

Friends of Abbey Fields

The Twentieth Annual General Meeting

Held on Wednesday 26th October 2022 at the Senior Citizens' Club, Kenilworth

1. Welcome & Introductions

The Chair, Ojars Bartmanis (Bart), welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. A special welcome was made to the dignitaries attending; Kenilworth Deputy Mayor and her Consort and members of Kenilworth Town Council, in recognition of their support of Friends of Abbey Fields particularly in relation to Steven Falk's report. A special thank you was also given to Jon Holmes and David Anderson of Warwick District Council who look after the management of Abbey Fields.

45 members were in attendance. On current membership numbers 14 members were needed to make a quorum. The meeting was therefore quorate.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Heather Alford, Gerard Daykin, Keith Deane, Alix Dearing, Liz Fawcett, Sabina George, Anne & Tony Gilmore, John Harris, Rowena Hill, Joanna Illingworth, James Kennedy, Victoria Lee, Sue Ling, Linda & David Pettifor, Hilary Scott, Gill Shaw, Sue Tall.

3. Acceptance of the minutes of the last AGM held on 20th September 2021

The minutes of the 2021 AGM had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

There were no matters arising.

The minutes of the 2021 AGM were accepted.

Proposed by: Alison Wiggins

Seconded by: Chris Macdonald

Unanimously agreed by the members present

4. Chair's Report – Ojars Bartmanis

Once again and firstly, I need to thank our FOAF Committee for all the hard work, dedication and time they have committed in their respective roles. FOAF remains really indebted. During the year we recruited a Membership Secretary, Clare Johnson and a new Treasurer, Fern Arnold. Their participation has been invaluable in literally, keeping the committee afloat. We have also engaged the support of Our Newsletter Champion Sarah Butler remains in place and she requires a special mention in producing our Newsletters throughout the last year. Thanks to all our journalists, more specifically Valerie Whiteman and Jenny Green who keep writing wonderful articles about the Birds and Butterflies that live in Abbey Fields. A huge thank you to John Emerson and his team who print our Newsletters for free and have done so for as long as I can remember.

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 (which are for sale here today) and John Harris for continuing to audit our Accounts. Jon Holmes and his team at WDC, in continuing difficult circumstances, require recognition in challenging times!

The newest member of the team is Lulu De Minto who manages our Facebook page. This has been a major step into the unknown for us as a team because of the potential need to engage daily with interested parties. But we have been delighted with what Lulu has managed to achieve and we know this is a key area of development looking to the future.

Thank you to Steven Falk our local Entomologist who conducted our first ever Mapping exercise in Abbey Fields recording the invertebrates that inhabit Abbey Fields. And thank you to KTC and WDC for agreeing to finance the research. As you will find out later it was a really interesting and revealing project that should help us in planning Abbey Field's future eco strategy. The big question is what do we map next??? And how do we record this wonderful information so we maximise the benefit so all can share in it? We think the Pavilion could be converted into a local Educational Hub that houses all this wonderful information but it is hard trying to initiate new ideas!

And finally, thanks to our Secretary, Sue Martin, for managing our AGM. It continues to be a major and detailed task which she manages in a really professional way!

Reflecting on the past year – it remains challenging for the Committee.

The legacy of Covid has continued to inhibit our work with the local schools but we do hope to resurrect our contact with Priors Field and other schools in the New Year once they themselves have managed to settle down into some sort of normal routine.

We have spent two years liaising and meeting with WDC discussing the proposed plans for the new Pool with meetings every 4-6 weeks culminating in the planning application itself earlier this year. We reviewed every document or proposal that was laid before the Planning Department (250-300) to ensure we reviewed everything that impacted on the local environment in Abbey Fields. Of course we now have potentially a two year wait for the final product during which time we need to be vigilant to ensure Abbey Fields is not adversely affected during the demolition and build and that the visitors to Abbey Fields are kept informed of developments before they happen. This will be a real challenge for everyone.

We keep producing the Newsletters. We have a calendar out for 2023 (copies are available here tonight). Our events have been a real success. We had 50 people at the Bat walk. The litter picks are always well supported and most importantly we have added a social element to our members by offering refreshments after the litter picks themselves which offers everyone the opportunity to talk and meet new friends. Our website has been immaculately updated and contains a wealth of information about everything Friends have done over the years. This is an organisation that has made a huge difference not just in protecting Abbey Fields itself but in also offering the community of Kenilworth a safe haven in which to recharge, recalibrate, relax and revisit. But this does not happen by magic. It is hard work and we need more volunteers to assist and most importantly we need even greater collaboration, with knowledgeable support and guidance from WDC and KTC in making sure we continue our good work in a sustainable and compatible way.

Disappointingly, our membership numbers continue to decline despite adding 33 new members this year. In the past few years we have struggled to find Committee members so the challenge was simply to keep the wheels turning. However, for the first time in my memory we will enter the new year with a full committee and with us also seeking to

embrace Facebook and Social Media I hope this will give us the stimulus to reboot FOAF initiating a drive to increase membership. We will need your help. Thankyou.

5. Treasurer's Report

A copy of the 2021-2022 accounts had been circulated in advance of the meeting. A signed copy of the accounts was available to view at the AGM.

I was appointed Treasurer in March this year after discussions with the Committee. I am also Chair of Bee Friendly Kenilworth and have other voluntary activities.

These Accounts cover the period July 2021 to June 2022.

The Chair had the unenviable task of also temporarily being the Treasurer when the previous Treasurer stood down and should be thanked for that.

During this period copies of the bank statements continued to be sent to Bernard Rogers, Accountants, in High Street to compile our accounts.

We would like to thank David Rogers for his very generous support and I look forward to continuing working with him next year.

I would also like to thank John Harris for again auditing the Accounts.

A copy of the draft accounts had been circulated in advance of the meeting, with a signed copy passed to the Chair in advance.

Although FOAF finances are still extremely positive there was no calendar last year which is an important fundraiser so our Cash Funds have decreased slightly from £17,306 to £17,125 up to 30 June 2022.

Our other income is of course the Subscriptions from our Members which are very important and I thank you for your continued support. This money is split between two accounts.

There are bank charges for the HSBC account of £5 per month plus charges for cheques. It is harder to get bank accounts for Friends groups like ours as many banks have stopped offering free banking or Charity Accounts.

There is a tiny amount of interest on the Scottish Widows account and I will contact them to see if they have a better product now that interest rates are rising.

Additional costs of £618 for Events, Meetings and Activities and are mostly due to the successful events that Richard organised but include the various walks which are an important part of what we do. The costs cover expenditure such as leaders fees and refreshments.

The Committee had commissioned Steven Falk, a nationally recognised Entomologist, to map the pollinating insects within Abbey Fields. This report is now on the Friends of Abbey Fields website and original copies can be found in the Library.

The cost for this important project was £3,800 of which 50% was paid by WDC and the other 50% by KTC. I would like to thank both KTC and WDC for their generosity in funding this. These figures can be seen in the Accounts.

I would like us to commission further reports in the future.

Although many members do now pay by standing order some subscriptions are still being

paid and received throughout the year which has made the reconciliation of the number of members to the actual payment remaining 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 adopted this method of payment for which the committee is really appreciative.

I meet with Clare, the Membership Secretary to share information and will continue to do so.

Now that I have been in post for some time it is my intention to investigate how we can recover Gift Aid for the Subscriptions paid.

The Proposals:

The accounts were independently examined by John Harris.

The accounts were approved.

Proposed by: Louise Griew

Seconded by: Maggie Bartmanis

Unanimously agreed by the members present

John Harris has kindly agreed to act as an independent auditor for the accounts again next year, it is proposed that he do so.

Proposed: David Emsley

Seconded: Richard Dickson

Unanimously agreed by the members present

The annual subscription is currently £7.50 per adult. It is proposed to keep the charge unaltered for the subscription year 2022 – 2023. However, I would like to look at this again before the next AGM.

Proposed: Rob Barry

Seconded: Joanne Richmond

Unanimously agreed by the members present

6. Committee Member Reports

Events and Litter Picks: Richard Gillard

Richard started by thanking the Chair for all his hard work and dedication to Friends of Abbey Fields;

First of all, this is an opportunity for me, on behalf of the committee and the membership, to thank Bart for his massive contribution in keeping the FOAF ticking along. I know how much work Bart has to do, not only in coordinating the more routine items such as newsletters and committee meetings, but more importantly in dealing with the many issues that arise in the life of Abbey Fields and the liaising with the many bodies that have involvement in Abbey Fields. And basically, acting as an inspiration for future projects to help improve the use of Abbey Fields as a nature resource. So, many thanks to Bart.

This was endorsed by a loud round of applause from the membership.

Events

Our five nature walks are a major part of our events - they are free and open to the general public, and generally very well attended. So thanks go to all the leaders who made the sessions so interesting and interactive.

With the bird walk we were up in the early morning to study birds and birdsong, spotting 23 different species! And thanks to Val Whiteman who at the last minute stepped in to lead the walk.

The meadow walk took us through the different meadow areas in the fields, and along the lake, allowing us to study the various wildflowers and grasses.

The bat evening was as usual very popular, but it was something of a record attendance with 54 participants!

The tree walk allowed us to study a small selection of the huge variety of trees in the Fields, and 31 people joined us for this event.

Finally, the moth evening was a great success – 33 participants studied many varieties using lightboxes and moth traps. Do try and come to this event if you've not been before – it's a real eyeopener to see the variety of colourful moths in the Fields.

As well as the events, we run working parties. Earlier in the year we planted 2000 snowdrops alongside the hedge in the childrens' play area, so we await the results with anticipation early next year.

We have also had in total seven Himalayan Balsam removal sessions. I think we are getting on top of this invasive plant, but we were surprised how it had taken over on the banks of the Luzely Brook. Luzely Brook is hidden in the Fields over most of its length with undergrowth several meters wide either side, but the balsam was thick along its banks right up its length to Borrowell Lane. Special thanks must go to Toby Arnold, Peter Sargeant and Graham Dowlen who spent many hours overall working on the banks of Luzely Brook and Finham Brook.

We have one more working party this year on November 24th. This is our regular joint session with friends from St Nicholas Church and we will be tidying up the church yard and garden of remembrance. There is a lot to go at this year so all help will be welcome.

We work closely with WDC and we really appreciate the guidance we get from Jon Holmes with our working parties.

Our monthly litter picking sessions are well attended with an average of 16 participants. After the work there is generally a chance for a coffee and chat, and this a good social occasion and a chance to meet different people. Thanks go to Forrest in the Field, who subsidise our coffee drinks. Hopefully they will be able to do the same next year if a suitable pitch can be found for them during the new swimming pool construction. And thanks again to Rob Blacklock for allowing us to store our equipment in his garden shed - this is very much appreciated. Several participants have commented that the Fields have

been relatively tidy, with the main litter hidden in hedgerows and undergrowth, so if you are new to litter picking and would like to join us next year then you may find it easier if you bring some of your own litter!!

Finally, we have participated in the Naturewatch event. This is organised by KTC, in particular by Samantha Cooke, our mayor, and John Dearing. For the summer half-term holiday a range of nature activities are organised for children. We have contributed with a tree activity where children can identify trees from their leaf shapes and estimate the height and age of trees. We also ran a bat evening led by Kate Carpenter, and this was a great success for the 26 participants, Kate ably demonstrating the various flying characteristics of the different species with action-packed arm waving!

That's a quick summary. If anyone has ideas how our events programme can be improved or added to, please let us know.

Webmaster: David Emsley

Once again, we have experienced an interesting year, not only due to the persistence of Covid, but also the demands of staying up to date with the expected – the development of the swimming pool - the unexpected – the extreme heat and its impact on Abbey Fields. I am sure that the next 12 months will offer more challenges and opportunities for Friends of Abbey Fields to document for future reference.

The website continues to be the repository for details of our activities both historical and current. This and our Facebook page 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 20 odd years ago. We continue to publish details of activities and forthcoming events on Facebook and in Kenilworth Vibes and we submit 'press releases' to the Courier and Nub News. Both of which has published details about our activities.

Structurally we have not made any significant changes to the website. I suspect that over the next year there will be changes that will make it more coherent and easier to navigate without losing any content. We will be re-opening the page to allow people to buy our 2023 calendar online in the near future. Last year one of the first online orders came from New Zealand. Where will this year's come from?

Having spent quite a lot of time organising the Calendar Competition and subsequent printing and all the associated activities, I can tell you that we have some 22 outlets in Kenilworth where you can buy more copies to share with friends and family. I do have some copies for sale here tonight.

I would also like to thank our competition entrants, sponsors, and distributors for all their effort which has allowed us to get to this point.

The role of Webmaster for Friends of Abbey Fields has changed considerably over the past 5 years. Then, it was a case of keeping the webpages up to date and virtually nothing else. Today, that role has broadened to becoming FOAF IT Support which then introduces many of the challenges faced by regular business organisations – data protection and security, communications, sharing of information and that one big delight – problem solving.

Over the past year some of you may have felt that you have been ignored or alternatively deluged by emails from us. We have been challenged by issues caused as a result of

email host service providers improving their email spam filters. Whilst this is great in theory, sometimes small organisations find that their own emails get rejected and never arriving with their clients. Of course, that does raise the two tricky questions – 1 - how do you know if you have not received an email and – 2 - how do we know if you have not either? We have spent a lot of time and effort leaping this hurdle and I hope that you all now receive all the emails we send out.

We have been looking at our membership recording methodology – currently an excel spreadsheet – to see how we can improve it to make life easier for especially our membership secretary, our secretary, and our treasurer all of whom need accurate and up-to-date bits of information. The seemingly simple processes need careful consideration to ensure that the data about members is kept safely but as accessible as necessary. Depending upon how we distribute newsletters and calendars partial restructuring may be needed to simplify the actual distribution process. And of course, whatever decisions are taken regarding security and access it is also necessary to think about where the data is stored and how the information is accessed

Our website continues to receive a lot of visits every month, but of the average monthly 4,200 visits from the UK and many other countries around the world, it is difficult to identify which are from genuinely interested human beings as opposed to internet robots looking for information. However, I can see that during the last month pages about Fish in the lake, newsletters, trees, membership, and Himalayan Balsam have all been popular.

Our Facebook generates interesting statistics as well. We have an audience of some 933 persons who like us and read our posts. It Seems that the majority of our readers are in the 35-54 age group and across all groups our audience is 71% female and 26% male. Nearly 55% of our audience is Kenilworth resident with good showings from Coventry Leamington and Warwick but ranging out as far as Sunderland, London, St Austell and Greenock although these last four are all low single digit readers. Country statistics show readers as far afield but not limited to Australia, USA, and Thailand. Recently, our most read post has been the one about the changes to access to the toddlers play area followed by photographs presented by our new Facebook editor

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Friends of Abbey Fields Committee for all their support over the past year - that support has been very much appreciated.

Membership: Clare Johnson

I took over in October 2021 and have therefore only been responsible for entries to and management of the membership records for a partial year. Bart took responsibility for the previous months.

These figures are for membership from 1st July 2021 until 30th June 2022. There is a small issue with counting the numbers as a result of the carryover of membership in 2020. As a result, I have split the figures as follows:

There are 50 members on the database who were members in 2019 that might be followed up on should it be considered worthwhile. This is probably as a result of the pandemic. I have not included them in the final number.

Only 1 member appears as having paid/renewed in 2020 and has not renewed since.

10 members in 2021 have not yet renewed and of those, 8 joined that year and will not therefore be considered members after 1st July 2022 unless a final reminder provokes a response.

136 members have renewed their membership or joined FOAF. There are also 11 honorary members.

Including those members who have yet to renew, this gives us a final figure of 157 members for the year 1st July 2021 to June 30th 2022.
We have had 5 new members since the 1st July 2022.

There will be further discussion, I have no doubt, about how we might increase our membership. This will include social media, local press, more involvement in local events etc. It is my intention to put forward proposals to the committee with the proviso that we recognise the issues that the building works etc. will have on the public perception of Abbey Fields.

7. Election of Officers and Committee for 2022-23

No members at the meeting, or in advance, put themselves forward to join the committee.

David Emsley is standing down as Webmaster after five years on the committee, the Chair thanked him for all his hard work and dedication to Friends of Abbey Fields, and presented him with a Friends of Abbey Fields paperweight and Honorary Life Membership.

A new Webmaster, Chris Fox, was co-opted onto the committee recently to take over from David. Chris introduced himself to the meeting.

All current members of the committee were prepared to be re-elected to their roles.

It was proposed that Ojars Bartmanis be re-elected as Chair

Proposed by: Lulu Minto

Seconded by: Jill Pugh

Unanimously agreed by the members present

It was proposed that the other members be voted for en masse:

Treasurer – Fern Arnold

Events – Richard Gillard

Webmaster – Chris Fox

Membership – Clare Johnson

Secretary – Sue Martin

Proposed by: David Emsley

Seconded by: Jill Pugh

Unanimously agreed by the members present

8. Any Other Business

Susette Garratt – enquired whether Steven Falk’s report has been published. The chair advised that it is available on-line and there is also a hard copy available to view here.

Louise Griew – has noticed that the council has cut back the brambles severely and enquired whether we have talked with them and can throw any light on the rationale. The Chair advised that there is a five year plan to encourage habitats but they encroach on green space & recreational space so they get cut back in rotation.

Louise Griew – noted that the cutting back was more than in previous years. Richard Gillard advised that a number of areas are done every five years, in some areas the brambles are being removed by their roots to be replaced with wild flowers, as WDC are looking to change the habitat slightly.

Kate Dickson – enquired whether the minutes of FOAF committee meetings can be available for the membership to see. She noted that people may join if they know more about what was discussed. The Chair advised that we would consider this at our next committee meeting.

Rob Barry – in relation to the recent issues with low water levels in the lake, WDC have indicated to KTC that significant stakeholders are involved – does this include FOAF? The chair confirmed that he had written to WDC to enquire what the brief would be. FOAF have had our own discussions with Cllr J Dearing about our options, and FOAF are ready to be involved as a stakeholder.

Richard Dickson – is there an update on abbey fields management plan? The Chair advised that this was still ongoing and we are still waiting the final document, which we will share as best we can once received. This was originally expected in October but has now been put back to November.

Rob Barry – in relation to the Himalayan Balsam, is it being propagated up stream so that just removing it from within Abbey Fields may not be fully effective? The Chair confirmed that this could indeed be the case but that we can only take action within Abbey Fields, although it is noted that the work done has had a significant positive effect on its reduction.

The official business of the AGM concluded at 7.55pm and was followed by a short break for refreshments. Steven Falk then gave a very interesting, entertaining and informative talk about the insects of Abbey Fields and how he went about surveying them in 2021.