

The Friends of Birkenhead Park

Constitution

Preamble

When it was opened in April 1847, Birkenhead Park was the first publicly-funded urban park in the world and until 2013 it was the only Grade I listed park in England. The Group known as the Friends of Birkenhead Park was formed in April 1976 as a community-based Conservation and heritage Group. For many years it has been recognised by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and other bodies as an official group for the conservation of Birkenhead Park. Its members are committed to ensuring its conservation, based on (Sir) Joseph Paxton's 1844 plan for 'Birkenhead New Park'. We will make sure that the peripheral housing and other buildings within the Birkenhead Park Conservation Area are recognised as the formal setting of the Park, and thereby contribute to their preservation. Since its foundation, the extent of its activities has expanded considerably as the Friends of Birkenhead Park has taken on a wider agenda of charitable objectives.

Context

The laying out of Birkenhead Park was part of a wider initiative by the Commissioners for the Improvement of Birkenhead to create 'a city of the future', but its full realisation was compromised by the international financial crisis of the late-1940s. Today, primarily as a result of long-term economic decline, Birkenhead, of all towns and cities in England and Wales, has the 9th highest proportion of Lower Super Output Areas affected by multiple deprivation. Its profile in terms of employment, income and health is particularly bleak. Birkenhead Central and three adjacent areas are amongst the top 15 neighbourhoods in England in terms of patients seeking help for depression. The role and responsibilities of the Friends of Birkenhead Park must be seen in this context.

Constitution

It was decided at the Annual General Meeting of 27th June 1985 that a Constitution should be drafted for submission and adoption at the following AGM in March 1986, in order to formalise the group's objectives. A further revision was drafted and adopted at the AGM of 16th April 2011. This version brings the constitution up to date and sets out the full range of objects that are currently being pursued.

1. Name: The name of the group shall be 'The Friends of Birkenhead Park'.

2. Objects:

A. The Advancement of Heritage

The creation of Birkenhead Park marked the start of the public parks movement, with Paxton's plan serving as a template for many other parks that were laid out in the second half of the nineteenth century (including, Central Park, New York). To raise the profile of Birkenhead Park's international

heritage, members of the Friends produce material that will make more people aware of its unique significance.

As a statutory consultee, we consider and comment on all applications and plans relating to the Park and the Birkenhead Park Conservation Area and are represented in any enquiry or official meeting on matters dealing with the Park and its periphery. We work in partnership with the Park's staff to promote its heritage significance by encouraging its proper use for the benefit of the general public and specific groups, including sports clubs, schools and other educational bodies, and arts societies. To achieve this object, we work with children and the elderly, in particular with people who suffer from physical or mental disabilities.

B. The Advancement of Education

For an internationally recognised park the range of educational material remains limited. The members of the Friends are committed to rectifying this situation. We will promote community education, focusing on the history, heritage significance and role of Birkenhead Park; develop new projects with community education groups and local schools that will increase and sustain knowledge, while raising individual capabilities and skill levels.

C. The Advancement of Health

Public parks were initially created from the 1840s onward as an antidote to the negative impact of unprecedented rates of urbanisation, abject living conditions for the working class and high death rates. The Friends promote activities that have a proven beneficial effect on health and wellbeing, including gardening opportunities, leading health walks and visitor tours around the Lower and Upper Parks and encouraging use of the outdoor gym equipment.

D. The Advancement of citizenship and community development

Birkenhead, together with adjacent parts of the Wirral, suffers from very high rates of deprivation that the Friends are committed to combating. Together with the Park Rangers, we have run an extensive volunteering programme that offers a range of activities, while one of our projects (using community plots at the Edward Kemp Community Garden and Growing area) offers additional volunteering opportunities for social networking and volunteering, particularly for those with mental health conditions. Some of the previous volunteers have used their new skills to find their way back into employment, while others have benefited from the positive health impact of being involved with the Park's natural environment on a regular basis. Local community groups have undertaken research tasks, as part of larger projects. This is envisaged as an empowering process that strengthens community development, promotes the role of the voluntary sector in community capacity building, and contributes to urban regeneration.

E. To encourage wider membership and links with other major parks, whether in the UK or overseas.

3. Membership:

Membership shall be open to the general public who agree, in principle, with the objects of the Friends of Birkenhead Park.

The renewable annual subscription shall be paid to the Hon. Treasurer from whom an official receipt shall be obtained.

The annual subscription rates shall be set by the duly elected Committee of the Friends of Birkenhead. Currently, there are three levels of contribution – standard (£5), Kemp (£10) and Paxton (£20) membership. Volunteers automatically become members of the Friends. Although they are not required to make a financial contribution, donations to the work of the Friends are encouraged.

Members and volunteers are entitled to receive notices of AGMs (and all quarterly meetings) and they are eligible to vote provided their subscriptions are not in arrears.

A list of all members and volunteers shall be kept by the Treasurer and Secretary, the Treasurer notifying the latter of all changes.

4. Management:

a. The Friends shall be managed by a committee of no more than nine members, including the designated honorary officers, elected annually at the Annual General Meeting.

b. The Honorary officers shall consist of the following: President; Chair; Vice-Chair; Treasurer; Secretary; Conservation Officer.

c. The Committee shall have the power to invite representatives of local the sports clubs, the elected councillors of the area (Claughton) and officers of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to meetings of the Committee and quarterly meetings of the Friends.

5. General Meetings:

a. An Annual General Meeting shall be held before the end of May in each calendar year to elect honorary officers (as listed in 4b), Vice-Presidents and Committee Members. In addition, it shall elect an auditor for the ensuing year and shall receive audited accounts and a balance sheet for the previous financial year ending on 31st December. At least 14 days notice, in writing, shall be given to all members and volunteers.

b. There shall be four General Meetings (including the AGM) each year, preferably held in February, May, September and December. They will serve as a forum to review progress in achieving the charitable objects of the Friends of Birkenhead Park and the projects for which members are responsible.

c. The Honorary Secretary shall arrange the Agenda for each General Meeting in consultation with the Chair.

d. All decisions will be determined by a majority vote of members present at the four General Meetings. All General Meetings, including the Annual General Meeting, will be quorate when at least 15 members of the Friends are present.

6. Committee:

The Committee shall be responsible for the following:

- (a). The formulation of policy in line with the agreed objects of the Friends;
- (b). The consideration of planning applications and the submission of a suitable response to the Planning Department of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.
- (c). The filling of vacancies as they arise on the Committee.
- (d). The distribution of Newsletters and other information to all members and volunteers, and reporting back to General Meetings.
- (e.). The Committee will have the power to invest the funds of the Friends as appropriate.
- (f). The Committee shall form sub-committees from time to time for particular purposes.
- (g). The Committee shall meet from time to time, as thought necessary by the Officers, normally on a four to six week cycle.
- (h). Five members of the Committee shall form a quorum for decision-making purposes

7. Formal representation:

In pursuit of its agreed objects, the Friends will be formerly represented on the following bodies: the Birkenhead Park Partnership and the Birkenhead Park Management Advisory Committee. Currently, at least one member of the Committee attends the Birkenhead Park World Heritage Site Planning Committee and the progress meetings of the World Heritage Site and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Such an arrangement reflects our aim to continue to work together with the Park's staff to achieve common objectives that will enhance its profile.

8. General:

- (i). The President shall chair the Annual General Meeting until an Honorary Chair and other Honorary Officers are elected. In his/her absence, this role will be taken on by one of the Vice-Presidents, or in their absence by one of the long-standing members of the Friends nominated by a majority of those present.
- (ii). The AGM will receive a report from the Chair on all of the year's activities and the audited accounts will be presented by the Honorary Treasurer.
- (iii). All other meetings shall be chaired by the elected Chair or, in his/her absence, the Vice-Chair, or in his/her absence, by a long-standing member of the Friends duly chosen by the Friends at the meeting.

9. Amendments to the Constitution:

No amendments may be made to the Constitution save by a two-thirds majority vote at the Annual General Meeting of the Friends. Any proposed amendments must be circulated to all registered and paid-up members of the Friends and all the active Volunteers at least two weeks before the agreed date of the AGM. If they are duly passed, they will become operative from the date of the meeting.

10. Special (Extraordinary) General Meetings:

These can be held whenever the Committee so decides, or as soon as practicable after the Secretary's receipt of a requisition signed by not less than 12 members of the Friends specifying the precise purpose thereof.

No other business shall be transacted at Special (or Extraordinary) Meetings, other than that for which the meeting was requested.

Fourteen day's notice of such meetings shall be given to each subscribing member and all active volunteers.

11. Assets:

(i). Any income or property held by the Friends of Birkenhead Park will be applied solely to the promotion of its agreed objectives. None of its assets, whether held in a current account or the Treasurer's savings account will be distributed by way of profit to any of its members or elected officers.

(ii). Upon the winding-up or dissolution of the Friends of Birkenhead Park, any assets remaining after the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities shall not be paid or distributed among the members, but shall be given or transferred to some other charitable institution or institutions (whether corporate or not) having similar objectives to those of the Friends of Birkenhead Park.

Birkenhead

6th May 2019