



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of The Friends of Cannizaro Park

Sunday, 11th June, 2023, Hotel du Vin, Wimbledon, 7:30pm

Present: Trustees: Catherine Nelson (Chair), Simon Ingall (Treasurer), Pit Rink (Secretary), Anne Peacock, Caroline Newsholme, Jane Watkins, Cathy Townsend, Liza Llewellyn and further Members including: Richard Angus, Maggie Cochrane, Carol Kerr, Sherril Ingall, John Lawrence, Fiona Marley, Robert & Caroline McCowen, Caroline Macqueen, Jennifer Melman, Margaret Murray, Michael Norman-Smith, Alison Pattenden, Colin Price, John Rink Also in attendance: James Cochrane, John Hendra, Mary Gooding, Keith Audas & Anna Ballerini.

The meeting was declared quorate.

The Chair welcomed all to the AGM, thanking Friends for their continued support.

1. Apologies for Absence: Mary Buckley, Ann Cantrell, Peter & Rosy Gent, Lynn Goodfellow, Jeremy Lumbers, David Scott, Marguerite & Richard Vaughan-Payne, Antoinette Urwick.

2. The Minutes of AGM held on 12 June, 2022 were approved.

3. Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2023

The Chair reminded the meeting that members had been made aware of the papers on the website. The Treasurer briefly discussed the good results outlined in the Financial Statements. Visitors have been positive about our work in the park and we are grateful for ongoing donations, including support from London Borough of Merton (LBM) Greenspaces Team in thanks for the work we do. The projects which we plan over the next few years will be costly, but thanks in particular to one very generous donation the costs of some key preliminary drainage consultancy work has been covered. Our admin costs were higher in this year due to our investment in a complete redesign of our website, together with its professional photography. We feel that this is important for improved engagement with our community. Thanks in particular are due to trustee Cathy Townsend, who led this work. The Treasurer thanked Colin Price for examining and approving our accounts.

4. Election/Re-election of trustees

Nine of the trustees have indicated that they are happy to stand again. Colin Price proposed and Maggie Cochrane seconded that Liza Llewellyn, Simon Ingall, Catherine Nelson, Caroline Newsholme, Anne Peacock, Pit (Elizabeth) Rink, Cathy Townsend, Anna Watkin and Jane Watkins all be re-elected. All trustees were unanimously approved to serve until the conclusion of the next AGM. Jeremy Lumbers, a long time trustee resigned recently. We are in the process of recruiting a new trustee whose prime responsibility will be Membership.

5. Re-appointment of Independent Examiner

Colin Price was thanked for his work as Independent Examiner of the Financial Statements. He has indicated that he is willing to continue in this role. Maggie Cochrane proposed and Margaret Murray seconded his re-appointment to serve until the conclusion of the next AGM, and this was unanimously approved.

6. Review of activities 2022/23 and plans for 2023/24

Through a series of pictorial slides the Chair described our activities and plans. This year we have completed two significant renovation projects. The Rose Garden is currently looking wonderful with colourful insect-loving underplanting. The Jubilee Cherry Walk trees have settled in, the thousands of bulbs planted by the volunteers made an excellent show in the spring and we have a mown path through the long grass.

While big projects get noticed, just as important is the weekly work tackling weeds, bracken, balsam and brambles, as well as pruning, drain clearing, and fencing. Such commitment from our hard-working, committed and skilled Friends' volunteer gardening team doubles the hours of the *idverde* contracted gardeners. Credit to trustee Anne Peacock who manages the volunteers, and to horticulture trustee Jane Watkins for her knowledge and advice. The camaraderie of the team in their maroon t-shirts is a pleasure to witness.

Thinking to the future we are concerning ourselves with three big infrastructure problems.

The Aviary, a well-loved feature of the park, became increasingly dilapidated in spite of considerable investment by both the Friends and LB Merton. We were also finding it difficult to find enough volunteers to feed and care for the birds on a daily basis or find an avian vet to visit. Reluctantly we found the birds a new home. After wide consultation it was agreed that we would not keep birds in the park again, but rebuild the structure. Exactly what format and how the space will be used will be the subject of a further consultation in 2024/25. Meanwhile we have been in contact with a number of local primary schools who in turn are creating exhibits in the aviary, inspired by the park.

The lower two thirds of the Valley Path down to the bog garden and pond is very worn away. We successfully applied for a Community Infrastructure Levy Grant of £85,000 to make this whole path accessible. Renovation of this path is expected to take place in autumn/winter 2023/24. This is the beginning of a wider program to make more paths in the park accessible to all.

We have spent a considerable amount of time this year developing a ten year management plan, taking into account a wide variety of criteria including biodiversity, accessibility, community involvement, communication and heritage. This has helped us in our work with LB Merton to apply for Green Flag Park Status. We will hear in July if we have been successful. If so LB Merton will commit investment to the priorities in the plan.

Alongside our primary charitable objective of renewing and maintaining the park, our secondary objective is to build visitor engagement with the park. Events led by trustee Liza

Llewellyn included our popular nature walks, which drew participants of a wide range of ages; a bridge drive pioneered by Den Anderson was again a wonderful fundraising event, and we are supporting a community interest company who will run the highly successful Art in the Park once more in September 2023. Community engagement is also sustained by our communications programme, and in the last year we have built a strong creative team of volunteers led by trustee Cathy Townsend, increasing our e-newsletter circulation and Instagram followers. We will conduct a second visitor survey later in the year to help inform our work.

In the immediate future where we have cleared the bed in front of the Hotel du Vin orangery, we are in the process of re-nourishing the soil in preparation for planting in autumn 2023. Throughout the park we have worked with Merton to agree a new pattern of mowing, leaving large areas to grow for longer, encouraging wildlife, and cutting down fuel use while maintaining good clear areas for picnics. We have installed water butts, and are mulching beds.

New noticeboards have been erected in the rose garden and at the front and back gates, for which we are awaiting new maps. In partnership with LB Merton, metal estate fencing is due to be erected along the path down from the aviary, for the protection of veteran rhododendrons. Elsewhere, to the relief of our dedicated early morning litter-picking volunteers, a new system of waste bins will be installed, all of which will be less accessible to wildlife. We are going to trial a “dogs on leads” zone between 10am-5pm in the popular picnic area within the Italian Garden.

With support from LB Merton Greenspaces who have de-compacted the areas under a number of our notable trees, our Tree Team is monitoring our 1200 trees, and a new Tree Trail has been developed. The rhododendrons suffered in the drought last year and we are taking expert advice on best care.

An altogether much bigger and longer term project is one we have entitled the Leonardo Project, in and around the Italian Garden. There have been major drainage problems for some years due to failing infrastructure and changed rainfall patterns with climate change. A large donation has enabled us to employ drainage consultants who report to us in July on the issues and sustainable solutions from the Keir garden, down the Valley Path, the pond and into and around the Italian Garden. In addition to drainage work, we plan to work with LB Merton to improve access and regenerate these areas, maintaining a fine balance between events and the natural environment.

The Chair concluded with thanks to our corporate partners Hotel du Vin, Landform UK and Robert Holmes, to the trustee team, the volunteers and the Friends for their continued support.

7. Any other business including ideas & comments from Friends

Maggie Cochrane asked how much the Friends benefitted from events such as theatre or weddings. The Chair explained that currently any income goes to LB Merton but we are building a stronger relationship with the events teams at *idverde* and LB Merton, discussing

type and frequency of suitable events, and feel that we are likely to benefit more in the future.

Clarification was sought about the process of the Green Flag award scheme. The Chair explained that a 150 page written application had been compiled by the Friends and LB Merton Greenspaces, and following review of this document, independent judges had visited the park last week to assess whether the park reaches the appropriate standard. If it does we will get a physical green flag and financial investment.

Jane Watkins responded to a question about Japanese Knotweed, saying that we and *idverde* are aware, that it is being addressed but it is a long process.

Jenny Melman asked about the plans for planting the orangery bed in front of Hotel du Vin. Jane has plans for drought tolerant plants which Friends will fund and plant but which will return to the care of *idverde*.

Carol Kerr asked about plans for the eyesore that is The Retreat. The Chair answered that we do have plans for that area but not the immediate future. One of the problems in that area is that there is no water supply.

In response to a query about disabled parking the Chair reported that we are working with LB Merton for a place near the front entrance.

Anne Peacock praised the Chair Catherine Nelson for her inspirational leadership.

There being no more business the Chair thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting at 8:15pm inviting all to join trustees for drinks.