

FRIENDS OF VICTORIA GARDENS
11TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
27 July 2019

1. **Welcome:** Hugh welcomed the attendees and thanked them for coming to our 11th AGM held in the park.

Introduction of committee: Hugh Daghish the Chairman, Treasurer Liz Bennett; Secretary Gary Ellison; Membership Sec Diana Pasterfield; and members, Val Daghish, Carol Fowler and Andrew Pasterfield.

2. **Apologies:** John & Barbara Martin, Martin Harrison, Dorothea Tettenborn, Carol Davies, Nikki Bennett, Alison Griffiths and Marion Hinton.

3. **Minutes of last AGM** were approved Actions arising were:

- a. Chairman thank the Gardeners – Done
- b. Attendees recruit new members.
- c. Committee review idea of tombola at picnic – done and not adopted.

4. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman restated the principle aim to recruit as many Friends as we could, in order to demonstrate the value that local people place on Victoria Gardens, and in the belief that a Friends Group could help protect the gardens and steer their fate.

The general principle for the committee's actions is that the Gardens are a small, sheltered and peaceful place where priority is given to the bowlers, very young children with their parents and those who like to sit quietly. This does not exclude other activities but defines the Friends' emphasis for everyday use.

In 2018-19 he had 118 Friends including 10 bowlers.

Committee has met three times in the past year, and used their time and funds raised from subscriptions and donations for the following activities:

- a. We have replaced the last of the old benches and now all are of the new type.
- b. The annual Neighbourhood Picnic with Round Table involvement was held on a fine day and a great success. It raised £602 - £437 banked after expenses
- c. Our "adopt a bed scheme" has flourished and is a very important part of the park's attraction, with all flower beds in the hands of local people who bring their individual ideas to the planting. The current holders have done a wonderful job which makes a big difference to the gardens. We make up to £50 a year available per bed for the cost of plants with an initial adopter's allowance of £100.

- d. The central bed has been planted and tended by the Committee and other volunteers, and we prune the bushes so that small children can run through them.
- e. We have a general clear up on the first Saturday of every month between 10am and 11am at which all are welcome to help.
- f. We have been participants in the Wirral Parks Forum which speaks for us in the bigger interactions with the Council. We consult with Martin Harrison (Ashton Gardens), Peter Ryan (Coronation Gardens) and lately Jane Kennedy of newly formed Friends of Sandlea Park.
- g. The Secretary maintains the website which shows commitment as well as being informative. This has been running since 2010.
- h. We enjoy a good relationship with the Parks Department officers who have generally responded well to maintenance points. We would like to acknowledge thanks to the gardeners who do as good a job as they can, with much reduced numbers, on lawns, ivy, hedges, and take away our waste from the clear-ups. Chairman requested AGM support thanking the gardeners and writing to the Parks Department to voice concern at their low numbers. AGM approved **Action:** Chairman
- i. We have an annual meeting in the park with officers to run through our suggestions.
- j. The park was awarded the Green Flag in July 2014, and again in each subsequent year. The result of the short notice inspection last year was another award although the inspectors warned the council that they need to do more to justify future awards. The Green Flag is a recognition that the park is serving the community well. For us, this was a means of getting improvements to the park made by the Council which might not otherwise have happened: paving re-laid (removing trip hazards), the bowlers' lavatories and our notice board replaced when it was damaged by storms; a large welcome sign on the corner of South Parade, masonry repaired, bowling green boards replaced and painted, pavilion roof, floor and doors replaced. The award also recognizes the work done by Council gardeners, and by the Friends - money, gifts, time and concern for the Gardens' upkeep and use. The Green Flag is prized by the Council and we hope this means they are less likely to think of alternative uses for the land. The inspectors returning every year to check that Victoria Gardens are still worthy of the Green Flag keeps everyone on their toes.
- k. Last month the Council accepted our nomination of Victoria Gardens as an 'Asset of Community Value' under the Localism Act 2011. This lasts for 5 years after which it may be renewed. This means that the owners (the Council) cannot dispose of the land without meeting some conditions laid out in the Act and the Council will apply for a restriction to be registered on its Land Registry title. This would not be a block to changing the use of the land but would be a hoop that developers would have to negotiate and perhaps an impediment – so worth having.
- l. Towards the end of the last school summer holidays up to 30 or more girls and boys, many recognised as being aged 13 or 14, were gathering most days and causing disturbance and serious threats to themselves and others. They

were drinking spirits to excess, leading to one girl having a fit and requiring an ambulance and stomach pump. There were also indicators of drug use which in combination with drink led to urinating and sexual acts in plain sight, criminal damage, in one case by fire, threatening behaviour and much broken glass. The same gang was also created grave disturbances in Ashton Park and damaged cars in Dunraven Road. The danger to the youngsters' health and future as well as nuisance to the neighbourhood was very clear.

- m. We involved, and continue to liaise with, several agencies including schools, the local authority, local off-licences and the police in an effort to stop this behaviour. We joined a 'WhatsApp' group of more than 70 local residents, effectively 'neighbourhood watch' which has been very successful in spotting bad behavior and reporting it to the police, resulting in much police response and some warnings to parents and arrests. As a result, the bad behaviour has, to date, much reduced, until recently. We quickly clear up any mess and report it to the police and to the Parks Department. In this way the police take action if the problem persists. If you ever see any criminal damage, under-age drinking or anti-social behavior call Merseyside Police on 101 and mail the incident number and brief description to enquiry@fvg.org.uk, so that we can log it. There is a need to check the noticeboard has the necessary contact details for contacting police.

Action: Val

5. Treasurer and Membership Sec Report.

- a. The Treasurer presented the accounts.
- b. Closing account 30th April 2019
 - i. Brought forward from last year: £3,396.68
 - ii. Income 2018-19: £1,045.95
from subscriptions/donations (including £100 from Selwyn Lloyd charity) and picnic
Credit total £4,442.63
 - iii. Expenditure: £3,006.33
on garden improvement – plants, tree stump removal (£210) benches (£1650) camera (£376), picnic costs, insurance, donation of £50 to Wirral Parks Forum and administration expenses
 - iv. Account balance - £1,436.30 (£1000 reserved)
- c. Since end of April we have received £328 in subscriptions and donations, and spent £301, mainly on plants as 2 plots had to be replanted. Today we have £1463 in the bank.
- d. The Treasurer thanked the auditor Peter McEleavy (16/6) and proposed providing vouchers as a gift of £25 voucher– AGM Approved.

Action: Liz

- e. Future expenditure – Liability insurance for picnic £63, plants, paint etc. All the major items have been completed with last of the old benches replaced, so we expect expenditure to drop significantly.
- f. Subscriptions were approved for next year 2016/17 – staying at £3 and £5 for a household. Maintained prices.

6. Over our 10 years to 30 April 2019
 - a. £14,181 has come from the community for the gardens: £7,572 raised by the Friends and £6,609 from a legacy in 2015
 - b. We have spent the money as follows:
 - i. £298 on admin - just 2.3% of expenditure
 - ii. £1632 on the picnics – donations to the bowlers, banners, bunting, insurance
 - iii. £7,900 on the gardens – 8 benches, plants, paint, camera, stump removal, plaques, keys, gardening hand tools
 - iv. £2,915 on the pavilion kitchen refurbishment in 2016-17, thanks to the legacy.
 - c. In all, £12,745 spent on improving the gardens and amenities. The rest, £1,436 was in the bank on 30 April.
 - d. We have always had over 100 Friends from the Community, the bowlers and picnic attenders; and the Nursery has honorary membership.

7. **Parks Department Update.** The Parks Department are still working under considerable budget cuts. We always say that the Council must not rely on Friends groups but manage parks properly on their own; and they have been very good at this in the past but are now struggling with a small team to cover 6 parks: the bowling green has fallen into poor condition and been out of use for the season so far. Recognition recorded that the workers do very well considering the severe pressures they are under.

8. Achievements Summary

- a. We have raised or been given £14,181 and spent **£12,745** on the Gardens: plants, benches, tools, new kitchen, taps and annual picnics. We have had donations in kind, cakes, raffle prizes, etc from people for the picnic.
- b. People, not just the committee, have given their time – working on the flower beds, clearing up, putting on the picnic.
- c. The committee has kept a close eye and reported dilapidation, vandalism and damage to the authorities, and it has organised events – time spent on the gardens.
- d. Around 118 Friends show concern for their continuing wellbeing and appreciation for the amenity.

Money, gifts, time, concern - from the community - for the gardens' upkeep and use. This demonstrates a community commitment to the gardens which must help preserve and improve them. The result has been improvements to the gardens and greater use by the community.

None of these - money, gifts, time or vigilance - would have happened without the Friends.

9. The future. We want to:

- a. Hold another "Neighbourhood Picnic" on Saturday 7th September from 12 to 3pm, with spare day Sunday 8th, aimed at the local people. You can help by

- i. Coming with your picnic and bringing others
 - ii. Donating a cake, or garden produce for sale
 - iii. Donating raffle prizes – the Chairman proposed to have fewer raffle prizes – children’s prizes very welcome.
- b. Continue to encourage adopt a bed and tidying and planting by the community.
- c. Keep in regular touch with Parks department on maintenance and improvements, and seek an annual meeting with officers to discuss maintenance priorities as shown in the new Management Plan
- d. Develop the new website for the gardens
- e. Try to increase the number of friends
- f. Report any misbehaviour and damage

Attendees were asked to encourage others to join the Friends and to come to the next picnic. The more we have, the more we demonstrate neighbourhood commitment to the Gardens and the better we can defend them against unwelcome developments. **Action: ALL**

The committee would be grateful for ideas, by note, e-mail or quiet word. If anyone would like to adopt a flower bed, please look at the notice board for details.

10. Stand down old committee – elect new committee.

- a. The committee was stood down and offered themselves for re-election, and were re-elected.

11. AOB.

12. Next AGM – sometime in June or July 2020 – venue to be confirmed.

The AGM was closed.

Gary Ellison
Secretary

Hugh Daghish
Chairman