

Friends of Selly Oak Park

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 3.00pm on 17th September 2023 in the Scout Hut

Present: Committee members: Andrew Schofield (Chair), Bob Curry, Ann-Marie McCarthy, Sue Whitmarsh, Helen Murie,

Also present : Wendy Critchlow, Adrian, D. Barker, Trevor Dyde, S Cartwright, Ben Adams, Louisa Delwiche, Beth Delwiche, Miranda Perks (council), Sue Amey (Council), Seinde Balogan, Handel Miller, C Wallace.

Apologies: Matt Malone, Marian Evans, Annette Lawson, Simon Stafford

1. **Welcome:**

Andrew Schofield welcomed all to the meeting

2. **Minutes of the previous AGM meeting.:**

available on the FOSOP website.

3. **Matters Arising:**

In response to question regarding litter bins and impact of McDonald's and KFC. - New bins have been installed near the play area and near the car park. One was provided by FoSOP and 2 by council. One bin was lost be Corisande Road entrance due to corrosion. FoSOP have been in contact with all fast food outlets in the area. McDonald's have agreed to provide 2 bins, some litter picking equipment and to include the park in their regular litter picking route. Costa have agreed to provide a new bench.

Signage in the park has been changed to include 'BBQs not allowed'.

FoSOP have changed the way we deal with abandoned trolleys. Instead of storing them in the compound in the hope of someone retrieving them we wheel them back to the shopping mall carpark. Some remain that belong to Waitrose and Aldi which is too far to wheel back, and some are damaged and can't be wheeled. Access to these trolleys has been useful in dealing with excess litter generated recently.

Traffic cones have been cleaned up and used for the festival. Those in poor condition have been taken away by the council.

4. **Chairs's report:**

Andrew Schofield presented the report

Chairman's report 2023

The 2022-23 year was another good one for the Friends of Selly Oak Park. We completed the Commonwealth Games Project at the Corisand Rd entrance, ran two successful events and continued to grow our volunteer base. The year ended on a happy note with offers of donations towards new bins from McDonalds and bench from Costa. These offers were somewhat soured by the arrival of a large group of travellers, however, now that they have left the park is already beginning to recover.

4.1. **Commonwealth Games Project:**

The project to revitalise the Corisande Rd entrance was completed this year with new retaining slabs and a new fence on the Lepid Grove side. Additional planting of bulbs and plants completed that part of the project although there will be an on-going maintenance and replanting schedule. A third Welcome post was added at this entrance carved by Graham Jones who also carved the welcome post just outside the scout hut and two benches in the park. Finally, as part of this overall project we installed a new information sign at the Harborne Lane entrance. Unfortunately one of the new trees was stolen during the year but a crown funding campaign and the surplus from the Selly Oak Festival will allow us to purchase and plant a replacement in the autumn.

4.2. **Carols in the park.**

We were once again able to run our Carols in the Park event in December with the help of Rev Hazel White of St Mary's Church and member of St John's Church, Harborne. There was a good turn out and the event was well received. The date for this years Carols in Sat 9th December.

4.3. Selly Oak Festival.

We were also able to run the Selly Oak Festival in June. The number of stalls was up on the previous year and close to our highest ever number. However, some did not show up on the day or did not have gazebos which left gaps. We were not able to secure donkey rides this year due to the stables effectively ceasing trading in May. Instead, we used the money we would normally spend on the donkeys (which have always made a net loss) to pay for a brass quintet and story telling workshop. The engagement of local schools in this year's event was a bit disappointing and the visitor footfall was low although the food stall and ice cream van were happy with their takings. We are currently seeking funding to support the festival in 2024.

4.4. Tree planting – National Trust Blossom Trees

This year we were pleased to receive a number of blossom trees from the National Trust. These were planted on two volunteer days in the winter period. Trees include 2 Hawthorne, a crab apple, 14 cherry trees and two varieties of dogwood. Sadly two of the cheery trees have since been damaged by vandalism.

4.5. Reports from groups:

4.5.1 Gardening Group: (twice per month on one Sunday and a Friday in spring and summer)

Our core gardening group has continued to meet this year on a monthly or fortnightly bases. We have weeded, planted, sown and weeded our flower bed and also put our efforts in working on improving the Corisande Rd entrance. Led by *Marian Evans*.

4.5.2 Nature Conservation Group: (Thursdays in winter)

This small group supported by Ranger Jan Thomlinson meet fairly regularly on Thursday afternoons. We've principally focussed on the Millennium Wood and the small wood behind Gibbins Road. This group assisted with the National Trust tree planting, planted a number of small trees and whips to extend the Gibbins Rd and Millennium wood and help with the willow sculpture.

Led by *Bob Curry*.

4.5.3 Litter Picking Group: (2nd Saturdays)

Our litter picking group meets at 10am on the 2nd Saturday of each month with individual members carrying our personal litter picks throughout the week. We often remove shopping trolleys from the park and secure them in the compound by the lodge. However, this has led to a large build-up of trolleys. Having found no service that will return trolleys we have now taken to delivering them back to the stores ourselves -regardless of their condition. We have now cut the stock of trolley down to the more far-flung shops such as Waitrose and Asda plus a few that cannot be wheeled at all. In any case we like to keep a few trolleys to help with litter picks. The lack of bin capacity near the play area and car park has been addressed with three new bins.

Sadly, we lost one bin from near the Corisande Rd entrance. In response to suggestions that fast food restaurants should help with litter in the park, in August we wrote by email to the chief executives of all the local fast-food outlets and supermarkets asking for their help. In response the local McDonalds franchise have offered to donate two bins plus some litter picking equipment. They also agreed to alter their regular litter picking routes to include the park and agreed to devote their November corporate volunteering day to the park.

This litter picking group were in the forefront of our clean up during and after the traveller visit including one litter pick and bin emptying session during the visit and another litter pick to follow up after the council teams once the travellers had departed.

Group Led by *Susan Whitmarsh*.

4.5.4 Landscape group:

This group meets as required to conduct hard landscaping projects. This year we installed an information sign at the Harborne Lane entrance and the Welcome post at the Corisande Rd entrance. Unfortunately, this year we lost two benches in the park due to old age. One of these formed part of the nature trail. Following our request for support from local fast food chains Costa Coffee have offered to donate a bench made from recycled plastic and this will be installed as soon as possible near the Corisande Rd Entrance.

Group Led by *Andrew Schofield*.

5.6. Thanks:

We would like to thank Sue Amy (BCC Area Parks Manager) and the Park Ranger, especially Jan Thomlinson service for their continued support. James Gibbs, Simon Needle (Both BCC), local Tree Wardens for their support with tree planting and the National Trust for donating trees. We thank all our regular volunteers for their support.

5. Travellers.

The Chair presented the following statement outlining his understanding of events in relation to the recent visit by travellers to the park:

5.1 Statement on Travellers,

As you will all be aware a large group of Travellers entered the park on Fri 25th August. I'm going to outline what we as a Friends group know about this visit and will then invite representative from BCC to correct any errors in that account and make comments.

Our understanding is that the group force entry in some way at the main gate, probably by forcing the lock. It's unlikely that the gate was left open.

West Midlands Police attended the site sometime after the first Travellers entered the park but before the remainder arrived. They concluded that they were unable to stop the travellers from occupying the site but stayed to manage the situation. You may have seen images of the police apparently standing by while the occupation took place and it has been suggested that they allowed it to happen – this seems unlikely to us. One of our committee members spoke to the police on the day and was told to report any fly tipping or anti-social behaviour.

BCC started eviction proceedings almost immediately and these typically take a week. In fact the eviction notice was ready sooner and BCC attempted to enforce this. However, by this time it was apparent that one of the travellers was injured and the QE hospital. We do not think this injury occurred in the park.

Consequently, the police asked the council not to enforce the eviction on compassionate ground.

When travellers occupy a park they generate a lot of household rubbish. They also do gardening jobs locally and deposit any removed items in the park. They also use the park as a toilet. Also the team that empty the bins are reluctant to do so while travellers are on site as they can be abused. As a result huge amounts of litter and less savour materials build up in the park.

During the period of occupation, we made representation to the council that the number of caravans was too high and that compassionate permission to remain should be restricted to very close family. The council basically agreed to this and the number of caravans was reduced to 8 by the end of the second week of occupation. We also argued that the council team should be able to empty bins at this point and that police supervision should be provided if necessary. This did lead to an attempt to clear flytipping and human waste but this visit was aborted.

In order to deal with some of the peripheral litter and to demonstrate that bins could be emptied we did a litter pick on Sun 10th Sept and also emptied as many of the bins as we had capacity for. This did alleviate the situation but did not deal with the main issue. Our doing this was fortunate because on Mon 11th the city

team mowed most of the park and had they done this with litter in place the result would have been to distribute shredded litter everywhere.

We also noted that the Travellers were using a hose from the former park keepers lodge to wash. We have since been told by the occupant of that house that he discovered travellers climbing his wall early in the visit and that they had essentially bullied him into providing a hose.

The travellers eventually left on Tuesday 12th at night or Wednesday 13th early morning. BCC clean up crews visited on Fri 15th and removed most of the waste. We did a litter pick on Sat 16th removing several more bags of rubbish and also reported further areas of fly tipping and human waste that had been missed.

5.2 Comments from Sue Amey BCC

Sue Amey reported that Council crews should still try to do bin collection in the park when travellers are present but there has been a history of crews being targeted eg bottles being thrown. Skips have been provided in the past but these were set on fire. Fast evictions are 7 days from issue with a 48 hour notice period but if there is a welfare issue the council can't evict but can reduce the numbers of people/vehicles. However when there is a confrontation the council can't be seen to provoke a breach of the peace. Also in the recent case there was a blanket ban on council expenditure so funding approval needed to be applied for.

5.3 Comments from Cllr Miranda Perks

Miranda Perks reported that the recent case was unique due to the welfare issue. In future big bins could be provided to deal with increased rubbish. Skips need external contractors who often won't provide for travellers. Several public health issues arise from cleaning up after traveller occupations of a site.

5.4 Comments from the public:

Thanks given to the council for rapid clean up of the park

The council workers often leave the park gates open. The wooden gate is largely decorative. The white gate doesn't stop travellers. Sue responded that there have been several attempts and trials across numerous sites of different locks and different gates and barriers etc but nothing on the market can stop access where there is a will.

Public expressed anger that if locals had broken the gate or drove a vehicle in the park or had unleashed aggressive dogs in the park or created as much mess they would be arrested, but travellers get away with it. There appears to be no consequences for them. Excrement and rubbish causes a public health hazard which costs a lot to clean up. Dogs are intimidating and so are some of the individuals. Locals felt that they were denied the enjoyment of the park over the bank holiday period. Locals don't feel listened to by the council or the police. FoSOP also feel police do not take the issues seriously.

Sue responded that the park is designated as private land and is owned by the council and as such need to get eviction notices from the courts. There is a designated site in town for travellers which is not serviced by the council but this is currently occupied.

Andrew suggested that the park should not be an acceptable site for prolonged stays for travellers with welfare issues, and the council and NHS and other relevant authorities should provide a suitable site in these circumstances. FoSOP will be writing to authorities.

Miranda suggested a petition to put to the full council.

Summer festival

No confirmation has been received for funding from UoB. Suggestions were discussed re fundraising eg membership fees for FoSOP (not supported, members already give a lot in terms of time and energy) , Just giving website (used successfully for replacement trees), Legacies, charity status (considered previously but difficult to achieve and liabilities of individual trustees onerous and off putting). Size of the festival is limited by funding which is a lot less than events in surrounding areas such as Bournville. Also limited by

the number of volunteers available who can be stewards for the day. Andrew confirmed no stall holders expressing an interest in the festival are ever turned away unless eg a food stall has been promised exclusivity as there would not be enough business for more than one.

The committee would welcome any help from anyone familiar with social media for advertising and recording events in the park, the friends group and the festival.

Lapal Canal Trust

The next stage of the plan is opening the tunnel under Harborne Lane as a pathway not a water way. It was noted that there is a trough of water which needs to be made safe and the tunnel would be long and low so concern was expressed about potential for muggings and drug misuse.

Antisocial behaviour in the park

Helen reported quad bikes and motorbikes using the park which she photographed and videos. Individuals asked her politely not to take photos. Police didn't turn up despite being called twice. Andrew had raised this with police but felt their response was submissive. Miranda stressed that all events should be reported to the police so they appear on the statistics. Police don't have enough staff and have to prioritize.

5. Treasurers report:

Bob Curry presented the report at the meeting

FRIENDS OF SELLY OAK PARK (FSOP)	
TREASURER'S STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD 8/9/22 – 7/9/23	
	£
INCOME	
Birmingham City Council (Open Spaces)	110.00
Selly Oak Festival	2,635.85
Donations	274.50
Total Income	3,020.35
EXPENDITURE	
Selly Oak Festival	(2,437.63)
Plants and Bulbs	(706.95)
Harborne Lane Sign	(487.44)
Corisande Road Welcome Post	(700.00)
Cable Avoidance Hire	(45.54)
Posters	(40.00)
Carol Service	(55.00)
Domain Renewal	(14.39)
Total Expenditure	(4,486.95)
Total Expenditure over Income	(1,466.60)
Bank Balance carried forward from 7/9/22	5,703.96
2023 Festival advance sponsorship from Bham Uni in 2021/22	(2,000.00)
Uncashed payment cheque in 2021/22	(566.77)
Funds available for FSOP brought forward from 8/9/22	3,137.19
Total Expenditure over Income	(1,466.60)
Bank Balance & Funds available for FSOP 7/9/23	1,670.59

6. Election of Committee members:

Chair asked if any attendees would like to put themselves forward to the committee. Beth Deliche and Handel Miller both volunteer and were elected.

Current committee have indicated that they would all like to continue

7. Dates of Future Meetings and Events:

Christmas Carols

Saturday 9th December 2023

Willow maintenance 27th Jan and 3rd Feb 2024 (To be confirmed)

Committee meetings: 7.00pm on zoom

Tuesday 24th October 2023

Tuesday 21st November 2023

Tuesday 6th February 2024

Tuesday 19th March 2024

Tuesday 24th April 2024

Tuesday 21st May 2024

AGM Sunday 15th Sept 2024

Festival

Monday Pre-Meet 10 June 2024

Saturday Festival 15th June 2024

Litter Picks 2nd Saturday of every month.