addition to committee responses, and that this meeting was therefore quorate.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Linda Pettifor.

3. Acceptance of the minutes of the last AGM held on 3rd September 2019

The minutes of the previous AGM were circulated in advance and are also available on the website.

Members were asked to vote "to approve the minutes of the AGM held on 3 September 2019". **Of 45 votes received, 40 were for and five abstained.**

The minutes of the previous AGM on 3rd September 2019 are therefore accepted.

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4. Chairman's report – Ojars Bartmanis

Once again I need to thank our under strength FOAF Committee for all the hard work, dedication and time they have committed in their respective roles. FOAF is indebted. We still require a Membership Secretary and a Newsletter Champion as a minimum but Sarah Butler has been a real find and Friend in producing our last 2 Newsletters.

Thanks should also be extended to our very loyal Friends, Rob Blacklock for the use of his shed, Liz Lofthouse for her generous donations from the sale of her books and John Harris for continuing to audit our Accounts. Jon Holmes and his team at WDC, in difficult circumstances, have also again done a wonderful job!

My final thanks to our Secretary, Sue Martin, for managing our remote AGM. It has been a huge and detailed task which she has managed in a really professional way!

Covid-19 has limited our physical activities this year in Abbey Fields but we have still been very active:

- Producing 3 Newsletters – more recently featuring our members, Valerie Whiteman and Jenny Green who are offering regular articles on Birds and Butterflies in Abbey Fields.
- Despite being under strength we decided to produce another Calendar for 2021 which has been masterminded by David Emsley and printed by Emmerson Press. Thank you to John and his team at Emmersons. Calendars will be available in a number of shops around Kenilworth as well as available to purchase on-line.
- Meetings and further plans were made with Priors Fields School but hijacked by Covid-19 but the pupils have been able to contribute to our Calendar with the inclusion of their own Poetry reflected in each month! A delight I am sure you will all agree.
- Numerous meetings and regular contact has been maintained with WDC regarding the proposed development and design of the new swimming pool. Our concerns and reservations have been shared with you, our membership and WDC.
- Despite Covid-19 slowing matters down, our important discussions with WDC continue regarding the Mapping of Abbey Fields. We have agreed to share the costs with WDC, of what is a very important exercise to determine what and who inhabits Abbey Fields. A specification has now been distributed to identify which organisation will actually carry out the work.

Finally, a huge thanks to all our visitors to Abbey Fields during Covid-19 who I know, have really benefited from and enjoyed our magnificent safe green space! What would we have done without it!! Despite the inevitable litter left by a few I do genuinely believe Abbey Fields was treated with a high level of respect by most people.

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5. Treasurer's Report – Rachael Horgan

The audited accounts for 2019 – 2020 were circulated in advance.

Payments made:

Printing, postage & stationery: The majority of this figure covered the cost of LCN (website & email) and Business Cards.

Activities: Costs include a Bat Walk on 03/07/19 and Litter Pick refreshments.

Lion's Show 2020: A previous payment made will be carried forward another year to 2021.

Heartsafe Pledge: This was a donation towards funding a publicly accessible Defibrillator in Kenilworth.

Other expenses: This amount includes a Plaque for the former Membership Secretary, Duffle bags for litter pick equipment, a reimbursed oversubscription and an unpaid cheque (deceased member).

The annual subscription is currently £7.50 per adult. It is proposed to keep the charge unaltered for the subscription year 2021 – 2022.

John Harris has kindly agreed to act as an independent auditor for the accounts again next year.

Members were asked to vote “to approve the accounts as presented for the year 2019 – 2020, to maintain the subscription fee at £7.50 per adult for the year 2020 – 2021, and to appoint John Harris to audit the 2020 – 2021 accounts”.

Of 45 votes received all 45 voted for. The 2019 -2020 accounts are therefore approved, the subscription fee remains at £7.50 for the forthcoming year and John Harris is appointed to audit the 2020 – 21 accounts.

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6. Committee Member Reports

Events Coordinator – Richard Gillard

We have not been able to carry out any guided walks, litter picks or working parties so far in 2020, but we are looking forward to starting these up again when circumstances allow. Towards the end of last year, however, there were several events:

Two well attended litter picks in September and October

Two joint working parties with St Nicholas Church in November and December, clearing vegetation in the churchyard, particularly around the walls of the memorial garden. We hope to make this a regular yearly event.

A working party in November, planting 500 Snakes Head Fritillaries bulbs in the meadow area to the west of the lake, and in the paddock area. The results could be seen earlier this year, and hopefully in the years to come!

Progress has also been made in liaising with local schools, and hopefully next year we will be organising educational nature events in the Abbey Fields for the children.

Membership Secretary – position currently vacant

As most of you will know Sam Sexton who had been a Committee Member for six years decided to retire last year and in the absence of a replacement Ojars Bartmanis, the Chairman, attempted to fill the gap. Sam has been missed there is no doubt!

The membership at the end of our financial year was as follows:

Corporate 1

Paid Members 162 (Including 5 committee)

Total Paid Members 163

Honorary Members 11 (an increase of one from last year)

Total Membership 174

Last year 198 Reduction of 24

The drop year on year is disappointing but the committee has seen a 100% turnover in the last 2/3 years and unless we manage to find a new Membership Secretary it will be very hard to reverse this trend. To illustrate the work involved: as at the 21/7 we still require payment from 40 members in respect of their subscription for the 2020/21. This all requires chasing and administrative follow up but of course there will possibly a natural fall-out due to Covid-19 with a number of members not renewing!

We really hope we find a new Membership Secretary this year!!

Webmaster – David Emsley

This year, as for everyone, has been challenging. 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 18 years ago. We have made use of our Facebook page and Kenilworth Vibes Facebook page with great success in relation to our requests for photographs for the 2021 Calendar Competition. We received a lovely selection of images and have completed the calendar print and are starting distribution to members. Full details for additional purchases can be found on the website and Facebook.

And for a few stats:

Our Website has received an average of 436 visitors per month with an average of 607 visits per month, both up from late year, suggesting that the website is being used quite regularly.

Our Facebook page, which is measured differently, indicates that we have 422 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 228. The majority of our followers are in Kenilworth but we also have 3 in USA and 2 in Australia. 74% 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.

7. Election of Chairman and committee for 2020 -2021

The FOAF Constitution allows for a committee of a Chairman and five additional people.

There are currently only five people on the Committee, all of whom are prepared to be re-elected:

Chairman:	Ojars Bartmanis
Treasurer:	Rachael Horgan
Webmaster:	David Emsley
Events:	Richard Gillard
Secretary:	Sue Martin

One new nomination has been received: Clive Peacock

Members were asked to vote for the proposal “that Ojars Bartmanis is re-elected as Chairman and that the other four committee members and the one new nomination are voted en-masse to form the new Committee”.

Of 45 votes received all 45 voted for. The existing committee and Clive Peacock will form the committee for 2020-21.

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8. Proposal by the committee

The Committee put one proposal to the membership, which concerns alterations to the Constitution. This has been prompted by the last two AGMs being inquorate and the need to address this, but the opportunity has also been taken to review the whole constitution.

A document detailing the current wording, the proposed new wording and the reasoning for this was provided to members in advance.

Members were asked to vote “to approve the proposed changes to the Friends of Abbey Fields Constitution”.

Of 45 votes received 42 voted for and three voted against. The constitution will therefore be amended to incorporate the changes. This will be available on the website in due course.

9. Any Other Business

Members were invited to submit any questions or comments relating to the AGM documents or about Abbey Fields in general.

Two questions were received, which are as follows, along with the response from the committee:

From Clive Stone: Having seen what has happened since the start of COVID-19 on visitors' attitude to the Abbey Fields, I recommend that FOAF put forward a clear and united view and statement regarding cycling IN THE ABBEY FIELDS. Adults, teenagers, families, club cyclists are now cycling ALL OVER — across all grassed areas, every pathway including that running down from the War Memorial and from the pool to the Ford; everywhere. We must have a clear policy of 'encouraging cycling TO the AF but not IN them. If we support linking the Greenway, at Bridge Street, with the path in Borrowell Lane for passing cyclists, then we would agree a dedicated cycle track passing Inside the AF parallel to Rosemary Hill, and Abbey End ending at the War Memorial. Cyclists could then use Forrest Road to access the track and Borrowell Lane's pathway. This avoids 'touring and passing through cyclists' having to use busy Rosemary Hill and Abbey Hill roads and keeps them away from visitors-families, walkers with dogs, children, elderly, picnickers, etc - who are there to enjoy the tranquility and wonderful facilities AF offers.

Committee response: At the committee meeting to discuss the outcome of the online AGM the committee agreed that the levels of cycling in Abbey Fields had increased significantly during “lockdown”. WDC appears to operate a policy of 'tolerance', understandably, as their resources to police the activity are limited. The Committee however, will forward and support the member's concerns to WDC and Kenilworth Town Council.

Regarding the member's suggestion for a proposed cycle route skirting Abbey Fields, the Committee has already concluded this was a real option with real benefits avoiding a cycle track across the centre of Abbey Fields itself. And yes, we would like serious consideration to be given to the suggested route. This has already been discussed with KTC representatives. At the moment, no formal WDC proposals exist but the FOAF Committee will make contact once again with both WDC and KTC to establish the current status.

From Henny Denny: The field is a most natural habitat for wild life and its wonderful trees and other plants help to clear the air of toxic gases. The collection of rubbish by FOAF is magnificent, It is in danger of having its natural peace being damaged by invading cyclists that are also dangerous to pedestrians and children, where they can enjoy the space and freedom. I see now that fishing in the pond in the fields is also causing problems. Should we have a campaign to put this to Kenilworth citizens? or you have done this already?

Committee response: The above response addresses the Cycling question. The issue of illegal fishing has been raised with WDC and the membership now have the contact details of the WDC Warden in the event they witness fishing on the lake. The Committee are also considering the return of the "No Fishing" sign that used to be in the centre of the lake as a response to those fisherman who state they were not aware they could not fish as a result of not seeing any signage prohibiting fishing.