

FRIENDS OF MILE END PARK

AGM Minutes

Monday 15 April 2019 at 7.15 pm in the Ecology Pavilion, Mile End Park

Committee Members: John White **(JW)** – Chair
Stephanie Dowker **(SD)** - Treasurer
Kerrin Isaacs **(KI)** – Secretary
Richard Thomas **(RT)**

Other: Jane Butterfield **(JB)**
Richard Desmond **(RD)**
Joan Griffiths **(JG)**
Barbara Gunnell **(BG)**
Jane Hutchings **(JH)**
Sue Johnstone **(SJ)**
Geoff Juden **(GJ)**
Gerry Matthews **(GM)**
Dan McCurry **(DMcC)**
Margaret McGinley **(MMcG)**
Jasmina Negrini **(JN)**

Mosfiqur Rahman **(MR)** (London Borough of Tower Hamlets)
Paul Sammut **(PS)** (London Borough of Tower Hamlets)

The AGM started at 7.15pm.

JW opened by welcoming all those who were in attendance and explained that he would be chairing the AGM.

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

1. Apologies for absence

JW noted that the Committee had received apologies in advance from Gail Stevens (GS) and Roshan Ansari (RA).

2. Minutes of 2018 AGM

The minutes of the AGM held on 11 April 2018 had been uploaded to the Document Store on the FOMEPA website shortly after the AGM. The minutes were also available to all attendees at the AGM.

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 (as Chair).

3. Matters arising

There were no specific matters arising from the 2018 AGM but we would cover several matters discussed at the 2018 AGM during the meeting.

4. Chair's Report on Activities and Developments

JW presented an overview of the recent activities of FOMEPA and developments since the 2018 AGM.

The **Park Life Community Fair and Dog Show** had taken place in July 2018. FOMEPA had assumed a more limited role in 2018 given concerns about resource, both in terms of capacity (as the Committee comprises only a small number of volunteers) and cost (given the constraints associated with obtaining funding). This meant that Mile End Park planned, paid for and ran the event with the support of FOMEPA; FOMEPA ran the dog show and focused on "friend-raising" (i.e. signing up new members and raising FOMEPA's profile). It was a very successful community event on a hot, sunny day attended by approximately 1,200 people.

BG thought that the event had been fabulous and the friend she had

attended with had been “bowled over”.

FOMEPE continued to organise regular **litter-picking sessions** on Sunday mornings and had supplemented these with several big **bulb-planting sessions** in autumn and early winter 2018 during which 2,000 snowdrop bulbs and 6,000 bluebell bulbs were planted in two locations, Chris’s Wood and by the Woodland Walk near the climbing area. The snowdrops had bloomed and were lovely.

JW mentioned that he had been on a wildflower course with Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park which supported FOMEPE’s bulb-planting activity. FOMEPE is hoping to be able to nurture these areas in the future.

These sessions are well-attended by members of the community as well as Committee members and provide a good opportunity to visit the Park regularly. JW thanked the Coffee Room for their support of these sessions in the form of complimentary coffee and cake afterwards for all attendees which enhances the valuable social element to the sessions. JW also thanked London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) for donating the bulbs and providing equipment for the planting sessions.

The Committee has recently decided to pause these activities given some concerns around personal liability for Committee members should there be any mishaps resulting in injury or financial loss (such as needle-stick damage or a stone flying into an eye). The Committee is investigating this issue further and hope to resume both litter-picking and bulb-planting sessions soon. PS provided the meeting with a copy of an email from Mayor Biggs regarding cover by LBTH.

The Committee has also focused on **increasing membership** during the year. Last year we had over 400 members on our database. This has increased and currently stands at approximately 460. In addition to the activities noted above, the Committee has ensured a presence at various local events in and around the Park and pavilions, such as at Urban Makers East and at art exhibitions. It is encouraging that some of our new members

then join in FOMEP's activities once they have signed up.

JW reported that in April 2018 the Committee had completed a Co-op application form relating to **community funding**. This enables FOMEP to benefit from a proportion of the amount spent by shoppers at the Mile End Co-op on Co-op branded goods and on plastic carrier bags. More than £2,500 has been raised to date and the amount over the full year is anticipated to be approximately £4,000. As Co-op transfer the donation in two instalments, unfortunately funds will not be received in time for the summer event in 2019 and the Committee may instead consider spending it on bulbs and holding some in reserve with the consent of Co-op.

The Committee has also been involved in supporting seven cygnets that recently hatched outside the Art Pavilion and have a nest in the reed beds. GS has done an amazing job of liaising with the LBTH and eliciting the support of Mayor Biggs to ensure that the nesting swans and their cygnets are protected. Following a site visit by Keith Woodward (Park Infrastructure Officer) and guidance from the Swan Sanctuary and the LBTH Biodiversity Officer, protective actions were taken, including restricting access to the Art Pavilion Island, installing signs to alert members of the public and preventing the use of a leaf blower very close to the cygnets.

In response to a question raised by RD, JW confirmed that FOMEP's mailing list is managed free of charge through Mailchimp and is GDPR compliant. As a small organisation we no longer charge for membership (we used to charge a £5 fee but the administration of this was onerous and outweighed the benefits). We can sign up new members on an iPad or even a mobile phone which is useful when we are out and about at events.

5. Treasurer's Report on Finance and Annual Accounts

SD (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 2018 to 31 December 2018. Both these documents were circulated during the meeting to all attendees.

The 2018 accounts show income of just over £1,300 (which was primarily attributed to a major grant from LBTH and sponsorship by and donations from George Irvin and Keatons estate agents). SD thanked these organisations on behalf of the Committee. In addition, SD noted that LBTH had taken on the costs of running Park Life and its management and that the event would not have been possible without this support; LBTH had also donated all the bulbs for the bulb-planting sessions. SD thanked LBTH on behalf of the Committee.

Our expenditure for the year was £505.82, primarily associated with publicity costs for Park Life and running the dog show itself, as well as some general costs, such as for web-hosting.

The net assets as at 31 December 2018 were £1,818.41, an increase on the prior year (net assets as at 31 December 2017 had been £861.19).

RD mentioned a scheme for getting free bulbs through the NPGA. JW was aware of this scheme but unfortunately the timing of bulb provision, just before Christmas, would not work for bulb-planting by volunteers at such a busy time of the year; further, the bulbs produce ornamental flowers and are therefore not suitable for woodland planting. RD also noted a free trees scheme that had been used by Meath Gardens to obtain 350 trees and shrubs. JW commented that FOMEPA would view major planting as the responsibility of LBTH rather than FOMEPA. RD suggested planting ferns.

SD had brought bank statements if any attendees wanted to look at them.

Following SD's presentation, the AGM formally accepted the accounts and they were signed at the end of the meeting by JW (as Chair) and by SD (as Treasurer).

6. Update on Future Events

Park Life Community Fair and Dog Show

The Committee hoped that Park Life would take place in summer 2019. JW

had not yet spoken with PS about it other than at a high-level.

JG commented that the dog show is a really very popular local event, even with attendees who do not have dogs. BG concurred. JW reported that unfortunately Reverend Debbie Frazer would no longer be able to run the dog show again as she has left the area. BG commented that she was great, a model of how such things should be done. The Committee noted this and their gratitude for Debbie's support over the years.

Litter-picking and bulb-planting sessions

JW confirmed that, pending resolution of the potential liability issue raised earlier, the Committee was hoping to return to litter-picking soon and run more bulb-planting sessions in the future. JW said that it might be worth establishing with LBTH whether corporate volunteers would be able to remove ivy, nettles and cow parsley in advance of bulb-planting sessions.

Social events

Committee members frequently attend the Tuesday quiz night at the Lord Tredegar pub and would welcome others joining them.

Any other suggestions

JW asked if any attendees had any suggestions for future events.

DMcC said that cycling would be a good way of increasing involvement and sparking public interest in the Park, especially as cyclists use Twitter extensively. Victoria Park collaborates with Tower Hamlets Wheelers. The Committee usually tries to arrange for the Wheelers or Bikeworks to take part in the summer event.

GJ welcomed expansion of activities at the summer community fair but noted that the dog show is the focal point of the event. He asked whether it would be worth considering running a 'best dog show in East London'. SD

noted that the licensing requirements for events including dog shows are complex and better managed by LBTH than FOMEPE; as a result, the Committee's preference was to keep the dog show light-hearted and fun.

RD commented that he maintains a list of community bands should the Committee wish to do anything involving music and he would be happy to pass on contacts to us.

SD mentioned the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme and its survey on flower-insect timed counts which is designed to collect new data on numbers of flower-visiting insects. SD suggested that FOMEPE could participate in this, undertaking counts of insects visiting an area of target flowers over ten minutes. There was some interest among attendees in this project and it was suggested that it could be combined with a picnic in the Park.

DMcC asked about the wind turbine which had broken over ten years ago and had not been fixed. He also asked about the water level in the ponds. JW asked PS to comment on both points later in the meeting.

There were no further suggestions of activities during the AGM.

For reference, suggestions may be made at any time via twitter (@TheGreenSandwich), email (info@fomep.org.uk) or the Mile End Park Facebook Page.

7. Election of officers

KI confirmed that she had not received any nominations for election in advance of the AGM and nor were there any nominations at the AGM itself. JW noted that RT is also on the Committee along with himself, SD and KI (and Gail Stevens, Roshan Ansari and Terence O'Flaherty who had been unable to attend).

Officers were elected unanimously as follows:

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

We would be keen to welcome additional Committee members later in the year at any point.

The meeting had a brief break for ten minutes.

8. Update from Mile End Park Management Team

JW introduced PS (Parks Engagement and Projects Officer) and thanked him for attending the AGM and agreeing to speak. PS noted that he would provide some updates and then take questions.

Park Life

PS opened by confirming that LBTH would once again be happy to support the summer event. PS will talk to JW in more detail about this. The Committee will need to confirm a date quickly with PS as the event will form part of the wider summer programme and will therefore need to be included in all publicity material.

LBTH Events in the Park

PS provided some analysis of events and activities held in the Park between April 2018 and March 2019. In total 23,840 individuals had benefited/taken part in 304 events and activities. The Park had hosted 19 corporate volunteering sessions (this was fewer than the year before following a decision by LBTH to focus resource primarily on engagement and community participation in activities and events).

Park Life had been attended by approximately 1,200 people which PS described as “impressive”. Although it had been a very hot day

accommodations had been made, such as setting up the registration area for the dog show in the shade and setting up a paddling pool for the dogs.

45 community-focused activities are planned for the Park over a six-week period in July and August, including nine events (this will include Park Life).

Arts and Ecology Pavilions

The Arts Pavilion had been used for 191 days and the Ecology Pavilion for 171 days between April 2018 and March 2019. The venues are used for events, exhibitions and private hire e.g. weddings. Queen Mary University of London use both venues for exams over a six-week period which provides a good source of income for the Park.

SJ asked PS why the Pavilions are not used more frequently. PS advised that current usage represents an increase on previous years. LBTH is trying to promote the use of the Pavilions for corporate functions, especially during the week and at daytime, with a package of rates to entice the corporate world and marketing now being managed by a couple of agencies.

SD asked about a recent art exhibition which might be deemed inappropriate for children but had not been labelled clearly at the door as being explicit. PS thought that warnings had been posted but agreed to check. BG asked PS what the remit is for the Art Pavilion. PS confirmed its remit as a public gallery and therefore each application to hold an exhibition there will be considered on its own merit.

GM noted that the Ecology Pavilion is used for public blood donation sessions.

PS noted that the income from both Pavilions is currently £237,000 per annum, which has increased over recent years. Revenue generated from the Pavilions and the Green Bridge shops allows the Park to be self-sufficient.

DMcC suggested adding some more lighting. RD said this could impact the bats although low lighting might be possible. PS noted that new more energy-efficient remote-controlled LED and digital lighting had been installed in the Arts Pavilion at a cost of £75,000. In June LBTH will be installing new lighting outside the Arts Pavilion which will include LED lighting that will light up the water at night so that the views may be enjoyed at night as well as during the day. Different considerations apply to the Ecology Pavilion as it was set up as an ecology habitat and therefore we need to be mindful of the wildlife, such as the bats.

PS made the wider point that investment in the Pavilions makes them desirable and supports the whole area. DMcC stated that he is happy for people to come into our area and enjoy it.

Wind turbine

In response to DMcC's earlier point on the broken wind turbine, PS said LBTH had assessed the repair cost a few years ago as £25,000 and concluded that this spend was not viable given the electric pump.

DMcC commented that the wind turbine is charming and calm. JG recalled that its construction had caused a lot of controversy. DMcC asked if it should be removed if it was not going to be fixed. PS said that there had been a debate a few years ago about removing it but the conclusion was that it should remain in the Park as an architectural piece. SJ thought people might not notice that it was broken but overall the view was that this was noticed.

PS asked GJ if he wanted to remove the wind turbine. GJ commented that he thought it reflects badly on LBTH. DMcC said he thinks people may have stopped noticing it because it has been broken for such a long time.

DMcC asked PS to revisit whether the wind turbine should be fixed.

Ponds

DMcC asked PS for an update on the water levels in the ponds. PS confirmed that they are now maintaining water to good levels (and noted that water should not rise past the wooden bridge mark). PS advised that LBTH monitor water levels regularly and can adjust top-ups as required; everything is working well since the new pump was put in and there are no dramatic drops in water level. Servicing takes place monthly.

FOMEF would continue to monitor water levels given their importance and given FOMEF's involvement in this over several years.

Skate Park

JG said that she hoped the skate park is well-protected as it is such an important part of the Park with visitors coming from far and wide. PS noted that the maintenance costs for the concrete are high as it is gradually decaying.

Graffiti is now permitted on the walls and all surrounding furniture, but not on the actual bowls where they skate.

DMcC thought we should instead have zero tolerance for graffiti as the Park environment is less urban and therefore less suited to graffiti compared with other more urban environments, such as Fish Island. DMcC and JW both mentioned that they would potentially be interested in volunteering to clear graffiti from locations other than the skate park.

Health and fitness

RD noted that the parkrun that takes place in the Park on Saturday mornings is very successful.

PS told us that the Great Outdoor Gym Company have put in a bid to the London Marathon Trust and asked LBTH for locations to site a new gym if their bid succeeds. The outdoor gym at Wennington Green is at the end of

its life so this would be a good option.

SD commented that she thought LBTH could promote the Park more as a place for exercise, especially in view of the low healthy life expectancy for women in Tower Hamlets. JG noted that there are sometimes guided walks, for example led by Graham Barker. SD would also like to see encouragement for people to walk regularly in the Park as free exercise in the open air.

Benches

JG commented that the design of benches is important for older users as they are often at an inappropriate height and with no arms at the side. It would also be great to see some benches in groups to encourage park users to sit and chat together.

PS said that LBTH had chosen a standard bench at the right height and with adequate back support and arms to make using them easier for older users and those with mobility issues; these are wrought iron with wooden slats. These have currently not been installed in the Park as the current Park benches are stainless steel and, as the styles are different, these will be replaced gradually.

Miscellaneous

GM raised a question about the planting along the canal. She feels some of the planting choices are inappropriate because they spread so far. She asked PS to revisit the planting choices. She also raised a point about corporate volunteering and conflicts that potentially arise between different Park users, such as in relation to the planter at the Solebay Street entrance which had been planted by corporate volunteers but which she thinks creates even more chaos at a very busy spot in the Park and ultimately makes access more difficult. JW commented that it has sharp edges at eye level for children. JW said that this issue had been raised two years ago. GM thinks it should be removed from the junction. PS said

nobody has raised this as an issue in two years.

JW thanked PS for attending the meeting and for his help and support through the year.

9. Any other business

Three attendees spoke to the AGM briefly about related initiatives that they are running:

- GJ would like FOMEPE to support Shoreditch Forest Garden Group in their creation of a four-mile urban forest garden through East London
- DMcC is running a campaign to build a river pathway to a jetty on the river at the Thames Path from Tower Bridge
- GM mentioned The Big Dig taking place on the afternoon of Saturday 27 April

JW said that it would be possible to provide information to him and he would circulate it if the Committee felt it was relevant to FOMEPE.

There was no other business.

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.50pm and refreshments continued to be served.

*Kerrin Isaacs
2 July 2019*