

FRIENDS OF MILE END PARK

AGM Minutes

Wednesday 5 April 2017 at 7.15 pm in the Art Pavilion, Mile End Park

Present:

Committee Members: John White (**JW**) – Chair of FOMEPP
Stephanie Dowker (**SD**) - Acting Treasurer
Kerrin Isaacs (**KI**) - Secretary
Colleen Bowen (**CB**)
Gail Stevens (**GS**)
Roshan Ansari (**RA**)
Terence O’Flaherty (**TO’F**)

Other:

John Matheson (**John M**)
Julia Miller (**Julia M**)
Geoff Juden (**GJ**)
Karen Robb (**KR**)
Joanna Milewska (**Joanna M**)
Tunde Morakinyo (**TM**)

Mohammed Raja (**MR**) (London Borough of Tower Hamlets)
Paul Sammut (**PS**) (London Borough of Tower Hamlets)

The AGM started at 7.30pm rather than 7.15pm.

CB opened by welcoming all those who were in attendance and explained that she would be chairing the AGM. She also thanked MR and PS for arranging the use of the Art Pavilion with JW, particularly as it provided attendees with an opportunity to view the Force of Nature Art Exhibition.

The Committee Members then introduced themselves.

As at least six members of FOMEPA were present, the AGM was quorate.

1. Apologies for absence

KI noted that she had received apologies from the following:

- Joan Griffiths
- Jane Preston
- Robert Ricks
- Martyn Daniels
- Bill Wright
- Geoff Thorington-Hassell

2. Minutes of 2016 AGM

The minutes of the AGM held on 27 April 2016 had been uploaded to the Document Store on the FOMEPA website prior to the meeting.

The minutes were approved unanimously as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed at the end of the meeting by JW (Chair).

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the 2016 AGM.

4. Chair's Report on Activities and Developments

JW presented an overview of the recent activities of FOMEPA and developments since the 2016 AGM.

He noted the following highlights:

- the Park Life Community Fair and Dog Show held in July 2016 had been a really popular community event, with over 1,000 attendees

and very positive feedback

- ongoing monthly litter-picking events with approximately 20 regular attendees and approximately 6 people attending each month
- the litter situation in the Park has significantly improved
- the Committee is operating very effectively and is expected to continue to do so on a sustainable basis

JW noted that he would expand upon these topics later in the AGM.

JW also noted his thanks to The Coffee Room for providing free coffee for attendees after the monthly litter-picking sessions.

5. Treasurer's Report on Finance and Annual Accounts

SD (Acting Treasurer) delivered the Treasurer's Report on Finance and presented a set of accounts to the AGM in respect of the last financial year, i.e. 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016. Both these documents were circulated during the meeting to all attendees.

SD noted that, as usual, the accounts were straightforward. They showed an income of £5,804 for the financial year 2016 which reflected the Committee's success in attracting major grants and also sponsorship from Keatons estate agents and donations from Irvin Leisure and The Pizza Room.

This income enabled the Committee's expenditure on the Community Fair and Dog Show, which was split approximately half on activities and half on organisational costs and the hire of equipment.

At the end of 2016 FOMEPA had just under £3,500 of net assets as at 31 December 2016. SD noted that the Committee feels it is important to retain some contingency funds in case emergency costs arise and/or there is a reduction in grant income in subsequent years.

Following SD's presentation, the AGM formally accepted the accounts and

they were signed at the end of the meeting by JW (Chair) and by SD.

JW also noted his thanks to SD for taking over as Acting Treasurer mid-year. In turn SD noted her thanks to JW for his work on the preparation of the accounts.

6. Update on Future Events

Community Fair and Dog Show

The Committee had started to plan the Community Fair and Dog Show that was due to take place on the afternoon of Sunday 9 July 2017.

Following the 2016 Community Fair and Dog Show, the Committee had debriefed in considerable detail and would build on what went well and what could have been improved in 2016 for the 2017 event.

The Committee will bear in mind the following key points for the 2017 event:

- aim to secure funding and sponsorship on a more sustainable basis (including liaising with the Mayor of Tower Hamlets to secure some funding from the Film Office)
- build on the publicity plan from 2016 (which had seen the distribution of approximately 1,000 flyers) and continue to increase the use of social media platforms which aim to raise awareness and generate support across all sections of the local community
- aim to provide more activities and seating for older people and a wider range of refreshments
- increase publicity of the Community Fair and Dog Show at crèches and nurseries and talk to PS and MR about the best approach
- in addition to the dog show itself, it was intended to have dog agility, a range of other activities, rides, live music and juggling
- consider using a token system for the fair rides, as feedback from

2016 was that they had been too expensive

- liaise more closely with Mile End Park Management Team as there had been some confusion in 2016 regarding some items, including the PA system (which was missing), chairs (there were not enough) and the coconut shy (the back was missing)

The Committee will finalise planning for the event over the coming weeks.

Monthly litter-picking get-togethers

The Committee has continued to organise regular litter-picking get-togethers on the first Sunday morning of each month (usually starting at 10am and lasting for up to two hours) and intends to do so on an ongoing basis. Details will be posted on the FOMEPA website and email reminders sent out.

These have proven to be a popular activity, with each session attended by on average 6 people with a wide age range of between 5 and 75 years. The sessions end at The Coffee Room where coffee is kindly provided for volunteers.

As well as providing an opportunity to collect litter, the sessions provide a good opportunity to visit and assess the Park on a regular basis and to give feedback as appropriate to the Mile End Park Management Team. Each session aims to focus on a particular area of the Park and to provide a “deep clean” that would otherwise use up valuable council (staff) resources. The most recent get-together, on Sunday 2 April, had identified a very large quantity of litter outside KFC.

MR thanked the Committee for its work on litter-picking and acknowledged the time and effort involved. MR offered to provide any support that we required and JW asked for more litter-picking equipment.

KR raised a question about what LBTH and local community groups are doing to change behaviour on littering. MR identified some of the

challenges faced by the Park in this regard given its location as a thoroughfare in the middle of LBTH and the fact that it is not gated or controlled overnight. In addition, it suffers from other local challenges, such as deprivation and drug-taking. MR told us that LBTH meets quarterly with Safer Neighbourhoods to try to address issues.

MR cited the following examples of recent interventions:

- a recent decision to place an order for another 20 plastic bins which, although they are cheaper compared with stainless steel bins in the Park, will significantly increase the number of bins and enable them to be moved around seasonally as demand requires
- opening up the shrubs at Copperfield Road to reduce anti-social behaviour and also so that there are fewer places where litter may be trapped
- a recent change of operatives which had increased the effectiveness of litter-picking in the Park

PS also noted that the bins have extra bags inside and as Friends we could assist during periods of peak use (e.g. sunny weather) by removing full bags and replacing them with empty bags (full bags to be left beside the bins).

It was also noted that KFC was a key corporate member of Keep Britain Tidy and had publicly committed to clearing an area 100 metres around KFC 3 to 4 times per day. PS suggested that LBTH could provide support if the litter problem with KFC continues.

CB noted that the Committee could potentially investigate the available research on improving behaviour in public places, though this would depend on Committee members having sufficient time to do this given other commitments. It was also suggested that FOMEF could potentially collaborate with Queen Mary University of London both in terms of raising the issue of litter with their students and also establishing what support their Geography department might be able to provide.

JW noted that the new vehicle that had been used the week before to cut the grass on the Mound had crushed a number of glass bottles, rendering them very difficult (and potentially dangerous) to collect during the litter-picking sessions. PS said that staff should avoid doing that. JW requested that staff be reminded of this.

Any other suggestions

There were no further suggestions of activities but CB stated suggestions could be made at any time via twitter (@TheGreenSandwich), email (info@fomep.org.uk) or LBTH's Mile End Park Facebook Page. Given the commitment involved in organising the Community Fair and Dog Show, any suggestions would probably only be implemented later in the summer.

7. Election of officers

KI confirmed that she had not received any nominations for election in advance of the AGM or at the AGM.

Officers were elected unanimously as follows:

- a. Chair – JW
- b. Treasurer – SD
- c. Secretary - KI

8. Update from Mile End Park Management Team

CB introduced MR and PS from Mile End Park Management Team and thanked them for attending the AGM and agreeing to speak.

CB noted that the Committee meets regularly with representatives of the Mile End Park Management Team: usually this takes the format of a walk

through the Park to allow the opportunity for plenty of discussion about specific issues. The next meeting was scheduled to take place in the week of 10 April 2017. In addition the Committee is in regular contact with LBTH as issues arise.

MR and PS started by introducing their roles (MR - Parks Development Officer for LBTH Parks Department; PS - Parks Engagement Officer for LBTH Parks Department). They then led a discussion on the following topics:

Cleansing

PS noted that there had been a real focus on cleansing generally. In addition to litter-picking which had already been covered, PS cited the following:

- Increased monitoring of grounds maintenance (e.g. grass-cutting, including liaising with the Biodiversity Officer on the appropriateness of leaving areas of grass to grow longer, and planting of wild flowers)
- Increased planting and sustaining the planting with a donated water bowser

JW noted that numerous plastic plant pots had been found in the Art Park pond.

Infrastructure

MR noted that a woodland walk had been created near the Copperfield Wood which was now very popular with local schools. In addition, some more educational signs and directional signs were to be erected in the Park. JW mentioned the question that Robert Ricks had submitted in advance about the educational nature signs; MR confirmed that 10 new ones will be provided and the old ones will also be cleaned.

Keith Woodard at LBTH is leading on the increase in cycling and the cycle path within the Park is to be realigned by the Meath Gardens Bridge. Julia M (from the Friends of Meath Gardens) raised the issue of the cycle way by the Haverfield Road entrance. PS said that he could provide contact details of Rob Morton, the LBTH Cycling Officer, if this would be helpful and CB suggested that the Friends of Meath Gardens and FOMEF could be jointly informed.

Finally, on Crossrail, the formal handover had been formalised earlier that week and it was anticipated that they would leave the Park by 2018 following the transition phase. Crossrail had done lots of new planting and from 6 April 2017 would be replacing the old-style halogen street lighting with new LED lighting which was both more economical and effective.

In Bloom Initiatives

PS and MR provided an update on the various In Bloom initiatives (Tower Hamlets in Bloom, London in Bloom and Britain in Bloom). They noted that in September 2017 LBTH would be hosting a 50th anniversary event in the Art Pavilion.

Children's Playground

PS advised that the playground had now reopened after being redesigned and furnished with new equipment.

CB invited questions for PS and MR:

- JW asked when the **dog agility area by Copperfield Road** would be fenced and/or improved. PS confirmed that there was currently no intention to fence it; this had not previously been raised and the cost would be very high. JW commented that, whilst the area remained open, it would not be suitable for dog agility.
- JW and Julia M asked about the **pollarding of trees** currently taking place at Haverfield Green which was extreme and, as noted by TM (who is a

forester), taking place at the wrong time of year (pollarding should take place in the autumn). PS commented that the pollarding may well be taking place for a health and safety reason and MR agreed to follow up and establish the reason.

- JW asked about some **new metal benches in Haverfield Green**. MR thought that they had been donated by Crossrail and/or Keith Woodard.
- JW asked why the **MEP budget** for next year (2017-2018) indicated a reduction in income from approximately £1.1million to £900,000. PS was unsure of the reason. JW also enquired about the expenditure of £76,000 on rent. PS confirmed that this arose as Network Rail charges for 5 or 6 units which MEP then sub-lets to tenants.
- SD asked if the reduction in income would affect the **number of full-time equivalent staff** that can be employed. MR stated that LBTH was aiming for no reduction in staffing numbers for the Park, although this was challenging given that LBTH was making cuts. PS noted that this year LBTH would employ staff on a casual basis to take account of seasonal peaks and specific events. JW suggested that it might be possible to obtain access to the figures as the Park is operated as a charity.
- JW raised the issue of **social media** and noted his view that LBTH needs to improve this, in particular their use of the Facebook account for the Park. Although this has 1,600 followers, nobody posts updates on this account. CB noted that it would be helpful to understand the strategy on the use of social media for the Park and it was agreed that this would be discussed at the next quarterly meeting between the Committee and the Mile End Park Management Team.
- JW asked about **access to the Art Pavilion** following a recent visit when the back doors were locked and he observed visitors being deterred from visiting in spite of the signage in the Park. CB noted that it was particularly frustrating given the quality of the current art exhibition. MR and PS offered to speak with their colleague in the Arts and Events team to establish the position.
- GS raised a question about the **ongoing deterioration of the ponds**. GS had first raised this issue in January 2014 with Steve Murray (Head of Parks, LBTH). The key issues are that the liner has been leaking for three years and the water levels are reducing. JW added that the pumps that

circulate water throughout the Park are therefore being overused to compensate for the leaks. FOMEPE felt that it was really important to address and resolve the underlying issue (i.e. the leaks rather than the pumps).

A number of people in the meeting commented that this is a significant issue and it lets the Park down and creates a feeling of dilapidation in spite of all of the other very positive features of the Park.

JW stated that, because of this issue and the amount of time since it had first been raised, FOMEPE have had no alternative but to withdraw support for the Park's Green Flag application.

PS noted that all pumps had been or were in the process of being replaced but, as one issue is resolved, another issue emerges. An initial condition survey on the ponds had taken place which provided indicative repair costs of £100,000 (though a detailed survey would be needed in due course). The survey engineer had suggested that costs could be reduced by filling in one of the ponds and creating a bog instead.

The view of the AGM was that it would be a terrible idea to lose a pond. In addition, it was noted that the creation of a bog would need proactive management.

JW noted that the Mayor is paying great attention to the ponds and has asked Debbie Jones (Director of Children's Services) to report back directly to him. In addition it is on the agenda of the King George's Fields meeting and FOMEPE could raise it directly with the Mayor and/or with councillors.

It was agreed that after the AGM FOMEPE would continue to liaise with MR and PS and put forward additional questions. MR and PS agreed to either answer them directly or forward them on to colleagues who could. GJ noted that LBTH should provide a timeframe within which the ponds would be put into better condition.

CB thanked MR and PS on behalf of FOMEF.

9. Any other business

There was no other business.

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.18pm and refreshments were served and attendees were invited to look around the Force of Nature Art Exhibition.

*Kerrin Isaacs
April 2017*