THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Annual General Meeting: Wednesday 28 September 2022

MINUTES

1. Present: Clive Evans, Chris Gurr, Ian Beavis, Lynne Lane, Clive McAllister, Joy Podbury, Felicity Brown, Pat Maxwell, Pam Brown, Chris Woodward, Alan Leale-Green, Martin Brice, Liz Goddard, Tony Pawson, Gemma Stapeley, Dan Colborne.

Apologies: Donald Clarke, Terry Coulthard, Pam Monroe, Freda Flint, John Barber.

1. The Minutes of the AGM held on 22 September 2021 were approved and it was agreed that future Minutes, or a suitable summary of them, could usefully be placed on the website.
2. Chairman’s Report

Clive Evans welcomed attendees and began his review of the activities undertaken over the past year by paying tribute to the work of the previous Warden, Steve Budden. The donations received would be used for clearance and a memorial bench in the “without a view” area. He also paid tribute to the major contribution made by Lynne Lane, who was retiring from her role promoting Community engagement, and specifically to her achievements with local schools in fostering the “forest school” activities. Both Steve and Lynne would be guests at the 20 November Friends’ lunch.

[Secretary’s note: Lynne has subsequently clarified that she has resigned from the Committee and from her roles with ‘WildChild!’ and ‘The Volunteers Big Thank You Event’].

In addition to the regular activities during the past year, improvements of particular note were: the new access arrangements made around Toad Rock; the increased security measure against encroachment of the Rusthall cricket ground; the launching of a new website, which would be discussed later; and the Marlpit enhancements which were currently in progress.

1. Treasurer’s Report and Adoption of the Accounts

Following their circulation, the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2021 were duly adopted. [Secretary’s note: a full copy of the Accounts is attached]

In a subsequent discussion, it was noted that the Friends’ investments had fallen in value during 2022. In the current financial circumstances, it was particularly important to maximise receipts and to control expenditure carefully. The proposal to use crushed sandstone instead of the significantly more expensive tarmac for the all-ability path was a good example of appropriate financial prudence. In the absence of the Treasurer, it was agreed that the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer would meet to review the Friends’ finances, propose appropriate actions and develop a budget for the 2023 calendar year. Separately, a copy of the financial report to the Charity Commission, which would be publicly available, could be published on the website.

1. Membership Secretary’s Report

Chris Gurr reported that there were about 550 members, with 30 new ones in the current year. The main expenditure was on the “Common Ground” circulated to members. Some 300 were hand-delivered by volunteers, whose efforts were much appreciated. Another 150 were posted and around 90 e-mailed. In terms of subscriptions, around 380 were paid by Standing Order and 170 by cheque or in cash. Overall, the money received from Gift Aiding covered the costs. However, looking to reduce those costs, members were being encouraged to receive their copy of “Common Ground” by email and, where it was not currently the case, to pay by Standing Order.

1. Website update

Joy Podbury updated the meeting on the new website. The closure of the old website had proved problematic but had now been completed. A new page with links to supporting pages had recently been introduced. The “latest” link provided an update on events and the latest news.

It would be helpful if members visited the site and any comments would be welcome. Promotion of the Friends was important for the future of the Commons and making payments needed to be as simple and easy as possible. Two systems for providing touch card services were under consideration: “sumup” and “square”.

To obtain further promotion, reciprocal publicity on the websites of local like-minded organisations was proposed. It was agreed that this should be implemented with the Civic Society; Friends of Dunorlan Park; Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert; and the Kent High Weald. In addition, consideration should be given as to whether joining the RHS “It’s Your Neighbourhood” scheme would be appropriate.

1. Election of The Officers (Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer)

The following were elected unanimously:

Chairman: Clive Evans;

Deputy Chairman (and Membership Secretary): Chris Gurr;

Secretary: Tony Pawson;

Treasurer: Don Clarke.

1. Re-election to the Committee of Terry Coulthard (to be Social Secretary) and Clive McAllister

In accordance with the Rules of the Society on re-elections, Terry Coulthard, who would be the Social Secretary, and Clive McAllister were re-elected unanimously as members of the Committee.

1. Any Other Business

Gemma Stapeley introduced the proposed future Management Plan for 2023/24 which was under consideration by the Conservators. She stressed the importance of establishing an ecological database for the proposed Plan. It was proposed that a well-respected ecologist be engaged to help to construct a co-ordinated plan covering the necessary research and surveying data. Following further consultation with stakeholders, the Plan would be developed to incorporate the vision and objectives together with the strategy for achieving them.

Gemma then ran through the elements in the proposed Project Plan. [Secretary’s note: a copy of the Project Plan is attached]

Dan Colborne said he was delighted to have been appointed as the Ranger. The Commons were fantastic and valuable places. There had been problems with drought and a major Ash die-back which would result in substantial felling being necessary. Looking ahead, the first - and major - task was to identify and catalogue all the available information resources, including photographs, to provide historical context as well as data about the Commons and their habitats. The resulting inventory would be essential to enable the sources to be accessed in future to inform surveys and decision-making. The Plan would be a living document and subject to review.

The following points were made in discussion:

1. The projects and the way ahead identified in the proposed Management Plan provided an excellent basis for decisions on the future of the Commons. Once further developed, the Plan would need to be costed and decisions on priorities made.
2. In addition to the projects in the Management Plan, the needs of the users of the Commons should also be considered, though the majority of these could probably be met from the Maintenance budget.
3. Further promotion and public engagement could be facilitated by surveys to establish users’ wishes and concerns.
4. A number of specific sources of information were identified by members, and it was agreed that these should be sent as soon as practicable to Ian Beavis who most helpfully agreed to collate them.

A J D Pawson (Secretary)

5.10.2022