

Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

Minutes of 29th Annual General Meeting

Held via Zoom

On Monday, 30th November 2020 at 5.00 pm

Present: Sue Price (Chairman), Joanna Clark, Simon Walton, Julian Peach, Susan Heywood, Tina Higginson, Alison Mould, Simon Cox, Jill Leuw, Patty Taylor
Approx. 59 attended including trustees and helpers

In attendance: Lynden Easton, Kathy Spanos

Apologies: There were 7 apologies. Accepted and noted.

1. Welcome from the Chair

Thanks to John Heywood who is retiring as the Independent Examiner of the Accounts
Thanks to Julian Peach who is retiring.

- Approval of the Minutes of the AGM held in 2019 – **Approved**
- Receipt of the 2019 Annual Statement of Accounts and the Trustees' Annual Report - **Approved**
- Election of those trustees retiring on a 3 year rotation Susan Heywood and Joanna Clark – **Approved**

2. Report from Andrew Scattergood CEO The Royal Parks

During this past year the value of the Parks has been shown in full.
There were worries at the beginning of the first lockdown that the Parks may have had to close. However there was good and effective liaison between the Parks and thanks to a brilliant team – the staff and contractors, of whom Andrew is very proud, they did not in fact need to close. The teams made adjustments to the way they worked. They travelled to work using different methods of transport e.g. bicycle and changed shift patterns.

Keeping the Parks open was crucial to both physical and mental health.

Thank you goes to everyone in particular those visiting – the receipt of positive tweets, photographs etc. which were circulated to the whole team were very motivating.

There has been a growth in numbers of people attending the Royal Parks despite, from time to time, the lack of toilet facilities, car parking and cafes. The increase is up to 16% according to the City of London survey although out of town it is believed that the number of people visiting their parks, such as Richmond, has doubled. In St James and Green Parks the numbers have been down – Kensington Gardens and Brompton Cemetery have been busier.

There have been operational challenges but these were met with things like learning online e.g. Crystal Palace and drone footage online. Toilets and litter have been a big challenge. In the summer, a campaign was run “Be kind to your parks – take litter home”.

This had all helped in relation to the second lockdown. More toilets, benches etc. were open following government guidance.

Transport – The movement strategy which was published in February 2020 has now been implemented with effect from 18th September. The maximum speed limit is now 20 mph in all Royal Parks.

There are five trials running in six of the Parks at the moment. In Hyde Park there is a trial to see if North Carriage Drive can be closed permanently; it has currently been closed for six months and is being used 2 days a week as a Covid testing station.

There is also a trial to see if South Carriage Drive can be closed on Saturdays. It is usually only closed on Sundays but during lockdown has been closed for some time due to the difficulties with the cycle lane linking onto Park Lane.

Andrew was delighted that the Green Flag award had been given in all of the Royal Parks and, for the first time, to Brompton Cemetery.

Park finances – usually 80% of income was generated through commercial activities with 20% coming from the government contract. In March they had been in the best financial position ever. That has clearly changed dramatically this year. The spending for 2021 was being reviewed to see what expenditure could now take place. They had received a grant for £1 million to help Covid-proof the Parks. However, they would need to look at fundraising.

The Parks have never been more important to London.

Q – question was then asked about the police in the Parks.

Andrew explained that the availability of police had increased as none were currently involved in the Changing the Guard parade which they normally would be. Behaviour challenges would always exist in the Park – the winter campaign has been launched “Be respectful to others”.

Q – question was then asked about big events and whether they had committed to any.

Andrew explained that these had all been delayed and/or cancelled but that Duran Duran had now booked a concert and it was hoped that the delayed Parks’ Half Marathon would go ahead in April. They were working together with the government to ensure the best plan for these events and at the same time anticipating having to cancel and/or postpone.

Sue Price – thanked Lynden Easton together with the technical officers at the Parks, who had kept the blog going during the first lockdown.

3. Report from Jason Taylor Parks Manager Hyde Park

It hadn’t all been bad.

26 Hyde Park maps have been installed, mission invertebrate was proceeding well and wooden statues were now in place in the North Meadows.

1km of Rotten Row had been reopened following its substantial improvement, the cost of which had been borne by the Ministry of Defence – there would be a formal opening later in the year.

Larger bins and putting them in different locations had been trialled – at one point during lockdown 1 they were emptying bins every hour!

In North Carriage Drive a swale had been introduced to assist with puddle drainage. This had been paid for by TfL. It created a wet area which was conducive to wildlife whilst at the same time draining North Carriage Drive.

Summer bedding had gone ahead and given people a lift – the winter bedding had been planted in October – people had been very complimentary.

Pat and Russell had thrived during the blog for which everybody had been very grateful.

Cadent has undertaken some substantial gasworks linking the north to the south parts of the borough. Covid had actually assisted these works as they would not have been completed within the anticipated time frame that had been allocated to them between events, if those events had in fact taken place.

As no events had taken place, turf had been re-laid and maintained and some areas had been given a well-earned rest.

However issues had arisen were:

Substantial littering, particularly in the evenings

Difficulties with lack of toilets

The Lido swimming facilities would now not be upgraded due to lack of funds

Recently there had been unauthorised protests involving a number of police officers in the Park.

They are moving forward with their 10 year management plan. They are hoping for funds to introduce larger bins and improve the toilets. Mission Invertebrate-funded initiatives are a welcome boost to the Park.

The long-term strategy was:-

1. Extend volunteering
2. Introduce Rangers
3. Re-introduce a stretch of the Tyburn Brook
4. Improve the bandstand
5. Consider long-term maintenance of the Serpentine

Finally, he wanted to thank all in Rangers Lodge – the grounds and maintenance staff, the caterers, the Park lock-up staff, the police, visitors and The Friends – the Royal Parks were closer now. However, bluntly, he hoped that 2021 would be a bit more normal.

Q – a question was then asked about safer cycling. He said he was not aware at the moment of any plans to alter the Park Lane junction although they would be looking carefully at this.

Q – what funds did he get from filming rights – he said people were charged. Gucci had filmed last week and had given a substantial contribution. Andrew Scattergood pointed out that the Parks' account show that £1 million is raised on average a year from filming in the Parks and the amount of filming has increased this year.

Q – a question was then asked about access for disabled people, wondering whether recent changes had made the Park less friendly. Jason advised that new benches had been ordered and thanked the questioner for letting him know that access to some of the toilets was currently more difficult.

4. Report by Andrew Williams Park Manager Kensington Gardens

[Andrew shared his screen throughout his talk and showed us some interesting images of the Park this year]

He said he had also had a challenging year – for example graffiti had increased with several people being apprehended, the Italian Gardens had suffered damage to stonework. However, the Green Flag and Heritage awards had been retained of which he was very proud.

They had gone online – at Brompton Cemetery held a virtual Halloween week about good death!! There was a podcast and a scavenger hunt. The learning team had taken us on a tour of the Albert Memorial – these were currently on YouTube.

Mission Invertebrate is a Park project where money was obtained from the People's Postcode Lottery and from which he has received 4 annual sums of over £0.5 million over the years. The latest award is for four tactile structures which would be put in place this week in North Flower Walk. Some of the funds were being used for three guided trails so that people could investigate science and nature. Other things that were being developed were pond-dipping platforms.

However, the proposed changes to the landscape maintenance team staff accommodation had now been put back for between three and five years. Andy thanked Sue Price for her letter in support of the planning application.

The 10 year tree strategy was being updated. With the recent hot summers, water had been a challenge and a number of horsechestnuts had had to be felled due to drought stem and bleeding canker.

New ways of funding needed to be looked at, one of these was DCS help – tap and donate – these will be investigated soon.

Planting had gone ahead in spring and winter, certain areas had been left fallow for two years to assist in the eradication of bind weed, railings had been used to protect corners and 24 new or reconditioned benches had been installed.

Andrew also wanted to thank his entire team, the contractors, staff and volunteers who had helped them through this difficult time.

Q – a question was asked about electric scooters and the like. He confirmed that electric scooters were not legal and the police were handing out warnings. Cycling was being monitored and opportunities assessed.

Q – a question was then asked about who chose the bedding plants. He explained that this was a group decision with the gardeners, the apprentices and the whole of the team. In relation to what type of trees went into the Park, there was a tree planting strategy with particular types of trees allocated to certain areas only.

Sue Price advised that a number of Friends had asked about volunteering. Tina Higginson confirmed that people wanting to volunteer should register on the TRP website and in due course, when volunteering had recommenced properly, the new volunteers would be contacted.

Sue Price thanked Andrew, Jason and Andrew for their time and fascinating reports.

Sue Price ended by thanking everybody for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 18:50 hours.

Alison Mould
18 January 2021