

FRIENDS OF SOUTH PARK

Minutes of the sixth Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 9 October 2019 St Clement's Family Centre, Cross Street, Oxford

Present:

Committee: Rob Waterston (Chair); Lesley Court (Secretary); Liz Rooke (Membership Secretary); Chris Cousins (OPT rep); Sarah Lane; Peter Rooke; Amanda Wood

Members: Jon Bliss, Rosemary Clayton, David & Christine Colbeck, Anne Copley, Roger Jenking, Tom Knollys, David Runciman, Elizabeth Teague

Oxford City Council: Chris Bell, Green Space Dev't Manager; Alison Drummond, Events Officer; Cllr Tom Hayes; Cllr Louise Upton

Thames Valley Police: Sgt Neil Bouse

Oxford Brookes University Community Wardens: Rosalynn Fennell, Casey Alves

TOAD: Tagore Ramoutar

Oxford Preservation Trust: Lindsay Priddle

Oxford Round Table: Neil Holdstock, Chris Langston

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Caroline Chanides (OCC), Andrew Lack (Treasurer) and 14 members.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 October 2018 were approved as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

There was a query concerning the proposal last year to invite a representative of FoSP to attend the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) meeting between OCC and OPT last November and whether, at that meeting, the issue of the ridge and furrow had been raised. It transpired it had not, as the meeting was about the relationship with OPT.

4. Chair's Report

Rob Waterston reported that the Park Management Plan (PMP), which was an ongoing working document, had been published last year and was available on the Council's website, with hard copies in various locations around the city. One item raised by members had been whether South Park should have one or more wildflower areas and this had certainly been included in the PMP. Another issue had been the poor state of the perimeter railings: both OPT and FoSP had carried out a review of these but as yet a funding application had not been submitted. Meetings with OCC had been held regularly and a few working parties carried out to deal with small tasks within the park: the next one would be held in November.

Antisocial behaviour: Thanks to the work of the Council and Police there had been a reduction in drug use in the park, but sadly people continued to ignore notices asking them not to have barbecues; litter was also an issue. The Brookes reps pointed out that when language students stayed in Brookes accommodation they had no control over their actions. FoSP would be signing up to the next OxClean weekend in March 2020.

Events: FoSP continued to help with the clear-up following the fireworks events each year, and were most grateful for the donation to funds received from the Round Table for this work. The Round Table had taken on board comments about reusable plastic cups, and this year were also replacing the plastic sheeting at the bottom of the park with strong lighting to prevent people from looking into the park. Common People was no longer taking place but the Pretty Muddy event in aid of Cancer Research continued to be successful. There had been some complaints about noise levels of live music for the Foodies Festival and no written notices had been issued to neighbours.

Re music events, the Events Officer (Alison Drummond) added here that artists' costs had trebled in the last year so it was impossible to keep ticket prices down.

TOAD: Work had not yet started on the cafe and toilet block but Tagore Ramoutar, their CEO, informed the meeting that two temporary toilets had already been added and the threshing barn was being altered to be a cafe/shop which should be open by Christmas and would be open during the daytime. He said it would be another 4/5 months before all the planning conditions could be met and then TOAD would have two years in which to complete their building works. However, bearing in mind the figure of £21,000 obtained by the Council for the demolition of the disused toilet block, this could not be covered by TOAD until they started to make a profit.

Signage: The committee intended to deal with the installation of signs in the coming year, with the help of OPT and the Council.

The Chair reminded the meeting that South Park was a designated Dark Sky Discovery Site and also mentioned matters to do with biodiversity in the park. The veteran oak in the middle had recently had a sturdier protective fence placed around it, following the committee's concerns about its being a safety hazard but also to preserve species there, and he thanked the relevant members of the Parks Dept for their prompt action in this regard.

The table tennis table was shortly to be replaced as a result of liaison between the Council, FoSP and Ping, the organisation which installed the original one. Ping would contribute £500 towards it, with FoSP paying the balance of £179, and it would be sited near the children's playground.

Publicity: FoSP would continue to monitor planned events for the year and to notify members about these, and members were encouraged to voice any concerns about such events. The committee tried to keep the website up-to-date and to use various social media outlets. All members were encouraged to pass suggestions for promoting FoSP to the committee.

5. **Treasurer's Report**

In Andrew Lack's absence the Chair thanked him for preparing his report, in which it was stated that the current balance in the account was £1,812.43. Income for the year was £45 re subscriptions and a £250 donation from the Round Table for FoSP's help in clearing up following the firework display. Outgoings for the year totalled £21.70 (photocopying and catering for the AGM).

6. **Election of Officers**

With the unanimous agreement of the meeting all four officers were re-elected as follows:

Chair: Rob Waterston

Treasurer: Andrew Lack

Secretary: Lesley Court

Membership Secretary: Liz Rooke

7. **Election of Committee**

The remaining committee members would therefore be: Chris Cousins (OPT rep), Sarah Lane, Peter Rooke and Mandy Wood. These were also agreed unanimously.

8. **Any other business**

There was no further business.

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

This would be notified to all in mid-2020.

Following a refreshment break, **Dr Louise Upton, Oxford City Councillor and Cabinet Member for Healthy Oxford**, addressed the meeting. The following are her own notes of that address:

My portfolio is HEALTH - which includes parks, allotments, sports pitches, cemeteries, health initiatives.

Importance of green spaces to the council aims:

Parks are crucial to health: air quality improvement; space to exercise; space to be with friends.

Exercise is medicine for both physical and mental ill health.

Parks also provide opportunities for volunteering - good for the people it is directed at helping, and good for those doing the volunteering!

Examples of increasing biodiversity that we are looking at - and ways of funding it in times of austerity...

- Showmans' field - develop ponds and surrounding habitat - (newts!)
- Meadow development (King George's field in Osney) residents to grow at home and then have a planting day!
- Fields for carbon offsetting (meadows + trees) + AIRLINES
- Work at Cutteslowe park - wildflower meadow in lower field. (Twice yearly cut and collect northern gateway 'offset funding')
- SOUTH PARK active management of elderly oaks to allow natural decline (= habitat for wide range) but without endangering park users. Replacement of fencing around veteran trees with hedging to improve invertebrate habitat.
- OTHER SUGGESTIONS WELCOME.

Evidence of importance we place on parks:

1- declared climate emergency..... cabinet post zero carbon. Green spaces vital to capture carbon, to improve air quality, to support biodiversity.

2- the latest health data shows alarming life expectancy differences across the city (and high levels of physical inactivity and social isolation).

As part of my role on the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board, we are discussing social prescribing. The creation of Primary Care Networks (groups of GP practices) each with their own Social Prescribing link coordinator should lead to an increase in social prescribing which could include getting involved with local volunteer groups, or health walks. [LU agreed to add FoSP to the invitation list for this.]

The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare has an Oxford programme working with GPs to prescribe health walks in nearby green spaces, and Manzil Way GPs are likely to start soon.

Budget challenges:

The City Council has lost 40% of its income since 2010 as our government support grant has been reduced to zero. This means that we don't have much money but instead we have to look at how we can influence others and lever funding in.

One example is the Oxford Waterways project that brings together stakeholders around the canal and rivers. Cllr Tom Hayes - with Environment Agency and Canals & Rivers Trust. It's all about: city regeneration, parks open spaces, practical mooring & life afloat, tourism management & waterways attraction, active communities, public health outcomes, sustainable active travel, volunteering, school engagement, culture heritage and the environment.

Another is the Green and Blue Spaces Network of landowners and stakeholder including the Environment Agency, OPT, BBOWT, Earthwatch, Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, County Council public health workers, City Council parks department, University of Oxford, HedgeOx, Allotments Association, CPRE, Rights of Way team from County. Partners work collaboratively to improve Oxford's green spaces and blue corridors.

Oxford City Council • Green Neighbourhood Grant Scheme £4k pot of funding to bring communities together to improve their local neighbourhood.

The Dark sky designation is really important - and the city's policy is not to lock our parks at night because people enjoy it. We will be holding firm on the 'no lights' policy.

Public toilets at TOAD - fantastic news that there will be loos coming soon to South Parks.

We need to reconvene the Oxford Language schools forum.

We will look at leaving long grass areas for wild flowers.

Items raised following Dr Upton's presentation:

1. It was confirmed that the installation of a cycle route through South Park would be against the Council's byelaws. The suggestion was made that cars be removed from Cheney Lane, which could then be used as the cycle route.

2. Chris Bell of OCC said he would follow up with OPT the suggestion that the bottom of the park, which was already wet and did not drain well, might be used for biodiversity.

3. There was discussion concerning the railings surrounding the park, some of which were in a parlous state. The railings had been important years ago when the park was locked at night. It was agreed there was no need for railings in certain areas (e.g. Cheney Lane, where there was a high bank preventing access by vehicles). The suggestion was made that some railings be replaced with hedgerow but that those at the bottom of the park should be kept so that people could see through into the park. It was noted that the children's play area was surrounded on three sides by low hedges.

4. It was suggested that the grass should not be kept too high in any area designated as wildflower meadow to avoid attracting litter, but that in some areas where there were already wild flowers the grass could be left to grow for a few weeks more, as happened in Headington Hill Park. Chris Bell said the issue of a wildflower meadow would be a change in land use but could be discussed with OPT.

The Chair thanked Cllr Upton for her presentation and hoped FoSP would continue to have dialogue with the Council and other amenity groups.