



FRIENDS OF VICTORIA PARK

Annual General Meeting

24th October 2019.

1. Present

Michelle Rowles, Lorna Bennett, Paul Bitchend, Jean Shrubbs, Edwin Bartlett, Thereza Baker, Margeret Clarke, John Clarke, Bob Shrubbs, Terry Jones

Apologies

Simon Howard-Smith, Janet Moreton, Wendy Pooley, Dara Farrell

2. Michelle welcomed everyone to the meeting

3. Chairman's report

In Simon's absence Michelle read the Chairman's report:

Firstly I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their input to the group over the year. Without the support of those who have come along to meetings, volunteered at events, or worked behind the scenes to ensure policies and financial matters are taken care of, Friends of Victoria Park would not be able to continue.

We have achieved a significant amount in our first year as an independent group. The committee have worked hard to ensure we have appropriate policies and insurance in place. We have also undertaken a number of events both on our own and alongside other organisations.

We started our events this year with a photography competition and exhibition with Friends of Singleton Lake and Ashford Photography Society. We are grateful to both these groups for all the guidance and work they put into this event. Friends of Singleton Lake held the exhibition at Singleton Environment Centre, and then we displayed the photographs for a weekend in County Square. This event attracted a reasonable amount of interest and we heard some lovely memories of the Park from some of Ashford's older residents.

We were invited to have a stand at the Armed Forces Day Celebrations in the park, and at Create and Mr Harper's Birthday Celebrations. These provided an excellent opportunity to talk to people about the plans for the park. We also took part in the national Big Butterfly Count, this too provided a great opportunity to talk to people and gave us our first steps into environmental/ecological events.

Our biggest solo events this year was our series of runs. In the bid submission for the Heritage lottery fund, there was mention of the Summer Series of 5k runs which had previously been organised by Pod Plus. These were cancelled this year by the original organisers. Not wanting this cancellation to affect the HLF bid, the committee took the bold decision that we should take on the organising of the Summer series. Whilst the initial interest was a little slower than we would have liked, during the course of the summer the runs became more popular, and we had great feedback from the participants. In addition to the success of the events they also produced great success

with advertising the group –in the first few weeks of advertising the events we saw an increase in the number of people following our facebook page. In addition to the 5k runs, we also organised a shorter family run. Despite the typically British weather, we had over 30 people gathering for the run and the smiles on the children's faces were the real measure of the success of the event.

The highlight of this year has to be the announcement of the success of the council bid for the heritage lottery Fund grant. There are exciting days ahead, and Friends of Victoria Park will continue to work closely with the council to ensure that these works are not only delivered to a high standard, but also maintained in the years to come. We will be having an update later in the meeting from the council so I won't dwell on this for too long now.

Michelle also announced that Simon was stepping down as Chair due to other commitments which prevented him having the time available to do as much as he would like within the Role. Simon will remain on the Committee.

4. Treasurers Report

Lorna read the treasurer's report – attached

5. Election of management committee

Michelle notified the meeting that with the exception of Simon, all other committee members were willing to re-stand. Michelle said that there was still spaces for additional committee members and also now a new Chair person.

Jean Shrubbs proposed that the current committee were re-elected, this was Seconded by Paul Bitchend and supported by a unanimous vote.

6. Review of Constitution

Michelle advised that the constitution currently stated that we would have a minimum of 7 committee members, and that at the current time we only have 6, but suggested that a year was a relatively short space of time for a group to become established so perhaps it would be best to leave the constitution as it is, and aim towards 7 committee members. There were no objections to this.

7. Updates from Ashford Borough Council

Terry Jones gave an update from ABC: The Heritage Lottery Fund grant has been awarded of £3039900, but is not given as a lump sum but over the course of the project, which will run for 4 years.

The first task is to appoint a project manager, and then the Community Development Officer, Youth Involvement Officer and Park Ranger. Building work will probably start next autumn, and council officers are currently working closely with the design team to make preparations for this.

ABC acknowledge the importance of the Friends group to the project and are grateful for all the time that has been dedicated.

8. Public Space Protection Order Consultation – Ashford Urban Area

Michelle explained that Ashford Borough Council were consulting on the Public Space Protection Order. This covers the town Centre, Victoria Park and south Ashford to Brookfield Road and out to the outlet. The protection order has been in place for 3 years, but the council are reviewing it. Michelle explained that it would be good to get feedback and put in a group statement, and that in addition members were welcome to submit their own views on the Council website at <https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk/consult.ti/PSPO19/consultationHome%20>

The consultation ends on 15th November 2019

Michelle read the relevant section of the consultation document. Members felt that they would like to see more to tackle the issues of Motorbikes in the park, misuse of Catapults, and fireworks. Members understood that some of these areas may already be covered by existing legislation, but felt that the fixed penalty notice may be more of a deterrent to offenders. Michelle said that we had raised the issue of motorbikes in the Park with Kent Police and they have said to report to them, they may not respond immediately but it adds to the statistics to help prioritise times and areas for patrol. Terry confirmed that this was the case, and explained that they had similar issues at Singleton which had not initially been reported and that the police were unable to act until issues had been reported directly to them.

Michelle then read the questions relating to safety within Victoria Park, members reported that they generally felt fairly safe during the Day; early evening people felt was a seasonal answer with people reporting feeling less safe after dusk. Members reported feeling fairly unsafe after dark, with some reporting that they would not consider going to the park after dark, others reported that they did use the park after dark, but were concerned at the failure of existing lighting and that perhaps groups were congregating in the childrens play areas after dark.

It was felt that people being drunk or rowdy was a minor problem in the park, it was not a frequent occurrence. Individuals misusing substances was also considered a minor problem, members said that often it was the litter left by such actions that were more of an issue than the misuse of substances itself in the park. Flytipping was not considered to be a problem in the park generally although occasionally items were seen on Watercress Fields. It was considered that individuals sleeping rough was a minor problem in the park and members were reporting to either the council or Porchlight when noticed. Individuals who defecate or urinate in public spaces was considered to be a minor problem, it was felt that on occasions this might be cultural and also there are times when the toilets are not unlocked which adds to this issue. The use of motor vehicles in an antisocial manner was also considered to be a minor problem, this was mostly in the form of motorbikes being ridden in the park and cars parked in Watercress Fields.

As a result of concerns over lighting failure, Michelle will walk round the park after dark to check the lighting and report lights which are currently not working. Members were also encouraged to use ABC and KCC websites to report issues themselves.

Terry Jones raised the issue of dog fouling in the park in relation to the issues with individuals who defecate or urinate. It was acknowledged by members that it does happen but was not as bad as some other areas. It was felt however that some bins need emptying more frequently. Members were encouraged to report overflowing bins to the council.

9. Future plans

Michelle explained that the Committee were already looking to repeat the running events next year, and also to be involved with Armed Forces Day, Create Festival and Mr Harpers Birthday celebrations. The committee are also looking to host a quiz night. Michelle explained that the council are hoping to organise a tree planting event with the mayor and 2 borough councillors in the park on 30th November, but awaiting final confirmation. The Friends Group have been invited to lead on bulb planting on a plot between the carpark and Jemmett Road.

Michelle asked if other people had suggestions for events. Members suggested a bird watch, bat walk and a cycling event.

Terry Jones suggested contacting KSCP to look at working together with them on an event.

10. Any other Business

One member asked about the timescale for when the path along Watercress fields was likely to be built. Michelle explained that was not yet known and the council would be working with contractors to finalise timescales for building works.

Michelle asked members what they thought about the change of venue. The consensus was that the Riverside was a better venue as we had our own room and less distractions. It was also considered that it provided more opportunity for future development of the group and meetings



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TREASURER'S REPORT

This has been an interesting first year for the FOVP getting ourselves up and running and hosting a number of planned events including the series of Fun Runs in the Summer.

Thankfully, for this year at least, we have been assisted by the Council who have provided us with our indemnity insurance. They may cover this again when it is time to renew but, if not, we have the funds to meet the cost although we would prefer these to be available to fund activities. Quotes obtained last year ranged from £180 to £670.

We were also able to capitalise on the local councillor's grant receiving £500 via Simon, our chairman, whilst he was in office as Councillor for Bockhanger Ward. A further application is due to be submitted to one or both of our ward councillors. We will also seek other sources of funding.

Our expenditure has included the cost of hiring the Gateway Church for tonight's AGM and the Ashford Bowls Centre for our previous general meetings; website hosting fees; a printed tablecloth embellished with the FOVP logo; the cost of printing flyers and leaflets for our events throughout the year, e.g. photo trail with map, tree identifier and butterfly count sheets; high viz vests for use by the members and volunteers at our events; and finally the costs of equipment required for our series of Fun Runs held during the Summer.

The outlay for the Fun Runs amounted to £413.88, however, this was offset by runners' fees which totalled £525.00. The directional signs can be re-used time and again and the printed numbers and safety pins not used this year can be utilised for next year's planned Fun Run series.

The attached Income and Expenditure document details all of our expenses and income for 2018-2019. I have also projected potential costs and income for 2019-2020.

In conclusion, I think we have had a successful first year ending as we have with a healthy balance of £438.73. We have achieved a great deal thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of the committee members, in particular, our outgoing Chairman, who has done a sterling job and I look forward to the next year putting into effect the HLF funding as well as our other planned events.

