

Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

Minutes of 28th Annual General Meeting

**Held at Queen Alexandra's House, Bremner Road, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2QT
(by kind permission of The Chairman of the Trustees, Adrian Harvey and the Principal,
Anet Brown)**

On Wednesday, 17th April 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Sue Price (Chairman), Joanna Clark, René Gimpel, Susan Heywood, Tina Higginson, Tom Newman, Julian Peach, Tessa Singleton, Kathy Spanos, Simon Walton.
About 52 Attending including Trustees and Helpers.

Apologies: There were 16 apologies.

1. Welcome

The Chairman Sue Price welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Councillor Lindsey Hall, Lord Mayor of Westminster, Councillor Marie-Therese Rossi, Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Deputy Mayor Mohammed Bakhtiar. She also welcomed members of the Royal Parks team including Tom Jarvis, Director of Parks, Jason Taylor, Manager of Hyde Park, Andrew Williams, Manager of Kensington Gardens, Rob Dowling, Assistant Manager of St. James's and The Green Park, Dave Jordan, Assistant Manager of Hyde Park and others. She also introduced DS Dan Window, PC Steven Barnes, Metropolitan Police Dedicated Officer for Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and Brompton Cemetery and Sam Owen, Head of Kensington Palace.

Sue thanked Ian Nightingale, Assistant Park Manager of Hyde Park, and Kathryn Whybrow for setting up all the technology for slide presentations by the two principal speakers.

Sue then thanked The Chairman of the Trustees of Queen Alexandra's House, Adrian Harvey, and the Principal, Anet Brown for so kindly inviting the Friends to the House and for helping with the organisation of the drawing room. Adrian talked about the Prince Albert Memorial, the Great Exhibition and gave a brief history of the building.

2. Apologies

The Chairman said many people were unable to attend owing to the traffic problems caused by Extinction Rebellion demonstrations. She requested all those present to let Kathy Spanos know after the meeting if there were any apologies.

3. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 11th April 2018

The Chairman asked if there were any errors in the minutes of the meeting held on 11th April 2018 which required correction. There was no response and the minutes of the last AGM were then agreed unanimously, having been proposed by Richard Price and seconded by Jennie Cleaver.

4. Matters arising

The Chairman asked if there were any matters arising.

In answer to the comment in Paragraph 3 about communications by The Royal Parks the meeting was told that the arrangements of Notice Boards in the Parks had been improved during the winter.

5. Financial Report and Accounts

Discussing the Annual Report, Sue Price thanked John Heywood, the Friends' independent examiner and Simon Walton, the treasurer. John spoke to say that he was happy with the accounts, which he had helped prepare and the Trustees had accepted the accounts as a full record at their last meeting.

6. Election of Trustees

The Chairman said that Tom Newman had done great work in setting the Friends up as a charity, for which she gave many thanks. She added that Tom was not offering himself for re-election as he needed to chair another Charity. He received a round of applause. She then said that Tessa Singleton and Julian Peach had come to the end of their three year terms and offered themselves for re-election. In addition, Tina Higginson had been attending Trustee meetings and had offered to serve as a Trustee.

The Trustees were therefore all elected, having been proposed by Tom Newman, seconded by Joanna Clark and agreed unanimously.

Sue Price thanked the Trustees for achieving so much in all areas pertaining to the parks, and the volunteers who manage the information kiosk.

7. Update on the Orangery at Kensington Palace

Sam Owen, Head of Kensington Palace outlined the current project concerning the Orangery re-development. A scaled-down planning application had been presented to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for a single-story building, rather than a multi-story one. It will include a learning centre and offices, with completion in 2020.

8. Short presentation on the bandstand concerts.

Joanna Clark gave a presentation about the previous year's summer bandstand concerts. Three further concerts were planned for the first three Sundays in August and donations were solicited. There was further information included with the papers on people's seats. Sue Price added that the bands brought much pleasure to park visitors and the Friends needed to raise the cash to pay for the concerts.

9. Guest Speaker: PC Steven Barnes, Dedicated Police Officer, The Royal Parks

Steve Barnes gave a light-hearted slide show of his career and work, not concentrating on crime but rather on the grass-roots work. He mentioned the Swedish mid-summer party as being a challenge, as well as the changing nature of Speakers' Corner, where not all new orators understood the nature of free speech, for which they had to be reminded about the ground rules.

10. Guest Speaker: Andy Williams, Manager Kensington Gardens and Brompton Cemetery.

Sue Price introduced Andy Williams who began his slide presentation by thanking Theresa Short, Russell Stevens and Pavel for all the good work that they did while he was working at Brompton Cemetery. He then gave details of some plans and projects. The park has 30 veteran trees, some 300 years old which require special provision and protection of roots. Tree experts and consultants are used and input from members is welcome. There is a coppicing program around the Long Water. Work had been completed on the Thimble Shelters. Andy gave an explanation of the work being done on and around the Peter Pan statue and added that there are 22 registered volunteers at the allotment, who have given 400 hours of work plus three volunteers from the Friends. He said that 160 further volunteers are sponsored by Bloomberg and that volunteering opportunities are available, listed on the park's website.

Andy then explained that in 2016 a ten-year plan was put in place, within which are five-year plans. In his slide presentation, Andy showed a chart which allows the Park's employees to monitor and assess progress.

Next year, work will begin on the less frequented North Flower Walk and continue on the more popular South Flower Walk. Meanwhile, with 1.2 million visitors a year to the Diana Memorial Playground, plans are underway to 'future-proof' the site.

Andy is also in charge of Brompton Cemetery, which was relaunched in July 2018.

Walks, talks and an exhibition were organised, including a Great War memorial dedicated to the gardeners who fell in that war. Statistics were given -in a question and answer quiz fashion- on the consumption of food and drink, plus rubbish collections.

Finally, Andy told the meeting that two people from OCS Group, who look after grounds maintenance for the Park, were present.

11. Jason Taylor, Manager Hyde Park.

The Chairman thanked Andy for his fantastic presentation and then introduced Jason who also gave a slide show, starting with a history of how he came to join the park 331 days previously. He delighted the audience by telling them that his initial interview came via a phone call at 2.30 in the morning while he was holidaying in New Zealand! Jason then explained that on his first day he had to deal with horses and carriages, then during the following weeks the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, then Christo's Mastaba with 800,000 visitors, and then the British Summertime Concerts with 350,000 attending over two weekends, followed, with four days warning, by the World Cup Screening, when 30,000 arrived to view England play. Because of the heat during the summer, ice cream sales rose 28% and bottled water 19%. Jason then gave details of the half-marathon, the dismantling of Mastaba, a bomb in November which caused a great panic but turned out to be a dummy, the 3.6 million Winter Wonderland visitors and the Parade Ground reinstatement of 11 acres of new turf. Jason concluded by congratulating the incredible parks' teamwork, which he had not seen elsewhere, and asked himself if he had enjoyed it. His answer was a resounding YES!

12. Questions from the Floor.

The Chairman thanked Jason for his fantastic presentation and asked if anyone had any questions:-.

A question to Steven Barnes:- How can Speaker's Corner be improved? Steve answered that the problem lay with younger, religious groups, as older speakers move out. He has instigated a focus group with the speakers to diversity topics and get back to tolerance and freedom of speech. Crime is down 75% because fifteen 'antagonists' have been moved on and he had built trust with speakers. One problem is that so much is organised through social media, which doesn't help with planning. Aggressive attendees like to download their behaviour, too.

A second question to Steven Barnes:- What's the best time to attend Speaker's Corner?
Answer:- About 2 pm.

Another question was put as to whether he was the only Dedicated Police Officer for Hyde Park? Steven replied that he was and also covered two other Parks but that he had two Officers who were assigned to Speaker's Corner and he could call on others. He added that there were 81 Police Officers across all the Royal Parks.

In answer to a further question, Steven replied that there were no plans to expand the use of CCTV but it was possible to bring in a video equipped van.

In answer to a question about veteran trees, Andy Williams expanded to say that they try to enforce regulations about feeding wildlife. Regarding parakeets, there was no way of controlling their numbers, though Andy thought that they were probably at their maximum number.

Paul Shelley asked if cycling was getting worse? Andy replied that rumble strips have slowed cyclists and improved signs were working and having a positive effect on commuters. The main problems were with tourists using Santander bikes. The Broadwalk had seen slower speeds. Tom Newman commented that The Royal Parks had employed Matt Bonomi, Head of Transport and Access, among whose tasks is to work out how cycling may exist in the parks without disturbing other users.

Jennie Cleaver then made a plea for two more volunteers to help manage the Friends' kiosk near Hyde Park Corner.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their contributions and thanked the members for coming. She then handed gifts from the Friends to Adrian Harvey, Anet Brown and to the Queen Alexandra House housekeeping team.

The meeting ended at about 8:20 pm

Apologies

Mark Field, MP

Emma Dent Coad, MP

Andrew Scattergood

Darren Woodward

Phil Newcombe

Cllr Elizabeth Hitchcock, WCC

Cllr Ian Adams, WCC

Cllr Antonia Cox, WCC

Cllr Heather Acton, WCC

Cllr Ian Wason, RBKC

Theresa Short

Jacky Hyer

John Harkness

Matt Higham, Contract Manager OCS

Lynden Easton

Tessa Kilgour