

Friends of Birkenhead Park

Minutes of AGM and Quarterly Meeting 25th May 2019

Birkenhead Park Visitor Centre

- 1. Present:-** Prof Lee (chair), Pauline Beecham, Margaret Robinson, Norman Marsh, Maureen Chadwick, Sarah Malin, John Thompson, Michelle Rowley, Paul Kravchuk, Heather Bradshaw, Les Elston, J H Leighton, Glyn Holden, Harvey Cox, Graham Arnold, Marion Russell, June Wilson.
- 2. Apologies:-** Georgina Keena, Michael Hickey, Cllr Bill Davies, Fraser Robertson, Ian lea, Sheila Blair
- 3. Remembrance of Esther Lewis**

Prof Lee invoked the memory of Esther who had been a founder member of the Friends in 1975 and had supported them ever since and had also written a book of poems. A minutes silence was held in memory of her.

4. Election of Officers

The existing officers were willing to continue to serve again. A new Secretary, Philip Holmes, was being proposed. The group of officers was voted in.

5. Minutes of AGM 5 May 2018 and Quarterly Meeting Feb 23 2019

The Minutes were accepted as a correct record apart from the spelling of the designer of Central Park New York which should be 'Olmsted'. There were no matters arising.

6. Chairmans's Report

- RL gave thanks to members and volunteers for their work over the year.
- Generally matters were going well in the Park.
- RL questioned members on what improvements could be made. SM raised the lack of changes made on noticeboards and that information was out of date. MR questioned the non removal of banners on railings after events and the leaving of ties on fences and gates. Comment was also made on the advert for Heybury House which had appeared two months ago. GA commented on the new privet plants which had been distributed around the Park boundaries and had at long last closed the gap by the containers at the Joseph Paxton Campus. With dry weather they would be susceptible to drought in the summer.
- RL was to meet with David Armstrong, Deputy Chief Executive, to get the Council to take the covenants seriously so that the backland development of 54 – 56 Park Road South could not be repeated.
- The first meeting of the Merseyside Civic Society outside Liverpool had been

held at the Visitor Centre on the 23 April 2019. The Society examined the question of a WHS for the Park and after discussions were in support.

- Finances were in a healthy state and the friends were good at obtaining funds for projects. £1,326 had been obtained from the Greggs Foundation for raised beds at the Edward Kemp Community Garden and Growing Area (EKCG&GA). NHLF had granted money for an analysis of the 'Forgotten Belgian Refugees of WW1'. RL compared their welcome to that for refugees today.
- There had been meetings with Community Action Wirral (CAW) on 5 March. A Seminar was held on 13 April for the North West Parks Federation (NWPf) at Birkenhead Town Hall to discuss future funding and other issues facing parks in the future.
- On the 17,18,19 May 'The Witching Hour' had been held in the Park. This was considered an innovative and rewarding event by a Hull based theatre company. It showed rare photos of Birkenhead past and was informative about history and culture of the area. However, there was criticism of the advertising of the event and some concern about the noise and closures of gates outside performance hours. RL commented that more volunteers were required for events such as this.
- A draft WHS nominations document of 130 pages had been prepared and RL and David Jacques were editing it. RL would be making a presentation to the ICOMOS Committee and to the Committee of the DCMS dealing with the tentative list of WHS's for the UK.
- RL showed a slide of volunteers at the unveiling of the Green Flag. More volunteers were required; existing ones were getting older; there was a need to coordinate with the public

7. Annual Accounts

RL referred to the previously published accounts. £623 had been raised by subscriptions and these were now due for the following year. Direct Debits were preferable to money payments. There were 3 categories of membership: Ordinary £5, Kemp £10 and Paxton £20. Book Sales were down from last year. £56 had been raised through recycling for charities with old inkjet cartridges; RL asked for people to pass such cartridges to him to generate more funds. £2,782.26 had been donated to EKCG&GA and for new uniforms for volunteers. £10,441.23 had been transferred from Park Roots in the past and was returned back to FOBP.

8. Constitution

RL set out the need to seek charitable status which would give access to a wider range of funding sources. The objects of the Friends needed to be updated since its establishment in 1975. Talking to a 1910s photo of courtyard housing in Birkenhead RL emphasised the new objects including the social justice role of the Friends. There was a vote on accepting the new constitution and it was accepted unanimously.

9. Speculations: The Business of Place and Parkness

Michelle Rowley, an arts lecturer from Wirral Metropolitan College gave a talk about the series of parks along Edge Lane in Liverpool from the Botanic Gardens past Innovation Park, the Business Park itself to the skateboard park beyond. It was speculation on reactions to these parks particularly the ones related to existing new business or laid out awaiting further development.

Projections of ourselves on Place are considered by academic researchers in terms of experiential reaction and of threats and conflicts from rival interests. Economic activity often steals metaphors from nature to describe development processes eg 'green shoots of recovery'. Business Parks tend to value landscape in terms of work output, indeed Chiswick Business Park is run by Enjoy Work Management Co. which sounds 'Orwellian'.

The Innovation Park has been laid out awaiting development. It is a mix of features and layout for the long term but currently abandoned with a lack of maintenance and notices that access is not allowed. However, dog walkers and children ignore such restraints, meet together, enjoy the re-wilding and leave bags in the bins which are not emptied. A such the land is treated as an urban common.

As an artistic response Michelle took photos of herself against the background and created large photos of advertising board size echoing the views and with such captions as 'I am already here' to claim engagement and rights. The response gave focus to philosophical concepts of 'Psychogeography' and the role of seer, surveyor, speculator and visionary in assessing urban landscape. Her work could be seen further on ISSUU and on Vimeo.

10. AOB

MC gave a short report on the EKCG&GA. It was now 8 years old. Virtually all groups had renewed but 2 spare plots were left. There had been visits from Friends of Christchurch School and pupils from Joseph Paxton Campus had been involved in using the great mass of apples to make crumble. Early crops were now appearing. There would be a fundraising event at the Garden on 9th June 2019. Money had been used for the layout of a Mediterranean Garden with planting of Cana and Bird of Paradise.

11. Next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Saturday 31 August 2019.

12. Park Managers Report

At the end of the meeting Chris Osborne gave a Park Manager's Report on behalf of Paul Davies. There was little to report as the political changes in the Council after the May elections had not been fully resolved. More events were being planned for the following year after the increase in the current year. Reference was made to the 'Witching Hour'. Comments regarding access, responsibilities, and advertising for that event were made to CO and he would transmit these back to park management. GA raised the need for watering of the extensive privet planting around the back garden boundaries of the Park. He also questioned the status of the gates in the boundary fences and the fact that planting had not been carried out in front of them.

G R Arnold

7 June 2019

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