

Friends of Abbey Fields

The Twenty First Annual General Meeting

Held on Wednesday 25th October 2023 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 within the membership who were in attendance who are also Councillors of Warwick District Council and Kenilworth Town Council. A special thank you was also to Jon Holmes who looks after the management of Abbey Fields.

31 members and two non-members were in attendance. On current membership numbers 17 members were needed to make a quorum. The meeting was therefore quorate.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Heather Alford, Karen Baines, Anne & Clive Stone, John Harris, Hilary Scott, Jenny & Phil Green, Sabina George, Kate Dickson and Susette Garrat.

3. Acceptance of the minutes of the last AGM held on 26th October 2022

The minutes of the 2022 AGM had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

There were no matters arising.

The minutes of the 2022 AGM were accepted.

Proposed by: Alison Wiggins

Seconded by: Rob Blacklock

Agreed by the members present by a show of hands

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. I would also like to thank all our members for their continued support and our many volunteers who consistently turn up to our Litter Picks and Working Parties.

I personally did not expect to be standing here this year but the fact we have a full committee and we are involved in some very important initiatives has encouraged me to remain for one further year subject to being voted in of course!!

If you remember, last year, our WebMaster David Emsley retired after 5 years of service. David's work in maintaining and embellishing our website was invaluable and many of the articles he wrote will remain on our web site for future members to read. David left a huge technical hole that was not easy to fill but we voted in a replacement at our last meeting who unfortunately, after 6 months, resigned due to ill health. This meant our work on the

web site alongside many other technical aspects was hugely delayed!!! BUT we have been blessed, by finding Antony Corbett who has recently joined us in the role but has chosen, for the time being, not to be on the Committee. But I would like to extend a warm thanks to Antony for his energy and support.: AND THIS IS A MESSAGE TO YOU ALL - it is not obligatory to be on the Committee to perform a supportive role.

Unfortunately, it is time to say thank you and goodbye to Our Newsletter Champion Sarah Butler who has also retired from the work she has been doing in editing and formatting our Newsletter. Sarah has been an ever present in producing Newsletters for many a year. ONCE AGAIN - 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. FYI – Antony, God Bless Him, will be taking over Sarah's role.

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. John too has retired from his role as our Auditor and we would also like to register our sincere thanks to John for all his time and expertise in auditing our Accounts across the years.

NEXT; I cannot forget to acknowledge and thank Jon Holmes and his team at WDC, who have the prime responsibility for maintaining and improving our wonderful green space in Abbey Fields. Despite all the challenges last year with the exceptionally hot summer, the reducing lake waters, and the never ending pool build somehow Abbey Fields remains in really good shape. You may not know this but in a National Competition WDC came equal top with Durham in having the BEST QUALITY OF GREENS AND PARKS. WHAT AN ACCOLADE!!

And finally, thanks to our Secretary, Sue Martin, for once again managing our AGM. It continues to be a major and detailed task which she has always managed in such a professional way!_But I am also very, very sad to inform you that we are, today, saying goodbye to Sue. Sue is retiring from the committee. Sue has been an amazing Secretary, prompting, organising, reminding, contributing and advising throughout her term. I know the Committee has lost a great asset and she will be really missed. In appreciation of Sue's time and contribution the Committee has also awarded Sue the status of Honorary Member. And we have dispensed with the traditional paper weight and have instead a voucher which Sue & Stuart can enjoy at some date in the future at one of Kenilworth's many restaurants!!

The good news is that first time in FOAF's history, that I can recall, we have managed to recruit Sue's replacement during her time so the new person has had the opportunity to work alongside Sue and 'learn the ropes' so to speak. Yet to be voted in but I would like to introduce you to our highly experienced Judith Wildig who will be succeeding Sue hopefully in her role as Secretary. Judith has a wealth of experience working as a volunteer on different committees and she has already demonstrated her enthusiasm and energy in working with the committee, shadowing Sue for the last six months.

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

Pool Build: At the last AGM I talked about the long process involved in the planning of the Pool following which demolition started BUT we then had the exciting but challenging discovery of the archaeological remains. This chapter has been well documented and the debate continues to rumble on but hopefully WDC cabinet will decide in November which strategy they will adopt. We continue to have meetings with WDC and the Pool project team and in the event the pool is given the green light the challenges for FOAF will be to ensure the north-south pathway by the duck feeding platform is kept open and that the duck feeding platform is rebuilt to an acceptable standard.

The Lake Water Levels: The intense heat last summer also caused many problems with the water levels in the lake and the fish stocks. Following representation from ourselves and a public outcry on social media WDC netted the majority of the remaining fish and removed them to Lavender Hall Fishery. Since then we have, with the support of expertise within our membership, presented WDC with a range of proposals to discuss with the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency dismissed many of the suggestions but agreement has been reached to manage the overflow pipe more diligently to control the levels of water in the lake. WDC have also started this year to trawl the lake twice a year removing the abundance of carp that had proliferated over the years.

Nature Trails: We also announced last year our vision of creating Nature Trails for the younger children of Kenilworth and surrounding areas using the pavilion as an Educational Hub. Well nothing moves quickly in local government but discussions with WDC are progressing and we are extremely hopeful that what was a vision could be turning into a reality. We will keep you informed.

Cycle Track in Abbey Fields: Thank you all for your response to our Cycling Survey in Abbey Fields. We will now use the responses provided to ensure the implementation of the proposed shared track is done in such a way as to ensure everyone continues to enjoy what they are doing in Abbey Fields and that we minimise the potential for accidents.

10 year strategy:

After a long wait - The Executive Summary for the 10 year Abbey Fields plan has now been released and will be the subject of our first meeting in November.

And finally thank you to our Membership for your continued support throughout the year!!

I will now hand over to Fern who will provide you with an update on the Organisation's Finances.

5. Proposed amendment to the Constitution

The proposed amendment to the Constitution had been circulated in advance of the meeting. It is:

The current wording of item 5B within the Finances section of the Constitution is:

A. The Treasurer shall prepare an annual profit and loss account and balance sheet at the end of each financial year.

B. A suitably qualified independent auditor shall audit the annual accounts and the treasurer shall present them to the officers and committee of the Society for approval before presentation to the Annual General Meeting.

The current wording of item 6C within the AGMs and EGMs section of the Constitution is:

iii Appointment of Auditor.

It is proposed that this wording in section 5B is changed to:

A. The Treasurer shall prepare an annual Receipts and Payments Account at the end of each financial year.

B. A suitable person, but not an officer or committee member of the Society (to be called the Accounts Reviewer), shall examine the same and the treasurer shall present them to the officers and committee of the Society for approval before presentation to the Annual General Meeting.

It is proposed that this wording in section 6C is changed to:

iii Appointment of Accounts Reviewer

The reasons for this proposed change are:

- The FOAF accounts are overseen by the FOAF Treasurer who is an officer of the committee.
- On a monthly basis the accounts and bank statements are currently checked by Bernard Rogers & Co – Chartered Accountants.
- The above scrutiny is already more than is required as FOAF's income is below the threshold that requires us to register as a charity.
- Our current auditor is retiring at the 2023 AGM.
- An accounts review by any person not involved in the production of the accounts is sufficient scrutiny as they have already been checked twice prior to this.
- The annual accounts are available for all members of FOAF to view and ask for clarification of any aspects.

The change to the constitution was accepted.

Proposed by: David Emsley

Seconded by: Clare Johnson

Agreed by the members present by a show of hands

6. Treasurer's Report – Fern Arnold

A copy of the 2022-2023 accounts had been circulated in advance of the meeting. A signed copy of the accounts was available to view at the AGM.

Hello, Hopefully many of you will recognise me. My name is Fern Arnold and I was appointed Treasurer in March last year. I am also Chair of Bee Friendly Kenilworth and involved in other local voluntary activities.

These Accounts cover the period July 2022 to June 2023.

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 and Adam Wyatt for their very generous support and I look forward to continuing working with them next year.

I would also like to thank John Harris for again Auditing the Accounts. This was his final year as Auditor and we are grateful for the support he has given us over the years. I have sent him a small token of appreciation in the form of meal vouchers.

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

FOAF finances are still extremely positive, even more so with the 2023 calendar which is an important fundraiser for us. I would like to thank David Emsley for the onerous task of compiling the calendar and organising the distribution and sales, also the other committee members who helped with this. A free calendar is given to all our members but we were still able to make a profit from the sales and the generous support of our sponsors. Our cash funds increased from £17,125 last year to £18,242 this year, an increase of £1,117.

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

Most members are now paying in July by BACS or Standing Order, for which we are grateful and avoids the burden of banking individual cheques and us being charged by the bank for this.

There are additional expenses for our usual programme of events, which Richard will cover in his Report.

The Proposals:

The accounts were independently examined by John Harris.

The accounts for 2022-2023 were approved.

Proposed by: Alison Wiggins

Seconded by: Antony Corbett

Agreed by the members present by a show of hands

Graham Dowlen has kindly agreed to act as Accounts Reviewer for the accounts next year, it is proposed that he do so.

Proposed: Joanna Illingworth

Seconded: David Watson

Agreed by the members present by a show of hands

Rob Blacklock enquired about Gift Aid as this has been received in previous years. Clare Johnson responded that our membership database is in the process of being reviewed and that she will shortly be writing to all members to check that we hold their correct information. This will also be used as an opportunity to check and update Gift Aid status.

7. Other 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, let me say a big thank-you to Bart for all the work he does on behalf of the committee and the members of FOAF. We know how much work is involved, not only in the routine matters, but also there are many sensitive issues associated with Abbey Fields that he helps us to steer a path through, having to liaise with the other interested bodies.

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

Events

We've had quite a busy year with the varied events that have been organised. This includes our litter picks, nature walks and working parties.

The seven litter picks have been very well attended – generally we are finding less litter than in the past which is encouraging. Unfortunately, though, Nitrous Oxide (or laughing gas) cannisters are becoming more common.

And thanks go to Graham who is helping us in organising running one or two of the litter picks.

We start again in April next year.

The five nature walks have been a success. Well attended, and this year we have tried something different with spreading the organisation of the events between ourselves. This year Bart, Clare and Fern each organised an event, and next year Lulu will also be organising one. This will just leave me with one! This has the dual advantage of both freshening up the events and also, ah yes, it's less work for me!

All of our nature walks are led by experts, and well worth attending – bats, trees, birds, meadow flowers and moths.

We've had about eight working parties throughout the year, under the guidance of Jon Holmes from WDC. We have started the sowing of perennial wildflower seeds, and this will continue in subsequent years. How this works is that the Fields management plan allocates lengths of the nettle and bramble borders into one of five groups. Then, on a five-year rotation, a group will get chopped back to ground level. We sow the seeds into these areas, but before doing so we remove many of the bramble roots to give the wildflowers some space to grow.

We've planted 4000 snowdrops alongside the path going up to the War Memorial, so look out for these next year. And thanks to Joanna for supplying these to us. Tomorrow we aim

to plant 200 Snakes Head Fritillaries at the bottom of the meadow, and also 100 daffodils near the car park.

We have also had several sessions removing the Himalayan Balsam, and also joined with our friends at St Nicholas to tidy up the churchyard.

In general, please join us if you can for any of these events, they provide good exercise, a chance to meet others, and we often finish with a cup of coffee!

Webmaster: Antony Corbett

I've only recently joined as webmaster and can't really report on website development and activity over the year. I have taken over from David Emsley who always provided you with a very comprehensive summary of its reach, popular posts and other stats, and it will be difficult for me to follow in David's impressive footsteps.

What I can say is that I joined during a time of change for the website. The current design is 10 years old. You may realise that web years are similar to dog years – 10 years have seen considerable change in web technology, and the committee felt it was time for a change. When I joined FOAF, work had already begun to completely rewrite the website with the assistance of local IT services company Solutions Squared on Castle Hill. The current site is in "maintenance mode". The homepage is kept up to date and answers crucial questions such as "Who are we?", "What do we do?" and "How do I join?"

To briefly mention 3 of the enhancements we're making in the new website, stylistically, there are improvements to be made, chiefly to allow the site to be more useful on mobile devices. Older sites like ours don't display well on small screens like phones or tablets. In contrast, newer techniques provide what are called "responsive" pages that dynamically adapt to the size of the device you are using.

Another goal we have is to make the content subject-centric. Currently, there is a mixture of event-based pages and topic-based pages. This means that if I want to find out about Owls in Abbey Fields, for example, I must scan several menus and read articles related to Owl box installation, Bird walks, etc. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, and it's happened quite naturally because of the iterative development of the website over some years. However, we aim to provide a better experience for the user who has a particular topic of interest in mind. We won't lose the information we already have, but we'll pull together those resources over time into a more coherent offering.

A final enhancement we want to make is some degree of integration with associated social media accounts, principally Facebook. Social media has become more and more important in recent years, particularly to younger people. Lulu kindly manages our Facebook page (with over 1100 following it).

We hope to go live very soon, and we will let you know when it's ready.

Finally, on a personal note, if you are thinking about the possibility of working with, or joining, the committee – go for it! In my experience, the team has been warm, welcoming and supportive, and the work is rewarding.

Membership: Clare Johnson

These figures are for membership from 1st July 2022 until 30th June 2023. There were 172 members plus 12 honorary members and 12 corporate members who kindly sponsored our calendar. This gives a total of 197 members on 30th June this year. We have had over 20 new members since the 1st February 2022.

Currently we have 161 members with 32 members who are yet to renew. They will be contacted before the end of this month.

Many members have chosen to create a standing order for their membership renewal and this has helped a great deal with the administration.

We had a very good meet and greet in Abbey Fields during the warm weather and plan to repeat it next summer.

8. Election of Officers and Committee for 2023-24

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

Sue Martin is standing down as Secretary after five years on the committee, the Chair thanked her for all her hard work and dedication to Friends of Abbey Fields, and presented her with a voucher and Honorary Life Membership.

A replacement Secretary, Judith Wildig, has been recruited and co-opted on to the committee recently. Lulu Minto, responsible for our Social Media, has also been co-opted on to the committee during the past year.

The remaining and co-opted members of the committee were prepared to be re-elected to their roles. It was proposed that they were voted for en masse as there were no additional candidates put forward.

The following committee members and roles were proposed:

Chair – Ojars Bartmanis
Treasurer – Fern Arnold
Secretary – Judith Wildig
Events – Richard Gillard
Membership – Clare Johnson
Social Media – Lulu Minto

Proposed by: Jon Holmes

Seconded by: David Emsley

Unanimously agreed by the members present by a show of hands

Antony Corbett remains as Webmaster but currently does not wish to formally join the committee.

8. Any Other Business

Two questions had been submitted in advance of the AGM by members who were unable to attend:

Sabina George: I have a question about the ivy that has been removed during the construction/renovations to the large house on the High Street that abuts the Abbey Fields. It grew on the wall (a small remnant of what was there remains to allow for a huge gate to access the Fields). The ivy was a magnet for *Eristalis pertinax*, in particular, as well as many other insects. There is still a wall of ivy over towards St. Nicholas which *Eristalis tenax* seem to favour but no sign of the *E. pertinax*. I have photos of those in previous years. Are there any plans to replant the ivy that has been removed in that area? Ivy in flower is a very important food source for insects.

Jon Holmes responded on behalf of WDC to advise that the wall is the private boundary of the house but that Historic England, which has to agree all development in Abbey Fields, will be inspecting the location this week. The importance of the ivy is appreciated and we would support it being re-planted, however at this stage we do not know if this will happen.

Cycling:

Clive Stone: One very important issue, that is not mentioned in the Agenda, is the issue surrounding Cycling in the Abbey Fields, which I feel should perhaps be discussed.

The survey was very important, interesting and valuable. It clearly shows that we all feel Cycling is good to do and promote. I am a keen cyclist, over the many years, now due to age, rather limited to good weather.

SURVEY

With reservations, it shows that we would allow Cycling in the Abbey Fields if it is strictly controlled and positioned. We have to make sure that the WDC have very clear views from FOAF as to where the route should be and what controls are put on allowing cycling in the AF.

As over 90% say they Walk in the Abbey Fields and use it for relaxation, there is absolutely no way that we must allow a dual use path, 2 – 2.5 meters wide running through the middle of Abbey Fields. We all know that the two leisures do not mix amicably! And, as we all know Cyclists do not have or use bells etc, only expletives.?

Solution for a Cycle Dedicated only Path in the Abbey Fields to take them from Castle Farm to Bridge Street cycle paths.

Leaving the path from Castle Farm at Castle Road, Borrowell Lane entrance, cycle up Forrest Road to the War Memorial and enter the Abbey Fields on to a Cycle Only dedicated path to be constructed.

This to run inside the fence along Abbey Hill to the old air raid shelter at Abbey Hill/Rosemary Hill junctions, then down the hill inside the fence to , either the existing bridge across the Brook or to a new bridge built nearer Rosemary Hill, taking the route to the existing bridge under Bridge Street.

This allows cyclists to have their own safe route between the two existing cycle paths (Castle Farm and Bridge Street) with no risks to Walkers in the Abbey Fields and equally important, no dangers to walkers and desecration of our beautiful Abbey Fields with a cycle/walking path through the middle of the Abbey Fields, children's play area and so on.

As a cyclist and also a protector of our Abbey Fields, I have thought about this issue, listened to many ideas and views and drawn this conclusion to solve the problem to satisfy everyone!

If it is possible to put this to the meeting, I would be most grateful

The Chair responded on behalf of the Committee: This is a subject that has been discussed in great length at committee and other meetings. The Committee lobby but do not have the decision on the route to be taken. More deliberation on this will not result in a change to the proposed route.

Dilys Skinner advised that she cycles in St Nicholas park in Warwick and that the shared path works there. Dilys also noted that cyclists are keen users of cafes and that once the cafe at the swimming pool is open they would support it. Dilys feels that a shared path would work but knows that not everyone agrees.

Joanna Illingworth does not object to a shared path but enquired whether the route would involve the demolition of the iron bridge as a previous plan was to demolish and widen this bridge.

Jon Holmes responded that the sustrans route will not impact on the metal bridge, only the vehicle bridge.

Christine Hodgson advised that she feels the shared route to the university is very dangerous.

The Chair advised that a requirement to “dismount and walk” in places could help to avoid accidents.

Dilys Skinner advised that the cycle path at Stratford requires cyclists to “dismount and walk” in some places.

Jon Holmes thanked Friends of Abbey Fields on behalf of the Greenspaces Team at WDC for their hard work and being supportive and easy to work with.

Swimming pool:

Christine Hodgson enquired whether FOAF could put some weight behind there being an alternative site for the swimming pool as she is concerned about the aesthetics and would prefer less building in Abbey Fields.

The Chair responded that although an alternative site may be preferable, he believes that WDC are unlikely to change the plans at this stage of the development.

Christine believes the lido usage is a “red herring” in relation to the use of swimming facilities in Abbey Fields.

The Chair confirmed that he and David Emsley had looked at hundreds of documents on the Planning Portal and that the committee would not wish to re-open the debate.

Dilys Skinner agrees that the plans can't be changed at this stage of the development.

Joanna Illingworth advised that the new plans are acceptable to Historic England.

Cllr Richard Dickson declared that he is a member of the Planning Committee. The revised plans involve raising the roof by 35cms and taking account of the medieval remains. The

District Council Cabinet proposal can be viewed online. These will require extra funds and will need a full Council decision in due course. Over the last 6 – 7 years two successive administrations have discussed the location of the swimming pool and decided to build in Abbey Fields rather than have the wet and dry facilities together. The public can express their views on the Planning Portal.

Cllr George Illingworth advised that views on the Planning Portal will have no influence on the location. People need to contact their local Councillors in relation to the location.

Ormond Simpson advised that there is a tree in Abbey Fields that has a fungus that he believes to be “Honey Fungus”

Jon Holmes advised that Honey Fungus is quite common and that the trees in Abbey Fields are inspected every three years by a qualified tree inspector, who would identify any concerns.

The official business of the AGM concluded at 8.00pm and was followed by a short break for refreshments. Liz Taylor of the Woodland trust then gave a very interesting, entertaining and informative talk entitled “Trees – Pillars of Life on Earth” covering some of the folklore about trees and also their positive effect on our environment and climate.