

Friends of Abbey Fields

The Nineteenth Annual General Meeting

Held on Monday 20th September 2021 at the Sports & Social Club, Kenilworth

1. Welcome & Introductions

The Chair, Ojars Bartmanis, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

25 members were in attendance. On current membership numbers 17 members were needed to achieve a quorum. The meeting was therefore quorate.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Phil & Jenny Green, Keith Deane, Bill Burton, Dilys Skinner, Margaret Rogers, Rowena Hill, Kate Dickson, Gordon Mitchell, John Harris, Rachael Horgan, Joyce Strachan, Anne Smith, Heather Alford, Clive & Anne Stone.

3. Acceptance of the minutes of the last AGM held virtually on 3rd September 2020

The minutes of the 2020 AGM had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

There were no matters arising.

The minutes of the 2020 AGM were accepted.

Proposed by: Maggie Bartmanis

Seconded by: Rob Blacklock

4. Chair's Report – Ojars Bartmanis

I make no apologies for once again repeating my sincere thanks, from last year, to our severely under strength FOAF Committee for all the hard work, dedication and time they have committed in their respective roles. FOAF continues to be indebted to them. Worryingly we are still without a Membership Secretary and our hardworking long serving Treasurer, Rachael Horgan has resigned so we are also now without a Treasurer. FOAF Committee cannot continue operating below strength like this. It is unfair on the Committee Members and unfair on the membership because try as we may it is a real challenge to cover all the roles effectively. My plea to you all here today is to dig deep into your contacts and let us know if you or someone you know, who is passionate about Abbey Fields, could help by either joining the committee or by assisting us in some of our Committee activities. Please contact me as soon as possible if you can help in any way.

Let me continue by offering a repeated thanks 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 looking after Abbey Fields!

My thanks also to our Secretary, Sue Martin, for planning our AGM which because of Covid has been difficult and complex to organise.

Covid-19 has continued to limit our physical activities this year in Abbey Fields but we have still been very busy behind the scenes:

Richard will tell you about the events and litter picks we have managed and David will tell you about our activity on Social Media and our website but in addition we have produced three newsletters – again featuring our members, Valerie Whiteman and Jenny Green who are offering delightful and interesting articles on birds and butterflies in Abbey Fields. Sarah Butler, voluntarily, continues to support us in the production of the newsletter with her expertise in publishing and editing skill sets. Thank you Sarah for your continued support.

The one really major event that was finally sanctioned this week was the passing of the WDC plans for the new swimming pool in Abbey Fields. We have spent hundreds of hours liaising with WDC over the plans for the new pool. There were over 250 filings on the planning portal all of which had to be read and scrutinised. Our main aim was to ensure the pool design and operations were compatible with the ecology and environment in which it stands. We believe that we have had a real impact and many changes have been made as a result of our representation and discussions. The real work begins now with the demolition and rebuild starting in January 2022 we believe. How do we keep Abbey Fields open and safe during these works?? David & Richard were immense in their commitment to reviewing the plans with me and I want to offer them a special thank you from us all.

We also await the long anticipated 10 year strategy for Abbey Fields which is due to be published this month. There will be a consultation period but we will keep you informed of developments as we become aware.

Despite being under strength we did produce another calendar for 2021 (missing out a year deliberately) which has been very successful and masterminded by David Emsley and printed by Emmerson Press. Thank you to John and his team at Emmerson's. And thank you to David, despite Covid the calendar was really well received and we had an excellent campaign!!

Unfortunately our activities with schools, in particular Priors Field School and Crackley Hall School were once again hijacked by Covid-19 but we hope to resume discussions in the new year once the schools have adapted to the new Covid protocols.

I am delighted to tell you that our commissioning of Steven Falk, funded by WDC and KTC, to record and map all pollinators that reside in Abbey Fields is due to be completed by the end of October this year. This has been a really exciting initiative prompted by the planning application for the pool when we realised that no one actually knows or has recorded what lives and grows in Abbey Fields. Our vision is to present all the findings in a presentational format for all to see within the confines of Abbey Fields either in the pavilion or the new pool building. Exciting!

Finally again, a huge thanks to all our members and 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. Our events and activities continue to be supported by record numbers and this year we also held a "Meet & Greet" giving members the opportunity to meet the Committee. It was a real success and we hope to hold more meetings like this in the future – time permitting!! We need your help!

Finally, I would like to say goodbye to Rachael our Treasurer, who has been with us for at least 4 years! Rachael has 3 children and as many pets and wants to start her own business. She needs to let go of something and unfortunately it's FOAF. We have really valued Rachael's input and involvement and we wish her well with her new ventures. Thank you Rachael.

5. Treasurer's Report

Ojars Bartmanis, Chairman, presented the Treasurer's Report on behalf of the treasurer, Rachael Horgan, who was unable to attend.

A copy of the audited accounts had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

FOAF finances are extremely positive with its Cash Funds increasing from £15,121 to £17,306. This is an increase, year on year, of £2,185 of which £1,604 net, is due to the very successful sale of calendars and the receipt of our annual subscriptions totalling £1,099 offset by our traditional expenses which included Activities £129, Printing & Postage £223, Poppy Appeal donation £100, Advertising £52 and a small amount of other expenses totalling £72.

Subscriptions have traditionally been paid and received throughout the year which has made the reconciliation of the number of members to the actual payment very difficult. In an attempt to help resolve this matter this year we once again asked that members paid on the 1st July by BACS or standing order avoiding the added burden of banking individual cheques for £7.50. Many members have co-operated and adopted this method of payment for which the committee is really appreciative.

The Committee also commissioned Steven Falk, a nationally recognised Entomologist, to map the pollinating insects within Abbey Fields. The cost for this important project is £3,800 of which 50% is being paid by WDC and the other 50% by KTC.

An important development this year has been the agreement by Bernard Rogers, Accountants, in High Street to assume responsibility for the compilation of our monthly accounts. We would like to thank David Rogers for his very generous support and look forward to working with him next year.

The Proposals:

The accounts were independently examined by John Harris.

The accounts were accepted.

Proposed by: Maggie Bartmanis
Seconded by: David Emsley

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

Proposed: Roz Comins
Seconded: Chris McDonald

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

Proposed: David Emsley
Seconded: Maggie Bartmanis

6. Committee Member Reports

Membership: presented by Ojars Bartmanis in the absence of a Membership Secretary

We have been without a membership secretary all year and I (Chair) have assumed the role.

It has been challenging, primarily a holding role but rewarding in that I get to welcome all the new members to the fold.

Currently we have 1 Corporate Member although we have offered all our Calendar Sponsors free membership up until June 2021 but that has now expired and we need to approach them once again to establish if they wish to renew their membership.

Corporate: 1

Paid Members: 150 (including 5 Committee)

Total Paid Members: 151 (this is a fall year on year of 12, was 163)

Honorary Members: 11

Total Membership 162 (last year 174)

An actual fall from last year of 26 (22) not paid as of todays date meaning we have had 14 new members!!

Events and Litter Picks: Richard Gillard

Richard Gillard started by thanking Bart for his leadership of the committee and for the considerable time, effort and enthusiasm that he has given to Friends of Abbey Fields. Bart has been personally involved in the production of the newsletter, liaison over the swimming pool redesign, the “Meet and Greet” event, calendar production and sales, amongst many other things. He has done a great deal of work and provided much inspiration and received a well deserved vote of thanks from the committee and membership.

Richard continued that since the last year’s AGM through to April this year we felt unable to safely re-introduce events in Abbey Fields. However, when restrictions eased, and following Covid guidance, we held our first event, namely a litter pick in May. Since then, we have held litter picks every month. Averaging 18 participants, these events have made a great difference to the general tidiness in the Fields, with plenty of litter collected.

We didn’t hold our early morning bird walk this year - it would have been in April, and the Moth Evening was also postponed for another year as we felt this might involve people crowding together looking at moth traps.

However other walks went ahead. Our Tree Walk in May had 23 participants, and we covered about 20 species. There are over 60 species of tree in Abbey Fields so that means you have to turn up to at least another two walks to learn about them all!

Fourteen people attended the Meadow Walk in June. A pleasant informative stroll through the meadow areas and by the lake. Peter and Marilyn provided the guidance, and there was plenty of interaction with the participants. Forrest in the Fields coffee outlet is now subsidising drinks for our events, and many people stayed at the end for a coffee and chat.

The bat evening in July proved a success as usual, with 26 people attending. The usual bat species were detected around the churchyard, barn, and lake. Jon and colleagues from the Warwickshire Bat Group provided bat detectors so that participants were actively involved. The only disappointment, really, was at the end – the coffee outlet had already closed!

Once again, we have had attempts to keep on top of the spread of Himalayan Balsam, the non-native plant that takes over if left unchecked. Two dedicated working parties and a further two combined sessions with litter picks have made a great difference to the situation. I was surprised walking to Castle Farm along the cycle path recently at just how much balsam had spread there – dense growth several meters high.

Bart has referenced the “Meet and Greet” event we held in the centre of Abbey Fields - 25 of our members enjoyed coffee and cakes and a chat. It was a chance for members to renew acquaintances and meet the committee. Thanks must go again to Forrest in the Fields for subsidising the drinks. In general, this support from Forrest in the Fields has been really appreciated, and many members enjoy the chance of a chat and coffee after events such as litter picks.

Kenilworth Town Council had a Naturewatch initiative this year – the idea being that outdoor activities associated with nature would be provided for children in the summer half term. They asked for help from various organisations and FOAF were able to organise a tree activity afternoon, and a bat evening, both aimed at children. They were relatively successful, given it was the first time we had attempted these activities. I believe the Naturewatch initiative will be repeated next year, and this will be a chance for us to improve the sessions.

Finally, we have two more events this year – a litter pick on Saturday 2nd October, and a combined working party with friends from St Nicholas Church to tidy up the areas around the churchyard, garden of remembrance and the old abbey walls. This will hopefully be in October.

Webmaster: David Emsley

As last year, this year has been challenging for everyone. I think that this next year will offer yet more challenges and opportunities to extend the opportunities for Friends of Abbey Fields to document how we see the changes in Abbey Fields. The website continues to be the repository for details of our activities both historical and current. We believe that the information that we publish allows members of Friends of Abbey Fields and other interested Kenilworth residents to see what we do and what has been achieved since Friends of Abbey Fields started some 19 years ago.

This year we have we have made some changes to the website to allow people to join us and renew subscriptions online which is proving successful and reduces some of the administration activity. We were able to take orders for the calendar via the website which was also successful, and we even received an order from New Zealand from an ex-Kenilworth resident who had emigrated. Our 2021 calendar competition was an interesting activity, and we are grateful to all those who contributed photographs and the staff and pupils of Priors Field Primary School for the contributions of the descriptions for each month. And I would also like to thank our sponsors, outlets, and distributors for all their effort which has resulted in some £1,900 profit which we will be able to use to fund activities to the benefit of Abbey Fields.

We continue to publish details of activities and forthcoming events on our Facebook page and in Kenilworth Vibes and we submit 'press releases' to the Courier and Nub News. Both of which have published details about our activities.

Our Website continues to receive a lot of visits every month, however I have not been able to identify which are from genuinely interested human beings as opposed to internet robots looking for information. However, I can see that pages about membership, the lake, and news letters are particularly interesting to our readers.

Our Facebook generates more interesting statistics. We have an audience of some 747 persons who like us and read our posts. Interestingly the majority of our readers are in a 35-54 age group and across all groups our audience is 72% female and 28% male. Over 50% of our audience is Kenilworth residents with good showings from Leamington, Coventry and Warwick but seems to go out as far as Stratford and Southam. The country statistics show readers the UK and from as far afield as Australia, Romania, Thailand, Germany and France. Our most read posts were firstly about the Cow Path repair, the

Earth Quaking activity (soil decompacting to improve the grass at the top of the slope near the war memorial among other places) and litter picking!

In conclusion I would like to thank fellow committee members and all others who have provided information and assistance during this past year.

7. Election of Officers and Committee for 2021/22

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

Chair – Ojars Bartmanis

Proposed by: David Emsley

Seconded by: Toby Arnold

Three other members of the current committee were prepared to be re-elected and were voted for en masse:

Webmaster – David Emsley

Events Co-ordinator – Richard Gillard

Secretary – Sue Martin

Proposed by: Maggie Bartmanis

Seconded by: Alison Wiggins

Vacancies remain for Membership Secretary and Treasurer.

8. Any Other Business

Gordon Mitchell – was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted the following question in advance: Gift Aid does not appear in the last two years accounts, is that due to a change in legislation or has it been decided not to claim it?

Response: To our knowledge there has not been a change in legislation, nor is it a result of not wishing to claim Gift Aid. Regrettably the committee is currently without a Treasurer or Membership Secretary and we simply do not have the knowledge or resource to claim Gift Aid in addition to all the other tasks. If any member is prepared to undertake this task we would be delighted to hear from them.

Alison Wiggins – notes that FOAF currently bank with HSBC, she understands that there is to be a large increase in their fees and wonders how we will respond to this.

Response: Without a Treasurer we are currently struggling with many aspects of FOAF's banking, including online banking and some of their other procedures. Although their charges are not onerous at the moment, and we have not been notified of an increase, we may well need to look for an alternative bank for this and other reasons.

David Rickers – in relation to the 10 year development plan for Abbey Fields – is there any intention to reinstate the hedge that ran from part way down the path to the War Memorial to the pedestrian crossing? Does the committee wish to re-visit this issue? David has a photo that was taken in 1892 which shows the location of the hedge which he is happy to share with the committee.

Response: The committee are not currently aware of whether there are any plans in relation to this hedge. Now that the issue has been raised any information that becomes available will be shared with the membership. The 10 year plan will be available for public consultation so any resident will be able to provide their view in their own right.

Roz Comins – asked how can we increase the membership numbers?

Response: As we have no membership secretary at the moment we are without the resource to be more pro-active in recruiting new members. However, we have received interest from someone who may be prepared to take on the role, so we remain optimistic that increasing membership numbers is something we can address in the near future.

A majority show of hands approved all of the motions that had been proposed and seconded throughout the AGM, and supported and approved the work of the committee.

The official business of the AGM concluded at 8.15pm and was followed by a short break for refreshments. James Kennedy then gave a very informative and entertaining talk about Eco Church and how St Nicholas Church, adjoining Abbey Fields, is providing a habitat for wildlife and amenity for residents in the churchyard.